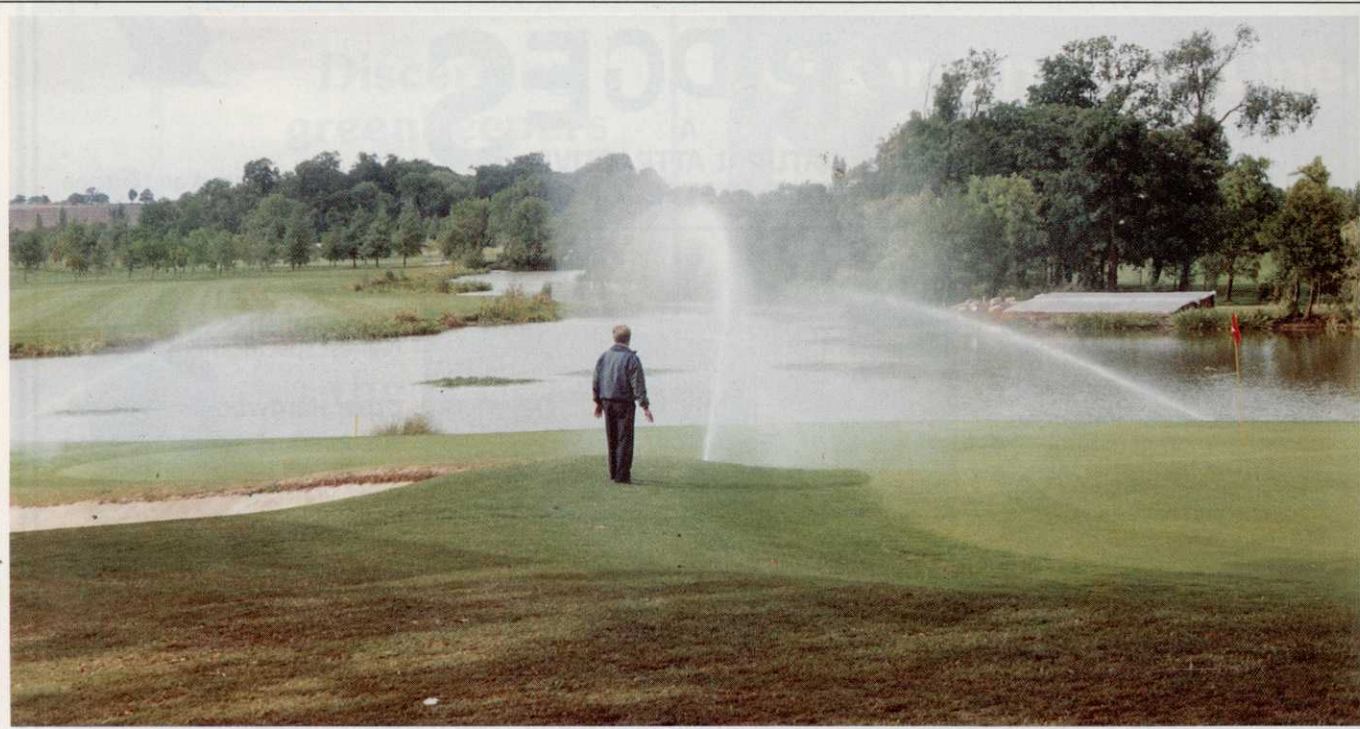


ON THE COURSE



Testing the irrigation at the 18th green

The Belfry prepares to defend the Ryder Cup

John Lelean takes a look at the Belfry just days before the match of the year

When the Ryder Cup teams return to The Belfry this month they will find a few changes since the Cup was last played for over the Brabazon Course in 1985. Not so much with the course, though more about that later, but the hotel and leisure complex is far grander, more luxurious and certainly more expensive. Two new residential blocks have been constructed, fitting in with the existing complex as if they had been there for years and this, complemented by a complete upgrading and refurbishing of all the facilities of the Belfry will provide the perfect setting for what is expected to be the most exciting contest since Samuel Ryder donated his trophy 62 years ago.

The interest in this year's matchplay contest, simmering for months, is now approaching the boil on both the European and American continents. It has been said that the Americans, so used to winning all before them, lose interest in international events until they are beaten. With that thought in mind it is worth noting that the three major golf team trophies, the Ryder Cup, the Walker Cup and the Curtis Cup are all on this side of the Atlantic. Add to that Nick Faldo's Masters' title won at August earlier this year and it is not difficult to appreciate that Ray-

mond Floyd's team are out for revenge.

Back in 1985, Derek Ganning, was the Head Greenkeeper-Superintendent, a fairly apt Americanised title, considering his greens were sown on pure sand with Pencross. Four years on he is known as the Course Manager with Sam Hagen as his working Head Greenkeeper.

What he has achieved is quite phenomenal when considering the past lashings the Belfry courses received from the critics. Comments such as "a featureless soggy farmland" and a "treeless barren wilderness" were two of the more charitable that can be recalled to mind.

The Alliss and Thomas design has taken more than its fair share of "stick" by those who have played badly looking for the excuse, but also from others who should have been constructive with their criticism rather than damning the Belfry for the sheer hell of it.

Twelve years later, plus the injection of a vast amount of money by Greenall Whitley, the Belfry has matured into a magnificent golf course, a view confirmed by PGA Tournament Director Tony Gray, who told Derek just days before the match, that the Brabazon was "the best presented course

he had seen in Europe this year".

Back in June, the English Open was played over the Brabazon, a tournament which the Belfry could have well done without. Only those managing a tournament course can appreciate the disturbance and interruption caused by the preparation of spectator facilities and their removal after the event. Competitor Tony Jacklin, putting on his captain's hat was quoted as saying - "The fairways were too fast and the greens were too slow. We may have had a dry spring and summer, but that is now excuse".

Whether Derek Ganning made an answering comment to that remark is not on record, but most of our readers would hole in one in any contest to predict his reply.

Although there has been some minor changes to the layout in the past four years, the course will be virtually the same as in 1985. A new fourth tee to the right of the existing tee has been constructed specifically for this match, forcing more of a draw over the edge of a recently constructed irrigation lake. Hit the water and the golfer will not only lose the ball, but incur the wrath of Derek Ganning for disturbing his colony of rainbow trout!

There is an additional water hazard also to the right of the short 7th where

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an existing drainage stream has been cleared, widened and a number of dead trees removed from an overgrown copse. A flock of Canada geese are more than happy with the new arrangements.

One other change has been the removal of a mature chestnut at the edge of the 18th fairway, blown down in the gales. In some way this is a blessing in disguise for both spectators and players as it opens up the view from the tee making it easier to see the well hit shot.

When Head Greenkeeper Sam Hagan was asked what special maintenance has been completed in preparation for the Ryder Cup, he said the Belfry courses receive intensive maintenance all the time. However, as this event is the peak of the golfing year, all their efforts have been geared to prepare the Brabazon to perfection for mid September.

Tees and greens have been scarified,



Derek stands beside the commemorative tree to mark the 1985 Ryder Cup



Head Greenkeeper Sam Hagan with the two Sisis Autorakes used to scarify the greens

top dressed and would be receiving a "Ganning Secret Feed" three weeks before the event. The bunkers have been edged and replenished with Moneystone White and last year the irrigation system was upgraded with the Toro 3000 system.

One of the principle purchases this year has been the Australian made Coremaster, complete with sets of quadra tines, half inch tines and three quarter inch slit tines. "This machine was an excellent buy", said Derek Ganning. He also purchased a John Deere Compact tractor which has proved to be "beautiful machine".

He also has a Jacobsen Diesel Greens King, complete with verti-cut reels and grooming units, which is currently used to cut the sand greens prior to the start of the contest. Once the matches start the greens will be cut twice a day by hand with his three Loyds Paladin machines.

Cutting will take place in the early morning and again around lunch-time before the start of the afternoon

matches, though Derek was reluctant to be drawn on the height of the cut or the stimpmeter speed to be achieved. What is certain, if the opposition are expecting similar speeds to those at Augusta, they are likely to be disappointed!

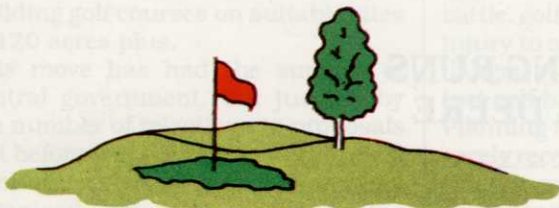
Staffing levels of around forty or fifty were reported at Muirfield Village, plus casuals during the match. Just for the record, the two Belfry courses are maintained by Derek and Sam in a supervisory capacity, six greenkeepers, one full-time mechanic, one man spending most of his time on the irrigation system and two YTS trainees, who are following the block release City & Guild syllabus.

As for the bunker raking and divoting, local pensioners will be on hand, happy to do the job for a monogrammed sweater plus a couple of rounds of golf. Just one more point - There is a special message for Jimmy Kidd at Gleneagles from The Belfry staff: "Watch for our colourful announcement under the score board at the 18th!"

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