

Achievements recognised

Whilst most of you were gritting your teeth and facing gales, blizzards, heavy rains and floods resulting from a series of meteorological depressions which raced in from the Atlantic, as the New Year unfolded, I joined the cream of Europe's turf managers heading for the sun and the Henry Cotton inspired Penina golf and hotels complex, set amongst subtropical gardens and orange groves which proliferate along Portugal's Algarve coastline.

The occasion? An opportunity to meet brothers-in-arms at the third, bi-annual PGA European Tour Greenkeeper's Conference.

Representing all the golfing venues which collectively forms the PGA European Tour tournament circuit, over 60 delegates – plus an international line-up of speakers – travelled from as far afield as Ireland, Scotland and England, most of mainland Europe, from Dubai and the United States in anticipation of the week to come...

We were not disappointed. Having been formally welcomed by Bruce Jamieson, Director of Agronomy, PGA European Tour, we set-



Toro-PGA European Tour Student award winners in Portugal: from left, Paul Brannan, Glasgow; John Waite, Leeds; David Norton, Belfry and Tony Gooch, Torrington, Devon

tled down to four days of evocative discussion and debate.

Keynote speaker, Dr James Beard, Director and Chief Scientist, International Sports Turf Institute, started the ball rolling with his absorbing paper entitled 'Construction and Maintenance of Creeping Bentgrass Putting Greens! This involved the quietly spoken Texan in leading a marathon, four-part discussion spread over the first two-days of the conference.

Hard pounding? Not a bit of it. Dr

Beard's relaxed delivery not only held his audience, it prompted spontaneous reaction from his listeners who included the redoubtable Walter Woods (St Andrews), George Brown (Turnberry), Derek Ganning (The Belfry), Chris Kennedy (Wentworth), Lawson Bingham (Sunningdale), Neil Whitaker (Woburn), Ken Barber (East Sussex National) and Ron Whitehead (La Moye).

Talking of the pressure put on greenkeepers whose courses staged tournament events, former Walker and Ryder cup golfer, Peter Townsend, now joint Managing Director, European Golf Design, criticised the practice of tricking-up greens to make them faster.

Citing the last Ryder Cup played on Kiawah Island as a case in point, Peter Townsend said "Tournament players are highly skilled – given good conditions they are capable of reducing any course to a round in the mid-sixties but sponsors and television might find that boring. Although I believe that it is desirable to 'tighten' championship courses for major tournaments, they should be fair."

Reviewing modern day golf course design considerations, Ross McMurray, European Golf Design, commented that it was becoming increasingly difficult to design good courses suitable for all types of golfers. "Today, we have to think about the big-hitter, the average player driving 200 yards and the beginner, only capable perhaps, of reaching 150 yards. It is hard to set-up a golf course which challenges all standards of abilities."

Striking a lighter note, Scotland's Man-of-Kent, George Brown, Golf Course & Estate Manager, Turnberry, regaled his audience with a humorous account of his annual battle to overcome coastal erosion, heavy rainfall and gale force, wind driven sand storms, which can quickly bury exposed greens – at the drop of the barometer.

Widening the topics under discus-

sion, Hermann Schulz, Head Greenkeeper, Gut Kaden Golf Club, Germany, spoke of the headaches he and his team faced in bringing his course up to PGA standards for the 1992 Honda Open.

Speaking in French – ably translated by Ian Dabson, (Monte Carlo Golf Club) – consultant Jean Pierre Leboucher reported details of a three-year study he had completed, assessing the effects of differing subsoils on root development – on golf courses and football pitches – in France.

Listing the wild-life which affected his course, Ken Glover, Superintendent, Lake Nona Golf Club, Florida, mentioned bald eagles, moles, armadillos and fire ants – oh yes, and alligators. 'If they (the alligators) get frisky I call in the local specialist – he nets them!'

Speaking about educational matters, Carol Borthwick, Elmwood College, Fife, outlined progressive developments "Which had allowed colleges in Scotland to respond to requests calling for HNC and HND training courses."

This had led to the formation of an HNC Greenkeeping Consortium – which works as a sub-committee of the Scottish Industrial Liaison Committee – chaired by BIGGA – and which included representatives from Langside, Oatridge, Dundee and Elmwood colleges plus the GTC.

Talking of BIGGA, I was pleased to meet four previous winners of the Aldwark Manor administered, Toro-PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper Awards, enjoying the five-star ambience of Penina – and taking opportunities to mix with their peers during the daily sessions and equally apres conference.

The four, headed by David Norton, now number one to Derek Ganning at The Belfry, comprised John Waite, Leeds, Tony Gooch, Torrington, (Devon) and the youngest of them all, Paul Brannan, Glasgow. When I spoke to Paul at the first conference coffee break, he was wide-eyed with apprehension, though some five days later I spotted Paul (and Tony) in deep, after dinner, conversation with a bevy of French greenkeepers. A week works wonders!

Back in the conference room the arrival of Ken Schofield, Executive Director, PGA European Tour, put the seal on the week when he told delegates, "The work you do is vital to the success of the European Tour events. All players acknowledge the big improvements you have made to tournament courses. It speaks volumes for the efforts you put in, we appreciate it."

■ The author, Cedric Johns, is editor of TORO's magazine 'Pipelines'.

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