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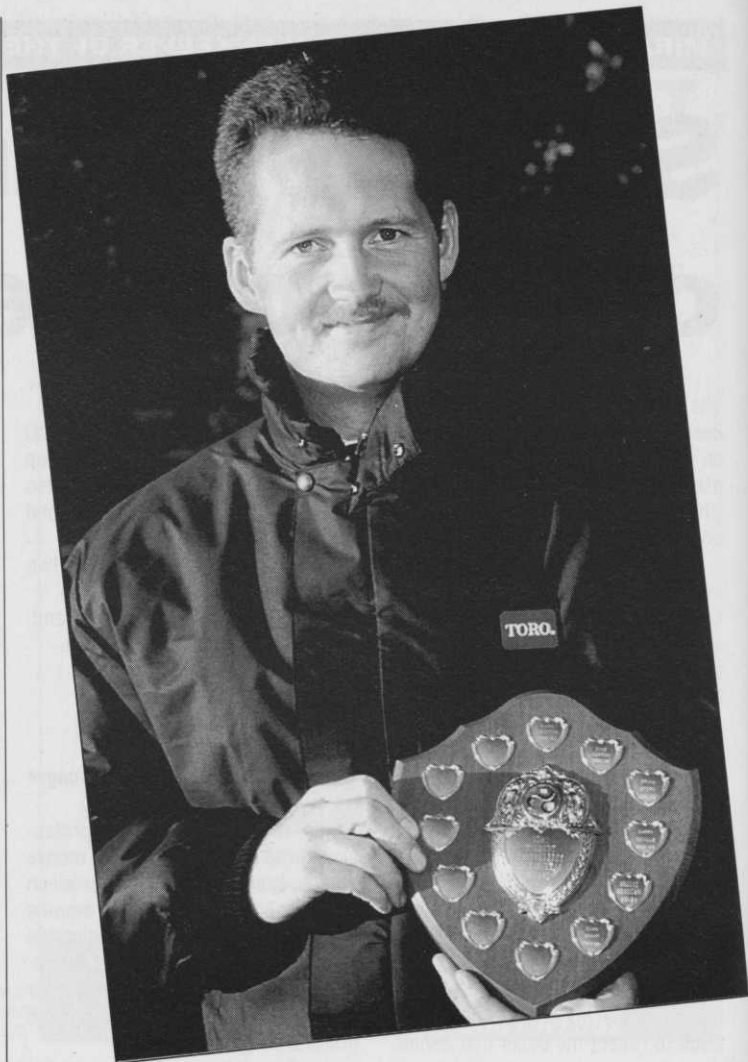
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New Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year James Braithwaite chats with Scott MacCallum about his hard earned triumph

Three years of effort paid off for James Braithwaite of Hallgarth Golf and Country Club Hotel when he was crowned the seventh Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year at Aldwark Manor last month.

James (29) only began greenkeeping in late '92 when the iron foundry, where he was Casting Department Superintendent, closed down but since then he has been instrumental in building a new course, been promoted to First Assistant, gained his Level 2 qualification at Askham Bryan College in York, increased the size of his family – and held down two other jobs to help make ends meet.

"I work as barman/waiter at a local hotel and as a gardener and it is not unknown for me to start on the golf course at 5.30am, finish at 9am get home at 9.30am, change, start at the hotel at 11am and work through to 1.30am, get home at 2am and back into work at 5.30am the next day. That's the worst scenario," he explains,

before casually dropping in that he also cycles the four miles to and from work.

It may have been that work ethic and will to succeed which convinced the judges – Graham Dale, Managing Director of Lely UK Ltd, Mark Gunter of Toro Irrigation, Edward Kitson of the PGA European Tour, Dean Cleaver, Vice Chairman of BIGGA and Chairman of the Education Sub Committee and Neil Thomas, BIGGA Executive Director – that he should take the honours and the winner's place on the eight week Turf Management Study Course at the University of Massachusetts in January/February. During his trip James will also visit the Toro Company Headquarters in Minneapolis and the Toro Irrigation Division in California and possibly visit the GCSAA Show in Orlando, Florida.

Asked what he hopes to achieve from his trip to the States James responds immediately. "I want education... and a chance to see a different way of life and culture. America is full of different ideas and everything is on a bigger scale.

"I'm excited about the prospect and can't really yet believe I'm going," he adds.

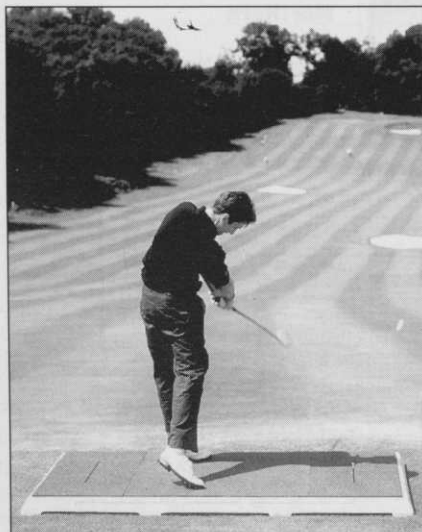
James talks of Hallgarth, a nine hole course near Darlington, with

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Blood, sweat and cheers

The winners and the people who put them there: from left, Barry Heaney, Gerard McCartney, Graham Dale, James Braithwaite, Edward Kitson, Stuart Adams and Mark Gunter



great affection and it is not without reason because it is a course upon which he has poured a lot of blood, sweat and tears.

"I began work as a labourer on January 3 1993 building the course. There was just the Head Greenkeeper, another labourer and myself with an architect overseeing the work. We did everything by hand, wheel barrowing, shovelling, and levelling with rakes. The greens are all USGA spec and we put in the drainage and the gravel carpet," explained James.

"It took us three months to complete and I lost nearly three stones in the time and suffered from wrist splints after damaging tendons. It was quite hard going," he adds with typical understatement.

The construction work complete James asked if he could go to college and was eventually given the go-ahead.

It was then that the need arose for the other two jobs to make ends meet and he began gardening and working in the nearby Walworth Castle Hotel.

"Getting to the finals of the Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year has been great because I have learned a lot from fellow student greenkeepers and tutors who were

excellent. The competition has opened my eyes to what you can do," said James, who played age level county cricket for Derbyshire as a leg spinning opening bat.

"Even if I hadn't won being one of the eight who made it to the final would have been wonderful for my future career prospects but to have taken the top prize is superb.

"It is my ambition to go as far as I can as fast as I can. I do need a lot of experience after all I've only got three years in the industry and less than a year on a working golf course.

"In the shorter term I'm doing my level 3. I'd also like to do D32 and D33 and become an assessor.

"Further down the line I'd love to be working on a top championship golf course. It's got to be everyone's ambition... or to turn a new course into a championship course," said James, who

lists his major influences as his first Head Greenkeeper Jim Webster, current Head Greenkeeper Richard Creane, as well as his tutors at Askham Bryan.

"I'd love to see our course expand and would be one of the best in the area. It is a long nine holes and it might go to 18," explained James, whose wife, Wendy, together with kids Carla (four), and Adam (nine months), are right behind him.

The finalists had battled through college and regional qualifying to earn their place at Aldwark Manor and the huge strides in greenkeeper education have made could be measured by the quality of the eight who made it so difficult for the judges to pick a winner.

The runners-up were 19 year-old Stuart Adams of Hartpury College and Forest of Dean GC, who has already completed Level 3 and is a qualified assessor and

Gerard McCartney, (33) who works at the four – all different types – hole Greenmount College course in Belfast and still has had time to produce seven children in partnership with his wife.

They will join the PGA European Tour at two tournament venues – the English Open and the German Open to assist with the preparation of the course.

The other five finalists were Martin Bond, Richard Mills, Chas Campen, David Ray and Stephen Gransby.

But let's leave the last word to Dean Cleaver, Chairman of BIGGA's Education Sub Committee.

"I have been in greenkeeping for 22 years and have seen the improvement in the quality of the education, and the students it is producing, and it makes me proud to be associated with the industry."

● What's in store for James: see overleaf.