

**Turnberry's Ailsa course was in** amazing condition for the 123rd Open. George Brown and his team of 18 full-time staff and three temps did a brilliant job.

It's always difficult to set up a links course because you never know what the weather is going to be like but, judging by the scores, it seems they got that right, too.

George was certainly proud of it. "It would be difficult to get it better," he said.

A few days before the big week, his staff were lightly watering parts of the 6,957-yard par 70 course because the greens were going brown, then he had three days of rain which made the greens and fairways soft.

"The last three days didn't help," said George on the eve of the tournament. "On Friday evening we played golf with the R&A and the course was absolutely beautiful, the greens were firm and fast, almost crunching underneath the spikes. Mike Bonallack asked me what sort of weather I'd like and I said, 'A little shower would see us nicely for the week' and since then it's rained every day. We had 17mm on Sunday, 5 or 6mm on Monday and another 4 or 5 on Tuesday – coupled with no wind. I can't remember Turnberry going five days on the trot without a breath of wind."

For most of the competition Turnberry was blessed with sunshine and light breezes, although after one wet and windy afternoon Willie Blair was heard muttering: "I don't know why they don't hold this competition in the summer."

Before the event George had said: "It's just like having your mother-in-law over for Sunday tea, you just do a bit extra." So we asked him whether it really was that simple.

"Yes, it was," he replied, "you get the best white tablecloth out and polish the table."

But he was obviously happy. "I'm very pleased," he said, "We've received so much good publicity from the newspapers, magazines and players."

Looking around the course after the event, he said everything would soon get back to normal. Mother Nature would take care of the rough that had been trampled down by spectators; his staff would concentrate on repairing the damage to the Arran Course's 2nd and 18th fairways, which were used as a practice ground and walkway respectively, and to the original practice area, where the tented village was sited. He gave the impression that within a couple of weeks you wouldn't notice the Open had been there.

It would all be a memory – but what a memory!

● Nicked it: Nick Price congratulates George Brown and his Turnberry team.



# The Open



*It's the best condition I've seen an Open Championship course in the last 10-15 years – Michael Bonallack, R&A secretary*



**Specs appeal:** Gordon Moir watches the final players come in at the 18th

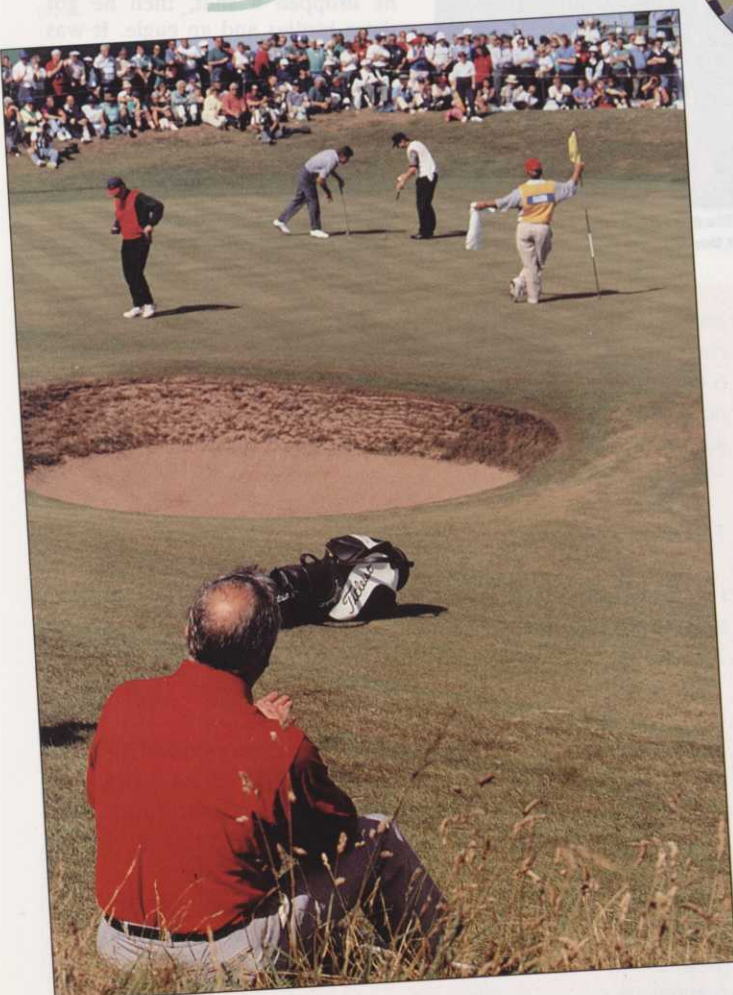


Price is right: Open Champion Nick Price meets the BIGGA support team

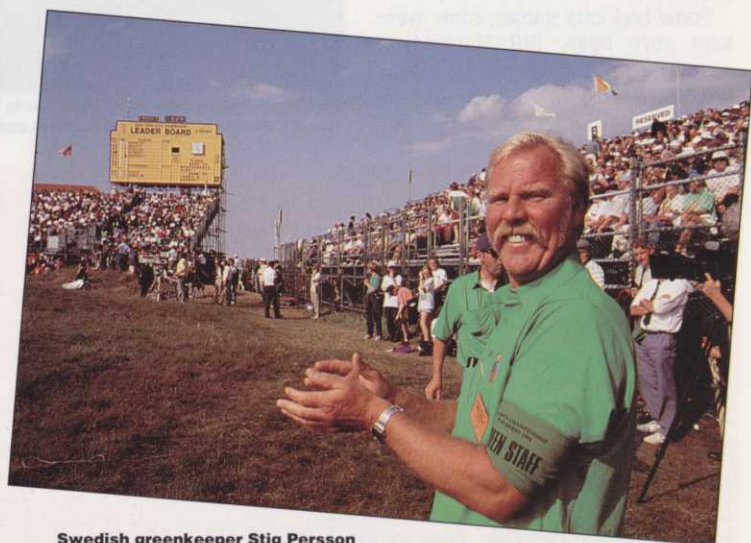
Below: Bill Hatfield

...and Duncan Smith

*I have to compliment the R&A for the wonderful job in setting it up. Of all the British Opens, this is the best condition of an Open Championship I have ever seen. It is the best condition of a links course I have played in Europe. The condition is fantastic – Greg Norman*



Bert Cross watches Nick Price putt out on 6th



Swedish greenkeeper Stig Persson cheers on Parnevik – before he hears what's happened in the following game

*This is only the second links course I have played and I think it's awesome. The novelty is that we do not play courses like this in the United States. The way it looks, the way it plays, the different shots you have to play, it's just different, just great. You need more imagination on a course like this – Tom Lehman*



# The Open

BIGGA at

**L**ew Brown and Buddy De Sylva must have been thinking of the bunker rakers at the Open when they decided: "The best things in life are free."

While some spectators were complaining about the cost of a day out at this year's championship – £20 entrance fee, £6 for car parking, £90 for a seat at the 18th – members of the BIGGA support team were enjoying a complimentary grandstand view of each game.

Since 1984 greenkeepers from around the country – and a few from abroad – have been drafted in for the Open to rake the bunkers and help the permanent staff with things like divoting.

This year more than 125 greenkeepers volunteered for the 52-strong team, many taking a week off work for a chance to be part of one of the most exciting Opens for years. They were close at hand for the memorable moments, like Nick Faldo playing the wrong ball, John Daly hitting two balls into the wee burn at the 16th and Nick Price's 75ft eagle putt at the 17th.

Sometimes they got a little too close to the action. Richard Heaslip, head greenkeeper at Epping Forest GC, was struck on the right arm by Tom Watson's wayward shot to the 18th green. He was later spotted recovering in the bar, using his left arm to lift pints of the beer that reaches parts that other beers can't. He said it was what the doctor ordered.

Some had easy games, some were kept very busy. Bill Hatfield, a retired head greenkeeper from Darlington, was with Andrew George when he shot an 83. About the only

Reports and photographs by **CHRIS BOILING**

holes he didn't go into sand on were the 9th, where there isn't a bunker, and the 16th, when he went into the burn. "On the 14th Andrew said to me, 'You must have blisters'. I said, 'I'm not suffering as much pain as you.' He smiled," recalls Bill.

Lee Trevino also felt sorry for his bunker raker, Willie Blair. After finding his fourth bunker in succession, the former champion patted Willie on the back and said: "Make sure they're paying you overtime, buddy!"

Who rakes for whom is decided by drawing the names out of a hat. Alec Robertson, first assistant at Grangemouth GC near Falkirk, had the honour of marching down the 18th with the last pair, Brad Faxon and Fuzzy Zoeller. He also had Brad Faxon in the first round, when he was playing with Gary Player and Jose Rivero. In the second round he had top amateur Warren Bennett, and in the

third round he had Nick Faldo and Mark Calcavecchia, who gave him a ball. It was 42-year-old Alec's seventh Open and "definitely the best as far as draws are concerned."

As it turned out, this year the penultimate pairing was the most important game. And the honour of walking down the last fairway with the '94 Open champion went to Brian Payne, head greenkeeper at Burnham Beeches GC for the past 24 years.

Brian, 52, told me: "It was a terrific atmosphere, but when you've done it for six years you know what to expect."

Many other greenkeepers were happy with their draw on the final day, too.

Dean Cleaver, 36, course manager at Gay Hill near Birmingham, had Greg Norman: "He's someone I've always admired. He played superb golf, just failed to sink the putts but it was a real experience, especially coming down the 18th. It's something I will never forget. The sound hits you and you feel part of it being inside the ropes. It's a terrific feeling." It was Dean's first Open and he was given a ball marked 'Shark' by Norman.

Russell Blackburn, one of two assistants at Castle Douglas, was with Anders Forsbrand, who shot a final round 64. "Even to be here is fantastic but that round was amazing. He started off two under, then he dropped a shot, then he got three birdies and an eagle. It was just fantastic. Coming up the 18th was the best experience ever. After his eagle at the 17th I was as hyped up as he was." The Swedish star gave Russell his glove as they walked to the 18th green. "I'm going to frame it," Russell told me, "It'll never get worn again."



**BIGGA members with 'Mr Walrus' Craig Stadler: from left, Billy Merritt and Russell Black, and Ronan McKeown and Bert Cross**

*The course is set up magnificently, the best condition of any Open I have played in the 10 or 11 years I have played it*  
– Ronan Rafferty after shooting a 65 on day 3

*This is one of the best links courses I have played. Really fun*  
– Brad Faxon, joint leader after three days

*This is a very good course, we don't have this type in Japan. But it's difficult for me to find the line to shoot at because there's nothing to take a line on* – Masashi Ozaki

*The course is fantastic. Nice to see the R&A listened from the last time and I have to say they have done a great job. Greens as good as possibly they can be. Fairways in good condition and the rough is very fair, so probably the best conditions I have seen in quite a long time. It is set up perfect, and anyone scoring 10 or 15 under may win. Nothing wrong with that. Whatever happens, it is going to be a great championship*  
– Seve Ballesteros on the eve of the tournament

*The course is in very good shape and condition. It seems to be quite fair. It is a bit easier without the wind, but there are some long holes out there where I had to go with long irons*

*and fairway woods on the par 4s. The fairways are a bit narrow, but there is a stretch of semi rough on both sides 5 to 6 yards which seems to make it fair before the thick rough stuff comes. What I remember in '86 it was severe, only 3–4ft of semi and then really bad kraut, as we would say*  
– Bernard Langer

*The course is very good* – Nick Faldo

*I think the whole golf course is good. The lighthouse 9th hole is the one that stands out. I think it is the toughest on the course. They have some very tough short holes there, especially the 15th* – Ernie Els

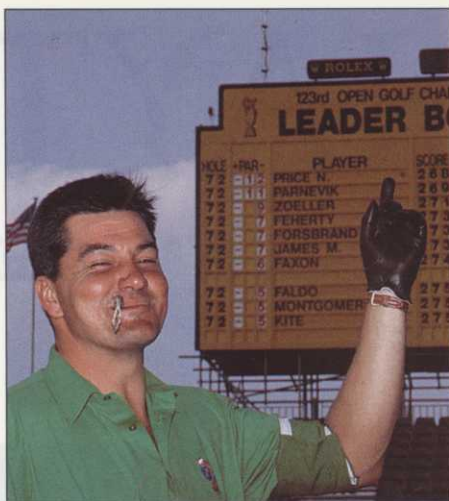
*The course is in great shape and it is very straightforward – not a lot of hidden things out there. Greens do not have big, gigantic hollows and the slopes are not overly done. If you play well, you will shoot well* – Corey Pavin

*I think we've got a course in fantastic condition and they all agree on that. We've set the course up so players can have a go at it* – Neil Roach, chairman of the R&A's championship committee

Gavin Kyle, 28, head greenkeeper at the new Sutton Park Golf Club, Surrey, was given Nick Price's glove by his caddy, Jeff 'Squeaky' Medlin, even though he was not raking for him. It was probably because Gavin, who comes from Durban in South Africa, said 'well done' in Afrikaans.

The greenkeepers are briefed to "only speak if spoken to". But if Ronan McKeown had spoken up on the 17th on the first day, the Open might have had a different result. He saw Nick Faldo play the wrong ball. "I had a feeling it wasn't his ball, but you can't say anything can you? Supposing you were wrong?"

Of course, it's not all big names and low scores. Euan Grant's threesome came in 49 over par. The UK's Lee Fickling finished with an 80 for a 20 over par total, Sweden's Anders Gillner shot 79 for +13 and Colombia's Eduardo Herrera's 79 gave him a +16



**Winning hand:** Gavin Kyle shows off two gifts from Nick Price – his Bridgestone glove and some "biltong", a South African dried meat which Price keeps in his bag for nutrition. Gavin, head greenkeeper at Sutton Park, which is due to open in November, comes from Durban and has been in this country 14 years.

As Brian Payne says: "It's nice to go out for people who are not household names, so you know who to look for in the future."

Ivan Hall, a retired greenkeeper, went out with Ruben Alvarez of Argentina, Peter Smith and Warren Bennett of the UK – and ended up talking to golf-mad Prince Andrew.

score. "I'd have preferred to watch a ladies' Tuesday medal," he said.

Richard Barker looked at his draw for the first two games and was a bit disappointed – no big names. Then he saw Jonathan Lomas shoot a 66 to lead for much of the first day and on the second day he had overnight leader Greg Turner!

#### International

The support team is an international gathering. As well as the usual English and Scottish greenkeepers there were sisters Jean Esposito and Sue Smith from their family run Hinckley Hills Golf Club in Ohio, a Welsh course manager with Thai ties, and three greenkeepers from Sweden, who were hoping for a Jesper Parnevik victory. Maybe next year!

This year it was Nick Price who collected the Claret Jug and had the honour of being pictured with the boys and girls from BIGGA. Afterwards, when he said: "I am still a little stunned right now. It is amazing," we think he was referring to shaking hands with Jim Paton.

And when he said, "I nearly jumped out of my skin, it is like a fairy tale," he was probably recalling his visit to the loo in the greenkeepers' office. About three hours after finishing his round, Price was still giving interviews and signing autographs when he got caught short. He asked if he could use our loo. While he was in the small room, his wife Sue waited outside holding the Claret Jug.

Now that's something you don't see watching the Open on TV.



**Congratulations to NICK PRICE on winning the 123rd Open Championship and to George Brown and his team for a true Championship course at Turnberry Hotel**

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