

KUBOTA CHALLENGE

After the debacle of '95 our boys improved in the '96 Kubota Challenge but they still didn't win. Scott MacCallum was there to support and record events.

Having carried the can for the horrendous showing in last year's Kubota Challenge when the BIGGA team came last for the first time in the history of the event it was with trepidation that I made my way to The Belfry for the 1996 event.

The news which greeted me when I arrived was extremely positive. We were in the final, having scraped through on count-back after tying four all with the secretaries. The stars were Raymond Day and Steven Heap who's big wins carried the day.

The other news was that the final had already started and every match was out on the course.

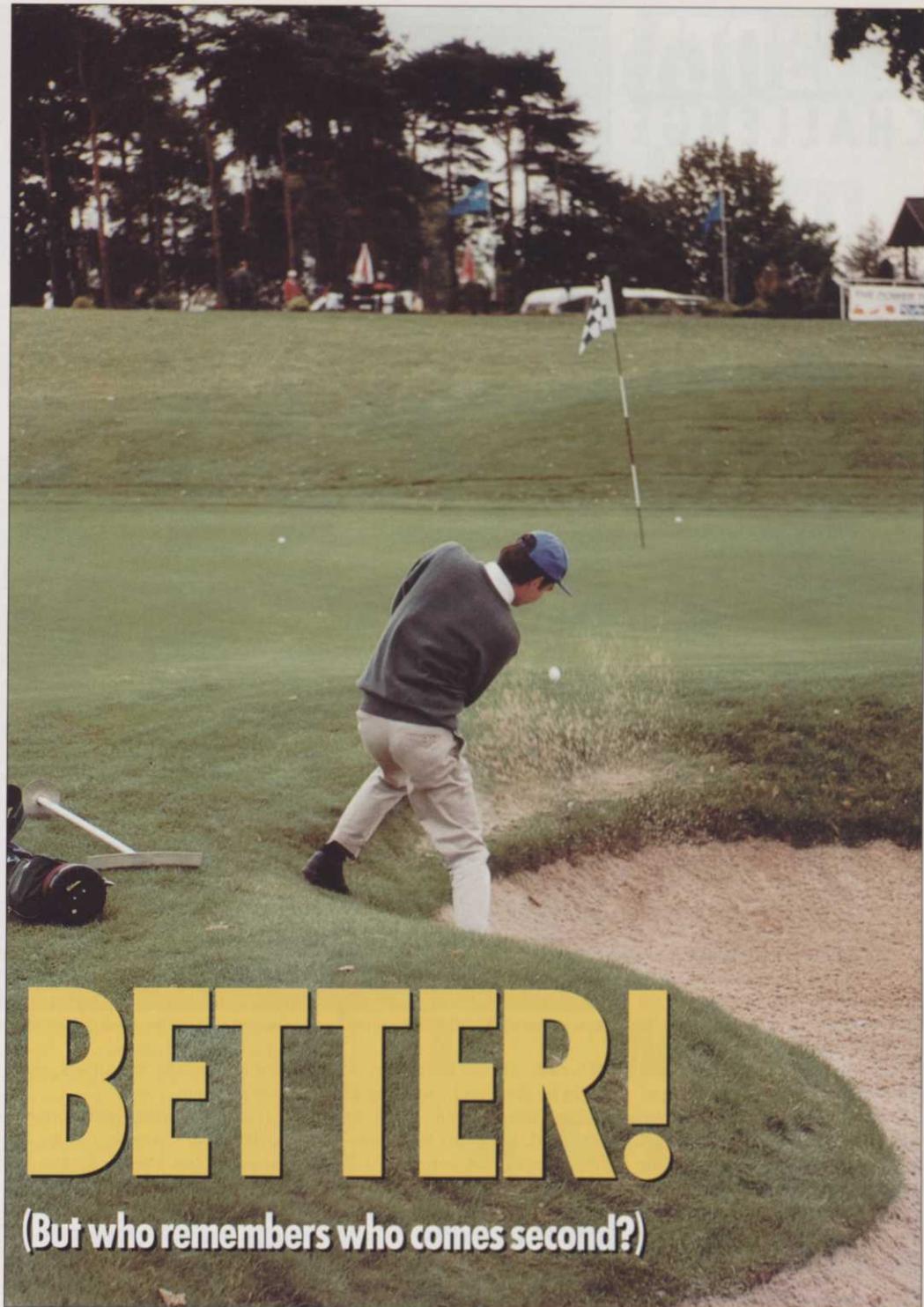
It appeared to me to be a desperate bid to avoid my evil eye after I had "cursed" our team last year and I was still thanking my lucky stars that I possessed a thick skin. It was only then that I discovered that a morning instead of an afternoon start had been adopted due to the hectic Belfry schedule and the traditional drive and chip would be later in the afternoon.

Hot footing it out in to the course and honing in on our lead man, Ray Day, I was about to learn that I was not going to see a great turn around in my own our team's fortunes. Good though our men were playing the defending Champions the EGU were a tough nut to crack and those in the early games who were receiving shots from our boys were certainly making them pay.

By the turn the writing was on the wall. We were well down and a collapse of Greg Norman proportions was needed by the men from Woodhall Spa to deprive them of the title.

Credit where credit is due our magnificent eight fought well but half a point from the first five games was a poor return and meant that the efforts of Neil Maltby and Steven Heap who produced maximum points over the two days and fought back to win their games in the final were in vain.

So who were our representa-



tives in this rare opportunity to represent the profession and how did they fare individually?

■ Ivor Scoones. The team Captain was seven down in the final at the turn. He found sand off the tee at the world famous 10th and BIGGA's photographer recorded his recovery over the water to rough on the right side of the green. He also recorded his mishit chip which left the ball in the rough. Unfortunately he put the camera down just as Ivor chipped in for an unlikely par.

■ Ray Day. Returned to the scene of his stag night a few weeks earlier and was the man on the match in the first round. He won 5&4 and was just one over par in difficult conditions in doing so. I

can only imagine that the celebrations of such a stunning display diluted his display in the final as he succumbed by two holes – although in mitigation, his opponent nearly holed his third at the infamous 18th from across the lake.

■ John Berry. Qualifying for the team by his stunning performance in the National Tournament at Seacroft but he perhaps peaked too early as he lost both his matches. The real tragedy was that he took souvenir pictures of the course during his round only to find he had no film in his camera.

■ Richard Barker. Nobbled Antony Bindley, his First Assistant at Kirby Muxloe, to get in the



Above: Ivor Scoones collects his ball after chipping in at the 10th. Top picture: Guess who!

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team as a last minute reserve and give him yet another picture in the magazine. Unfortunately he too, despite having an excellent season, lost both of his matches. He did, though, go down the last in both of them.

■ **Scott Ballantyne.** Came from two down with two to play to grab the half point in the final and at least by the man to avoid the whitewash as we were already four nil down at the time.

■ **Roger Willars.** The only survivor from last year's humiliation. Won his first game but was the victim of a strange virus which affected his co-ordination the night before the final. At 2.30am he totally missed his mouth with a bacardi and coke, splashed it all over the bar and had to fork out £1.90 for a replacement. Remarkably his co-ordination returned sufficiently to make it to the first tee on the final but his brave fight came to an unsatisfactory conclusion on the 16th green.

■ **Neil Maltby.** Showed his team mates what conscientious professionalism can do by staying on soft drinks and being in bed by 10 the night before the final. He was rewarded by a 100% record and being the first greenkeeper to record a win in the final. He was also a star at the dinner because being from Doncaster he was able to translate the jokes of the excellent Duggie Brown, also from "Donnie", for the rest of the team.



Above: Neil Maltby, the first greenkeeper to record a win in the final. Below: At least we won the drive and chip!

■ **Steven Heap.** Carried on the form he showed in winning individual honours in the Hayter National Final at Fairhaven to also record full points. His 5&4 victory in the semi final along with Ray Day's similar victory margin helped

ensure that the countback went in our favour.

It was a marked improvement on last year's showing when we came last but bearing in mind it required a countback to reach the final there is improvement required to reach again the giddy heights when we won it five years in a row to '89 and three times in a row to '93. It is now three years since the cup has resided at Aldwark Manor the longest barren patch we have suffered in the event's 14 year history.

The one saving grace continues to be the drive and pitch where despite a severe handicap with regards to equipment we won convincingly. Behind the wheel of a Kubota our men are as at home as Chopin at the piano or Gazza in an early bath and, complimented by skill with the wedge that they hadn't displayed earlier, they

romped home with time to spare. The Kubota Challenge is a firm feature on the calendar and although there was a change this year with Brian Hurtley now enjoying his well earned retirement, Rene Orban took up the reins and immediately displayed a genuine feel for an event which should ensure it continues well into the next millenium.

All those, greenkeepers, secretaries English Golf Union and Golf Foundation representatives who have played since 1983 will certainly hope so.

THE ONE QUESTION I WOULD LIKE TO ASK OTHER GREENKEEPERS IS:



"How do you combat disease?"
Steven Heaps, Rothey Park

