

Whitaker by a whisker

A popular catchphrase often spoken at presentation ceremonies following competitive events is 'there are no losers here today, everyone is a winner'. The sincerity of the catchphrase is undoubted: indeed the phrase has such a pleasant comforting ring about it that it could well become an integral part of speechmaking folklore.

'No losers here today', however, took on a whole new meaning at the ICI banquet given at Aldwark Manor in December, when the five finalists gathered for the supreme honour of being heralded ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year learned that after a selection process which began months earlier with a written paper, followed later with an assessment of their golf course and finished in December with a searching panel interview, a gap of less than a handful of points separated all five contestants. What was even more staggering was that not a single point separated first from second!

The final choice, a hugely popular one, went to a young man who has performed miracles at the exciting new Wisley Golf Club in Surrey. It was the view of the judges that David Whitaker had demonstrated in convincing style the skills necessary in managing a golf course, albeit a brand spanking new one, to near perfection. To be in the shoes of a selection panel chaired by Neil Thomas and comprising Jack McMillan, John Crawford and ICI's Richard Minton, was one this writer did not envy, but it was to their credit that David was chosen and indicative of their wisdom that runner-up Laurence Pithie would later go on record by writing 'I'm sure that their decision in choosing David Whitaker was the right one after taking all aspects into consideration. He has done a marvellous job at Wisley and I wish him every success in the future.' There is, as mere humans are all too well aware, nothing quite like praise from one's peer group and Laurence's views were heartily endorsed by the other finalists, third placed Richard Barker, Arne van Amerongen and Tim McCreddie.

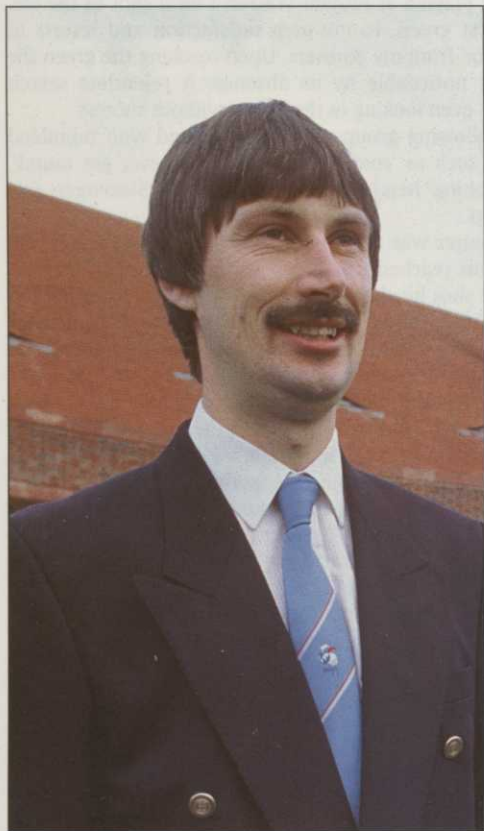
Returning to the banquet, the congratulatory speech given by the Marketing Manager of ICI Professional Products, Roger Mossop, gave rise to massive optimism for the future of today's professional course managers when he opined that by their knowledge and understanding of the art of greenkeeping the world of golf owed greenkeepers – and especially the five contenders – a debt of gratitude, and they had much

of which to be proud. His comments were music to their ears, as was the splendid news that ICI Professional Products will again be sponsoring the event in a new and even more exciting format for 1992.

For the winner himself the taking of the title ICI Premier Greenkeeper, along with a trip to New Orleans to visit the GCSAA Conference and Trade fair, comes at the end of a whirlwind period which began peaceably enough at the Baildon Golf Course in Bradford. It was here that David began his career as an apprentice and served for a total of eleven years under the tutelage of David Hannam, thence to Rawdon Golf and Tennis Club as head greenkeeper and followed at the age of 27 by a unique opportunity to work from the growing-in stages at Golf Du Domaine Imperial in Switzerland. This Pete Dye designed course, like his present Wisley, is American in concept and design and was the first to open in Switzerland on a shares debenture basis. Without knowledge of foreign languages, David coaxed a raw crew of French, Italian, Swiss and Portuguese into tending a course that boasted pure sand greens and bent grasses, greatly spurred on by the pessimistic views taken from his native West Yorkshire that 'it couldn't be done'. It could, it was, he delivered, and the rest is history. Head-hunted during a sabbatical in Britain following a long hard summer, David took some convincing of the need to move from a task he enjoyed so much, but the magic of Wisley soon convinced him that there was another hurdle to leap and the proof of his decision – and dedication – is witnessed now in every blade of grass at Wisley.

Proof also that all finalists were well chosen is witnessed with Laurence Pithie already acclaimed as Britain's first ever Master Greenkeeper Certificate holder, Richard Barker engrossed in a golf course construction exercise with the Hawtree Practice, Arne van Amerongen about to move to new pastures and Tim McCreddie setting up shop this very month at the popular golfing venue of Royston, home of the racehorse gallops. They are indeed all winners!

David Whitaker: ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year



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GREENKEEPER OF
THE YEAR 1991