



THE BELFRY

Derek Ganning

THE EXTRA MAN IN THE RYDER CUP TEAM



With the champagne still flowing, the vast ecstatic gallery reluctant to leave the arena where history was made, a depressed, but magnanimous Lee Trevino called the Belfry's Head Greenkeeper, Derek Ganning into his private suite and introduced him as 'the thirteenth member of the European Ryder Cup Team'.

Last month, Derek and his team showed the world what a magnificent golf course the Brabazon has now become. Not only as a test of golf, requiring thought, skill, determination and courage but as a spectacle both for the galleries and the millions who stayed at home to savour the increasing excitement on television.

The Belfry's two courses, the Brabazon and the Derby were constructed around the existing 59 bedroomed hotel, ten years ago, to a design conceived by the Alliss and Thomas partnership. Since the courses were opened in 1975, there has been constant and voluble criticism of the design, construction and maintenance. A comment on the Brabazon — 'A featureless soggy farmland' could be included among the more charitable remarks. Hardly a recommendation for the heart of England's Championship course. When Greenall Whitley, the Warrington brewery, finally acquired control of the Belfry two years ago, the problems were at last nailed firmly to the table and a planned programme devised to make the Belfry's courses what they are today.

The first task was to reorganise the management under the Belfry's Director, Brian Cash. In came Jack Broady, the horticultural manager responsible for all forty of the famous Greenall Whitley bowling greens. Put in charge of the golf courses was Derek Ganning, the Head Greenkeeper under the previous regime. He was confirmed as Head Greenkeeper - Superintendent, a most suitable job title in view of his responsibility for the American type Penncross sand greens.

With a good management team four further ingredients were essential, a great deal of money, the identification and sound solutions for the problem areas, unbounded enthusiasm coupled with the ability to motivate the green-staff into a well coordinated team. — And all this within the short period of about eighteen months!

Martyn Jones was brought in to the act as the consultant agronomist contributing his expertise to the very defined programme of maintenance. It has been under his guidance the Brabazon greens have shown such a marked improvement using a different type of sand in the top dressing followed by a programme of overseeding and top dressing along the lines recommended by the United States Golf Association Greens Section.

Derek Ganning says his secret formula of fertiliser is mixed for him at Steetley by that well known cuddly bear Welshman, Colin Murphy, though not necessarily personally, and supplied by E. J. Breakwell at Solihull.

Early this year the Belfry signed a contract with Ransomes, said to be worth around £180,000, to supply a complete range of turf equipment for course maintenance. These machines have been used to cut, verticut, vibro-spike and scarify the greens over an intensive four month period.

Out on the fairways, an area of major criticism over the years, the stones have been trowed out and handpicked, some sixty to seventy tons of peat spread on every fairway, they have been overseeded with a fescue/bent mixture and verti-cut with a prototype version of the new Ransomes 350D with sports cutting units. *'What a brilliant job it did'*, said Derek Ganning. *'They were absolutely magnificent and cut beautifully'*.

From the spectators point of view there would be few who would disagree. The Brabazon fairways were a picture of perfection both in colour, texture and shape. As far as colour is concerned Jonathan Harmer would say that was down to Farmura which has been used at the Belfry for some years. This season Farmura Green was included in another of Derek Ganning's 'secret cocktails' the contents of which he is not disclosing though he says the highest proportion of nitrogen he every used was 6%.

Another Belfry criticism that had to be overcome was the 'Barren Wasteland' tag. A tree planting programme commenced three years ago was accelerated and upwards of 10,000 whips and saplings of Pine, Birch, Alder, Ash and White Beam have now become established. To give the course a more mature look almost a hundred

semi-mature trees have been planted costing around £150 each.

As an American style course, lakes and streams provide the backdrop to all the spectacular holes and this has meant the construction of eleven new bridges to allow the easy flow of spectators around the course. These are Derek Ganning's pride and joy, as a number of people witnessed on Day One of the Ryder Cup. When the telephone rang in the Greenkeeper's sheds with a message that the spectators were piled high on the bridges to get a better view he was hot foot out on the course in his Yamaha buggy resplendent in an official blazer - to see if there was any damage to the structures.

The fact that the European Team have won the Ryder Cup, for the first time since it was played for at Lindrick twenty-eight years ago has added the icing to the Belfry's cake, but even if the Cup had returned to the United States nothing but praise could have been heaped on the people responsible for producing such a majestic stage for an enthralling contest.

We all feel great pride in Derek Ganning's recognition for a job well done. He appeared on BBC Breakfast Television to explain in two minutes how he maintains the course! He was certainly congratulated by several executive members of the American PGA one of whom told him in all the years of visiting courses throughout the world he had never seen a golf course with better definition. Another said he had done a magnificent job and produced a golf course as good, if not better than any they have in the United States.

He will also remember the comment by Dave Thomas *'Derek, you have made a dream come true'*.

But when the euphoria has ceased, Derek will still be able to reach into his bookcase and pull out his copy of Tony Jacklin's book and read the inscription *'Thank you Derek Ganning for a magnificent effort, for all your hard work and for making the Ryder Cup a complete success'*.

With the other hand he can pick out Lee Trevino's book *Super Mex* also suitably autographed. A little touch of thanks and recognition arranged by another much involved in the emergence of the Brabazon as one of the world's finest golf courses — Martyn Jones.