

Canadians maintain Fulford's reputation for tense finishes

SO CLOSE!

JOHN HUNTER reports on the seventh Ransomes International Greenkeepers and Superintendents Golf Tournament

Fulford Golf Club in York has seen some great players over the years, as the stars of the PGA European Tour have competed in the Benson & Hedges Open and Murphy's tournaments since 1971.

There have been some tense and exciting finishes as the likes of Nick Faldo, Tony Jacklin, Lee Trevino, Tom Weiskopf and Ian Woosnam, to name only a handful, have tested their skills against the course.

Fulford maintained its reputation for down to the wire, moment of truth finishes in the seventh Ransomes International Greenkeepers and Superintendents Golf Tournament, when Canada snatched victory by one point from the United States with England third, two further points away.

What a day and what a finish. Many pundits felt that United States were in with a favourite's chance of wresting the trophy for the first time, after near misses previously.

And the Americans had smiles on their faces when they went into lunch after the morning round with a one-point lead over Canada with England and Germany tied in third place, three points adrift.

That lead came after a superb finish in the morning by the American team of Ed Walsh, Roger Null and Frank Maxwell, who gathered a marvellous 14 points from the last four holes.

They had four at the 15th, three at the 16th, two at the famous 17th (the Bernhard Langer hole where the German player had to climb the huge ash tree alongside the green during the Benson & Hedges International Open in '81, after his iron shot lodged in the fork of the tree) and finally five points at the par five final hole.

Here Walsh, an 11 handicap player from Ridgewood, who had a birdie three at the 5th, put his second shot inches from the pin to tap in his third and accomplish a rare gross eagle, nett albatross.

The Canadians, twice winners of the competition – at Ipswich in 1982 and St Andrews in 1985 – had looked as though they were heading for the lead, until the tremendous spurt by the Americans.

The Canadian team of Tom Charters, a six handicap player from Weston, Bob Heron, nine handicap from Beacon Hall, Doug Meyer, five handicap from Cedarbrook and Robbie Robinson, five handicap from Hidden Lake, ably led by team manager Ken Olsvik in addition to wives and supporters, were not at all downhearted about the sudden turn of events and to prove the point gave away a few lapel badges with the Canadian maple leaf to people in the clubhouse over lunch.

England's team of Mike Hughes, five handicap from Edgbaston, David Wood, eleven handicap from Holtye and Mark Diment, fifteen from Knighton Heath backed up by team manager Ivor Scoones, who was National Chairman of BIGGA in 1990, were well placed at this stage.

Hughes had played exceptionally well with 14 points going out and 14 coming back as well. Diment scored 9 on the outward nine holes and 5 coming back. Remarkably, Wood didn't score at all, although that was often because one of his colleagues obtained the necessary points before it was his turn to putt.

There were some hard-luck stories too at this stage. Scotland, who won at Woodbridge three years ago and were keen to retain their title, had no luck at all in the morning.

Elliott Small, head greenkeeper at Tulliallan and an eight handicap player, said "We had no gross birdies and no one-



Smiles from the winning Canadian team of Heron, Olsvik (Manager), Meyer, Charters and Robinson

point or four-point holes. They were all twos and threes, which is very unusual. We seemed to be seeing borrows which weren't there and lipped a lot of holes".

At the other end of the field, Austria, who had three of the longest handicap players with marks of 25, 26 and 27, did very well to obtain 34 points when remembering that under the rules of the competition, all players had to play off a maximum of ten.

Norway also did well, considering they had earlier worries, being involved in a crash at Harwich shortly after disembarking and having to hire another car to bring them to York.

And so to the afternoon when conditions were again perfect – in stark contrast to high winds the day before and the day after the tournament. Could the United States hold on to their lead with Canada and England breathing down their necks?

It was neck and neck all the way as Frank Maxwell, who had the best round of the day, a one over par 73 in the afternoon, leading the American's challenge with 18 points, Null gathering 12 and Walsh, superb in the morning with 24 points, managing only 11 in his second round.

But the gritty Canadians were not to be denied their hat-trick as they gained 43 afternoon points to edge home by just one point from the Americans (46 and 41), as everyone held their breath.

England improved their score by one point in the afternoon (42 and 43) while Northern Ireland, The Republic of Ireland (who had father and son Jim and Frank Byrne in their ranks); Scotland and Wales all, coincidentally, finishing on identical 78 point marks.

A wonderful end to a wonderful day for the greenkeepers from a record 15 countries who competed, three more than the previous best.

As Robert Dodsworth, Ransomes Group Chief Executive, said at the closing banquet later: "The comradeship of the greenkeepers has been of the highest order and we are very proud to be associated with it by sponsoring the event".

Kevin Miller, captain of the host Club, told the assembly: "If you would like to come back in three years time I am sure we will be delighted to have you".

Greenkeepers from the 15 countries, who gave Mark Menell, head greenkeeper of Fulford a standing ovation as a mark of tribute to the work of himself and his staff, will certainly be looking forward to the next time, wherever the event is played in 1994, none more than Canada's Bob Heron, who has played in five of the seven events so far, missing only 1973 and 1979.

Final positions

Canada 88 points,
United States 87,
England 85,
Denmark 84,
Germany 82,
Holland 82,
Sweden 80,
Norway 80,
Northern Ireland
78, Republic of
Ireland 78,
Scotland 78,
Wales 78, Finland
74, Austria 67,
Belgium 64.