

Five greenkeepers are beginning to get nervous. One of the most important days in their careers is fast approaching. They have intelligently answered their way through regional finals. Their courses have sailed through an inspection. Now they are preparing themselves for the national final at Aldwark Manor on December 5.

The winner will be crowned the ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year. This prestigious title should be reward enough, but the winner will also be given a free trip to the 1995 GCSAA Exhibition and Conference in San Francisco.

The two runners-up will get weekend breaks. One will receive a weekend for two at a top London hotel, with tickets for a West End show of their choice. The other will receive a weekend for two at Aldwark Manor Hotel near York.

Twenty-four greenkeepers from all over England, Scotland and Wales were nominated for the award by their sections. Each section nominee's course was then visited by representatives of ICI and BIGGA. They walked the course with the nominee and discussed various aspects of greenkeeping informally. After these visits five regional winners were selected for the grand final. Tom Murray represents Scotland, Paul Pearse represents the Northern Region, David Walden represents the Midland Region, Mark Webb carries the honour for the South West and South Wales Region, and Stefan Antolik is the choice from the South East Region.

Unfortunately there can only be one winner. Last year it was Gordon Irvine. Who will it be in 1994?



STEFAN ANTOLIK
Age: 38. Head greenkeeper at Cooden Beach GC, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex

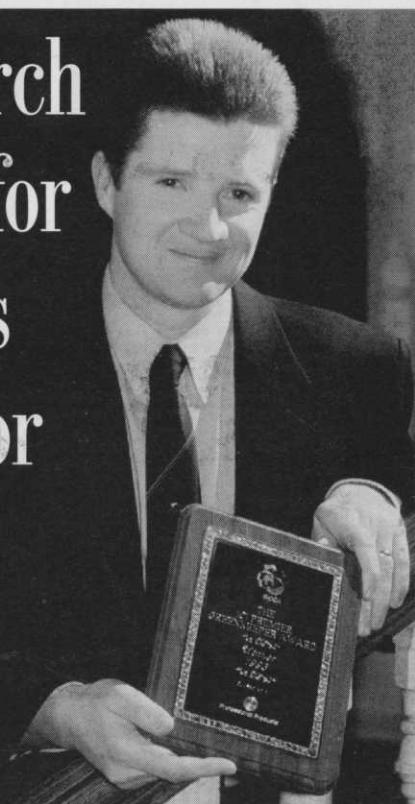
Stefan Antolik knows what it's like to win big. In 1990 he was a British motor racing champion. OK, so it wasn't Formula One, but the Triumph Sport Six Club, Class A Trophy is a tough branch of the sport. What's more, Stefan won in a car he built himself.

The mechanical skills he learned during his four years racing have helped him in his greenkeeping career. No, he doesn't have the fastest fairway mower but he does have some well maintained machines, as well as a well maintained course. When he came to Cooden Beach in August 1991, machinery was old and morale was low. He said it was in need of a shake-up, so that's what he did, leading from the front as usual.

"I am a strong believer in leading by example," he says, "and like the hands-on approach to work, so I set about returning equipment to safe running order with the help of

The search hots up for Gordon's successor

Who will be the new ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year? Chris Boiling looks at the shortlisted candidates, one of whom will take over the title from last year's winner, Gordon Irvine



mechanical skills I had picked up over the years. Once the membership could see what could be achieved with a little effort, and that the machinery would be used, it became easier to obtain new equipment."

A 12-handicap bandit, he says: "My interest in golf started when I was at school and earned pocket money caddying at weekends. My father had wanted me to follow in his footsteps as an engineer but, much to his disapproval, I left school at the age of 15 to work at Abridge Golf and Country Club as an apprentice greenkeeper."



MARK WEBB
Age: 36. Head greenkeeper at Alresford Golf Club, Alresford, Hampshire

Mark Webb has been in greenkeeping for 20 years and has worked on five very different courses in Hampshire. Two were on clay overlaying chalk, one silt, one low lying silt/clay and one on ironstone sand with pure sand greens.

Mark's latest club is Alresford. He has been there for six and a half years.

"104 years ago when Alresford Golf Club was formed it would have been classed as a downland course," he says, "but over the years areas of trees - mainly oak and beech - have formed copses and only about a quarter of the existing course could still be classified as downland."

In 1990 Mark and his assistant extended the course from 12 to 18 holes. "We, over copious cups of coffee, designed and planned all the necessary changes that the club would need to undergo to allow

members to keep playing the existing course as much as possible, including the financial implications, and a four-year strategy of course reconstruction, complete with its funding, was then submitted to the committee for their consideration. With some further help from our course development committee, the whole package was presented to the members. Fortunately, this was very well received and in May 1993 a new layout of 18 holes was opened by John Jacobs."



PAUL PEARSE
Age: 33. Course manager at Stockport Golf Club, Cheshire

Paul Pearse loves golf. When he's not working at Stockport, where he has been course manager for five years, he's playing the game. A member of Hazel Grove, he has a handicap of 2 and a list of golfing achievements that's longer than his CV. These include winning the Hazel Grove Club Championship and the Fourball Knockout last year, the Champion of Champions in '93 and '94, and he was a member of the scratch team that won the East Cheshire Scratch League this year.

Paul has been a greenkeeper since 1977, starting as a trainee at Heswall GC under Bill Lawson. In 1981 he won the Sisis Young Greenkeeper of the Year Award and moved to Helsby GC, where his father Norman is in charge. He has also worked at Effingham, as Kenny McNiven's deputy, and as course manager at Staverton Park GC, Northants.

"I feel fortunate to have worked

on a variety of golf course types and to have had a thorough practical education from excellent greenkeepers before attaining my first course manager position," he said. "I have also seen three of my staff from Stockport GC move on to become successful head greenkeepers at local clubs, and I am proud to say that they are using some of the working practices that they used during their time with me at Stockport."



TOM MURRAY
Age: 36. Head greenkeeper at Ratho Park Golf Club, Midlothian

Tom Murray has been at Ratho Park, a James Braid-designed parkland course near Edinburgh, for 20 years. He served three years as an apprentice, two years as an assistant, eight years as first assistant and for the past seven years he has been the head greenkeeper.

During his time there he has helped build and rebuild tees, rebuild greens, put new drainage in to various parts of the course, and helped plant many hundreds of trees and shrubs.

"I hope in the future to continue to keep the course to a high standard for golfers of all standards to enjoy," he says. "It is a job I love doing, and I hope I can pass on some useful experience to the rest of my enthusiastic greenstaff."

Tom is also a good golfer. He plays off 4 and recently won an East Section event.



DAVID WALDEN
Age: 50. Golf course superintendent, Nene Valley Golf Services.

David worked on a farm for ten years before joining Peterborough Development Corporation as a forestry and landscape operator. While there he gained City and Guilds phase I, II and III in amenity, decorative and turf culture and studied at home for the National Diploma in Turf culture.

In 1973 the Development Corporation had a golf course built and advertised for a head greenkeeper. "I was very fortunate to get it," says David. Over the years his job has evolved into that of golf course superintendent and he has been responsible for the construction of a new 18-hole course and 12-hole pitch and putt course.

In 1988 Nene Valley Golf Services took over the courses, but David kept his job. He is in charge of ten people and has also been involved in the construction of a new 27-hole private course. Chairman of the East of England section, David has just started his second year of distance learning at Elmwood College (greenkeeping and golf course management).