

**Raymond Hunt is charged with creating US Open like conditions for the Alamo English Open in June. Scott MacCallum found out how he is going about it.**

Hosting a European Tour event on your course is a pressurised situation for any greenkeeper. The exposure a top tournament gets, with the world's best players competing before large galleries with television cameras recording every move, can make a course's reputation and the subsequent financial benefits it can bring are massive. Alternatively if it doesn't go well...

Raymond Hunt, Course Manager for the Marriott Forest of Arden Hotel and Country Club, knows all about the pressures as he goes about preparations for his fourth English Open Championship.

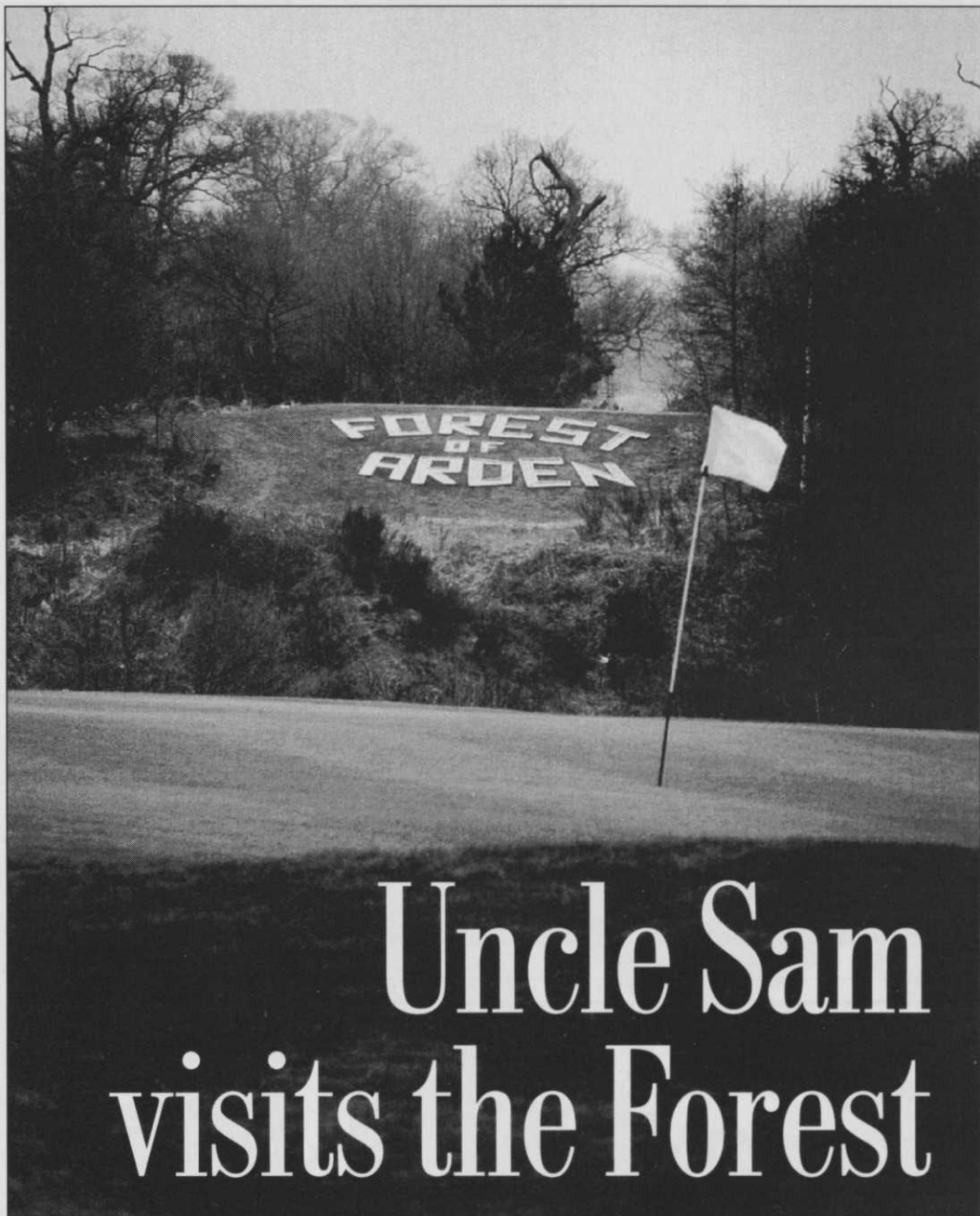
If that were not enough to keep him on his toes it was announced at the pre-tournament press conference that he will be expected to provide "US Open-like conditions" so 15 of the European Tour's top stars, led by Colin Montgomerie, can get some practice in before flying out for the US Open the very next week.

We've had three English Opens already and they've all gone very well and obviously it's got to grow and go on from there otherwise it'll become stale. It's a challenge to see what sort of test you can provide for the players."

The US Openification was first mentioned to Raymond and his team by the Tour about six months ago.

"The idea was to give players better preparation for the US Open and also to make it more tough and more interesting," explained Raymond, from the modern magnificence of the Hotel which over looks the spectacular par-3 18th.

The extent of the problem it sets can be seen when you con-



# Uncle Sam visits the Forest

sider that the US Open is invariably contested in temperatures which exceed 100 degrees, and that just 11 weeks before the Alamo English Open – it was the Murphy's English Open until this season – the thermometer was barely stirring and certainly in no

fear of developing vertigo. Raymond also has to keep the course open for members and important corporate golf both of which form the bread and butter business for the Marriott Forest of Arden Hotel and Country Club.

"Coming out of winter our

growth is particularly backward and we are badly affected by wildlife – Canada Geese on the front nine and deer on the back nine where the course forms part of a deer park," said Raymond, as, right on cue, a group of deer posed for pictures on the side of

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the 14th fairway.

"Having said that I'm fairly happy with where we are now because on average you are going to get some good weather in May and knowing the course, and how it is going to react, we should achieve what we want," explained Raymond, who is employing a special cover on his 5th green to attempt to inject some warmth and speed growth.

Although that means only six to eight weeks of really intensive work on it Raymond knows that being in June things won't be burnt up as they might be later in the summer and the course will be really fresh.

So what does "US Open style" actually mean for Forest of Arden?

"We have to promote growth to get where we need to be for early June. So at the end of the day the main difference is going to be cutting.

"We will have a collar two width of a pedestrian machine, then a fringe which, although we haven't talked about a definite height yet, I think we'll be looking at around about two and a half to three and a half inches. This could be as close as a yard off the green."

The rest of the course will also have thicker rough.

"I don't see that as a problem



**Course Manager Raymond Hunt and, above, activity at his club, the Forest of Arden**

because the rough here grows well and is quite consistent which is what the Tour wants – you don't want poa annua at the bottom and the ball nestling down in it. In general I think the rough will come up to scratch. The difficulty we will have is around the greens, getting the sort of consistency and the sort of rough we want when you have traffic moving over it all the time and we don't enjoy US Open weather. We can only do what we can do if we've got weather on our side."





Meet the team: Greenstaff at the Forest of Arden

If the pressure leading up to the event is bad Raymond feels that the pressure through the week itself is even more intense.

"I have 22 staff (Raymond pulls in other experienced greenkeepers from courses in the Marriott group) out there all of whom have machinery and something can always go wrong. So not much time to relax through the week itself.

"I'm in complete contact with

the Tournament Director through the week through radio and I'd see him two or three times through the day generally to discuss how things are going."

Some of the things which can crop up are quite bizarre including last year a complaint that the hole was misshaped.

"This was two thirds of the way through the day. That was a new one for me. I got a call over the radio and had to go down to the

7th green. I spoke with the rules official, stopped play and had a look at it and although it didn't appear out of shape to satisfy the players we reshaped it with a hole setter."

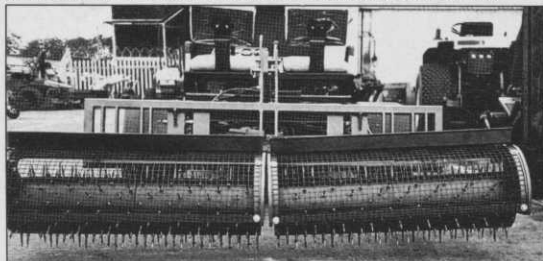
The unpredictability of the British weather also plays a part.

"On the Saturday of last year's event we had a heck of a lot of heavy rain and it became a fairly pressurised situation. You've got to get your staff all over the

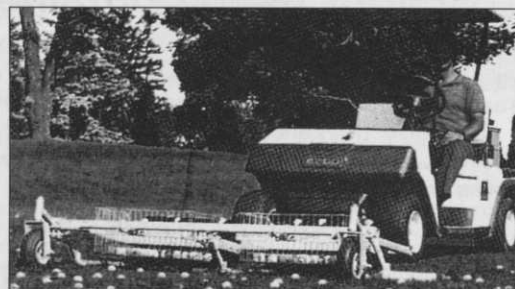
course with squeegees and act quickly. The TV is on, the players don't want to wait, you've got to get through the crowds and all the time it's pelting down."

If Raymond appears well in control and gives off the air of a man who will cope with every conceivable eventuality it perhaps comes from living through a Baptism of Fire when he first arrived at Forest of Arden just a few months before the course's first

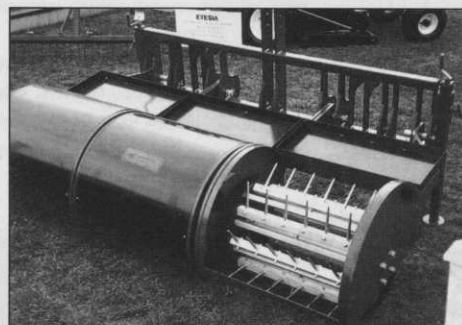
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'We had a heck of a lot of heavy rain and it became a fairly pressurised situation. You've got to get your staff all over the course with squeegees and act quickly.'

English Open.

"When I arrived there was about 50% grass cover on the greens and tees and lot of scarring to repair on the fairways where the irrigation and drainage had gone in.

"So we had an awful lot to do in three and a half months to make it playable for the first tournament which we did. A 1000 rolls of turf went done on the fairways up until the end of July and it was hot as well so we had to keep it wet. There was a lot to achieve that first year and since

**Marriott Forest of Arden  
Golf and Country Club  
Machinery Inventory**

- 6 Lloyd's Paladins
- 5 Toro GM3s with Grooming, Verticut, Vibra spike units and 11 blade competition cylinders.
- 5 Toro 216s
- 2 Toro 5300Ds with Verti-cut units
- 1 Toro 4500D
- 1 Toro 455D Groundsmaster
- 1 Toro Workman with attachments including Hardi Sprayer, Top dresser
- 1 Lloyds Leda Gang mower
- 1 Massey Ferguson 240 Front Loader
- 1 Massey Ferguson 240 Tractor with Trailer
- 1 Kubota B7100 Compact with Trailer
- 1 Fiat Tractor with Trailer
- 4 E-Z-Go Trucks
- 2 Cushman Trucksters with Attachments including Slitters, Brushes, Top Dressers and Sprayers
- 1 Tractor Mounded SISIS Slitter
- 1 Verti-Drain
- 1 Howard Rotovator
- 1 Tractor Mounted Fertiliser Spreader
- 5 Scotts Fertiliser Spreaders
- 1 Wessex Leaf Sweeper
- 1 Wessex Grader, Rake
- 5 Flymos
- 5 Strimmers
- 4 Waterpumps
- 2 Leaf Blowers
- 1 Chain Saw
- 1 Ryan Overseeder
- 1 Ryan Turfcutter
- 1 Turf Iron
- 1 Mole Plough
- 1 Core Master



then we've built on it.

"Everybody enjoys the buzz leading up to the tournament the week itself and then the Sunday afterwards.

Michael O'Dyer, General Manager at Forest of Arden, is also in no doubt as to the quality of his Course Manager. "He is a perfectionist and it shows," is his ringing endorsement.

Raymond began his greenkeeping career at Bidston on the Wirral before joining Bill Lawson at Heswall GC.

"I spent six years with Bill, four years as his Deputy, and I learned everything from Bill. If you can't learn anything from that guy you can't learn anything at all. All my greenkeeping and man management skills can from him and he also directed me in the route I should be taking."

He then went to Royal Porthcawl adding good links and championship experience before joining Goodwood and the Country Club Hotel group as it was then.

Since '93 and his arrival at Forest of Arden he has helped improve the course to the extend that Colin Montgomerie, whose input into course design has been acquired as part a contract Europe's number one has signed

with the Marriott Group, was quoted as saying, "The aim is to make this the best course there is on the European Tour."

It's a challenge that will be met with relish by Raymond and his excellent team.



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