

It was fascinating to see another world of greenkeeping at work

The previous Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year, Euan Grant gives James Braithwaite some insight as to what he might expect while in the United States.

It is only after being back a short while and having been firmly reintroduced to a 6am start that the significance of my experience in the USA has become evident.

Upon selection as the Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year, I was very excited about being offered the opportunity to study turfgrass management in America on the eight week Winter School for Turf Managers at the University of Massachusetts.

The experience was invaluable, very educational and a great eye-opener. The depth of scientific detail offered required long hours

outside the classroom to become fluent with this information and to be able to convert theory into usable turf management practices.

There were 11 separate subjects including irrigation, plant physiology, design and architecture, turfgrass calculations, entomology (study of pests to me) which were all lectured very formally by specialists in their own field. I was certainly kept on my toes with seven exams and four reports to complete during this time.

The course taught me a great deal, and followed on very well from the craft level theory and knowledge that I gained from phase II City & Guilds Greenkeeping and Sportsturf Management. I did however find that more emphasis was placed upon the importance of efficient irrigation, precise scientific theory and computerised organisation.

Bridie Redican and other female greenkeepers can also take heart from the fact that there were double the number of women on the course than in the previous year.

There is a fantastic career in American greenkeeping with very good wages and job opportunities and due to this a lot of highly educated men and women enter the profession at a fairly high level (deputy or superintendent) – rightly or wrongly, that is a separate argument – with turf related degree qualifications from various universities, but relatively little practical experience in time management, prioritising and dealing with golfers.

One aspect of greenkeeping I noticed in the States was the lack of craft level education offered to “junior” greenkeepers. There does not appear to be an equivalent to our S/NVQ or City & Guilds phase/level 1 or 2, also no

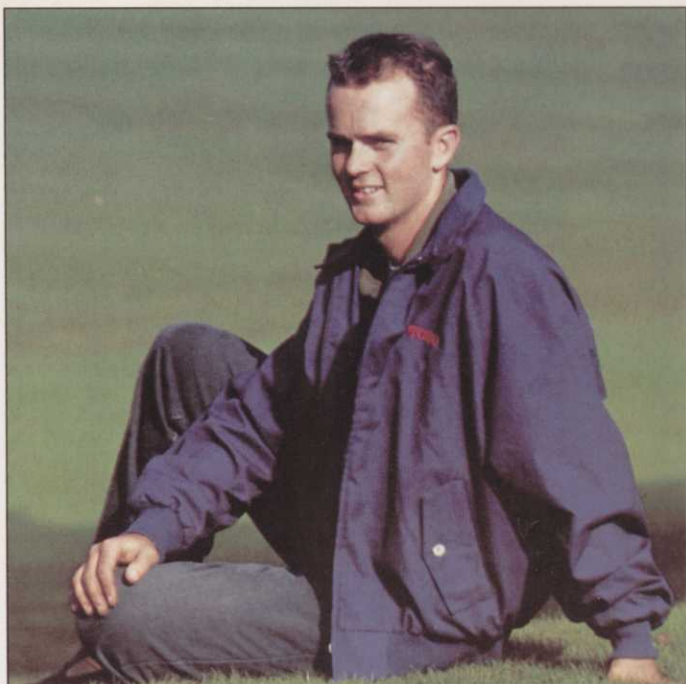
apprenticeships, or Government subsidised YTS schemes.

My belief is that, in general, British greenkeeping skills are improving rapidly with the necessary focus on education. In educating our whole workforce we are creating a base on which hands on experience can build. The S/NVQ qualifications are the means by which, either on one day a week part-time courses or block release courses, newcomers to the industry can incorporate both theory and practical, and importantly share their own work place gained experiences with others in the same situation. A business studies graduate would not expect a decent management position with British Gas, for example, without also having the necessary experience.

In educating our greenstaff we are climbing a great step to becoming a very professional career, in which people will take

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'The experience was invaluable, very educational and a great eye-opener'

SAYS LAST YEAR'S WINNER, EUAN GRANT (pictured)

interest and notice. Young people can now enter the profession identifying a career path with job satisfaction, increasing financial reward and, if worthy, job security. In return, golf clubs must recognise the importance of an entire educated greenstaff. Increasing the awareness of the whole greens team, is more essential nowadays given the latest health and safety legislation, European directives and the fact

that course managers are unavoidably spending less time on the golf course and more time in meetings, writing reports, analysing budgets and planning ahead.

It is imperative that all greenstaff, through college learning, seminars, information days and learning from our colleagues and superiors, have educated answers, holding educational evenings for the golfers, question

and answer sessions, machinery demonstrations and just talking on the golf course we can aim to constantly improve our image, let the golfing public know that golf courses do not look after themselves and that we do actually know what we are doing.

Britain is not such a long way behind the USA in the greenkeeping profession. They have some huge advantages, eg. budget, with which most of us cannot compete but our skills, knowledge and organisation right through the greens team is not inferior.

I must give a massive thank you to the Toro Company for sponsoring my chance to study and travel in the States, for giving me the opportunity to visit its machinery and irrigation factories and headquarters. Witnessing the research, manufacturing and testing facilities and procedures were fascinating, as was the San Francisco show.

Most of all, I made a lot of friends and contacts from all over North America and Canada. I have significantly increased my knowledge and have matured in my outlook to golf course management.

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Congratulations to James Braithwaite of Hallgarth Golf and Country Club Hotel, winner of this year's Toro/Lely (UK) Ltd/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper award

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