



The TOROs

Hankley Common's Ian McMillan set himself and his golf club two goals at the beginning of the year. On each occasion he scored the winner.

How many of us set goals at the beginning of each year? One, two, three four... Yep! I make that most of us. How many of us actually achieve them? One, two... any more? No, I'm afraid that's about it.

One of the guys who should have had his hand up is Ian McMillan, Course Manager at Hankley Common in Surrey who, like so many of us, set himself some goals in January. They were to win both the inaugural Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping and the BIGGA Golf Environmental Award, in association with Amazone and Rhône Poulenc. Ten months, and a great deal of hard work later both trophies sit together proudly in a little corner of Surrey.

If the name is familiar perhaps it should be because Ian belongs to perhaps the best known family in the world of greenkeeping. Dad, Jack, was Course Manager at Sunningdale for many years and is a Past Chairman of BIGGA. He is now a respected consultant. Ian's oldest brother Stewart is Course Manager at Leatherhead, Bobby at Burhill, Billy is General Manager of both Wildwood and Lamerwood golf clubs and younger brother Cameron at Stockley Park – all are top golf courses and it's a dynasty unrivalled in golf.

"I don't know how or why it is that I'm the one who has gone for the awards. I enjoy entering into things that are competitive but I certainly wouldn't look forward to the prospect of competing against them," laughed 36 year-old Ian. It certainly isn't a male only family sister, Heather, now a nurse, has also spent time working with Cameron and mother, Rita, has probably picked up enough knowledge to be a dead cert if she were ever to



The winner, runners-up and competition organisers. Top row, from left, Bob Buckingham, Graham Dale, Neil Thomas, Walter Woods. Front row, Mark Ford, Philip Stain, Ian McMillan, Tom Murray and William Sparrow

Fanfare for the Common man

sit a Master Greenkeeper exam.

Ian had previously entered both competitions in their old formats in the past and had been runner-up in each of them – in the Premier Greenkeeper in '92 and the Environment Competition in '95.

"That basically made us feel that we could win them both and we worked very hard at putting both documents together," said Ian, using the plural to reflect the input he received from his three Course Members – Hankley's version of a Chairman of Green – John Harris, Peter Green and the present incumbent, Alan Kerr; the Club Secretary, John O'Brien; his team and his family.

"The competitions complemented each other. Both entries were fairly weighty documents – about 60 pages each – and there

was a considerable amount of thought put into them. I started work on the Environment entry in January, completed it, then started on my entry for the Toro award.

"Inevitably we thought it would be a bit of a fairy tale to win them both."

Asked if winning one and finishing runner-up in the other would have been seen as a failure Ian paused before smiling and saying slowly.

"We do set our goals high. We like to achieve."

Winning was not without its pressure and Ian freely admits to feeling nervous as he sat in the St George's Hotel, Harrogate, waiting for the result of the Toro Award to be announced.

"I could certainly feel the tension in the room and I didn't

really realise just how tense I was myself," he explained.

No-one who watched Ian make his victory speech could have doubted just how much winning the award meant to him and it was clear that his unique pedigree, a desire to learn and many years of hard work had combined to make him an outstanding winner.

"My father never wanted any of us to be greenkeepers but it was a desire of mine from fairly early on. I enjoyed the game, I liked the outdoor way of life and tinkering with mowers. There were lots of aspects which attracted me in those early days."

Ian grew up at Cardross Golf Club in Scotland and it was there that he picked up his love of golf.

"We moved south to Bush Hill Park, North London, and that's where I started work as an apprentice under my father." Remarkably four out of five of the McMillans worked on the course at the same time. Jack, Stewart, Ian and Bobby before Jack moved to Effingham Golf Club and Stewart took over as Head Greenkeeper at Bushill.

"I was there for four years then moved to Datchet which was my first job as Head Greenkeeper. It was 1981 and I was 20. After three years I moved to Finchley and spent a couple of years there before going to Hankley as Course Manager in 1986.

"Hankley was a real magnet. I'd played the course before and I was very fond of the area but I really had a desire to work on a heathland golf course.

"When I was at Datchet I lived at Sunningdale and gained lots of heathland experience helping my father and I certainly appreciated the finer aspects of it," he explained.

Ian's 12 years at Hankley have, by his own admission, been exciting and very progressive times.

"The whole club is run by very professional people, many of them company directors, and through dealing with these peo-

TORO® Student GREENKEEPER of the year

ple and sharing their skills and experience I've learned communication skills, computer usage, dealing with budgets etc. Equally I was imparting my greenkeeping skills to them. It was a very good partnership."

One of the interesting concepts at Hankley is the Course Management Status Report which is published every two to three years.

"It talks about greenkeeping philosophy, it talks about woodland management, the turfed areas, conservation areas, staff requirements, resource requirements. All aspects of the golf course. It also pinpoints what we want to achieve and reviews some of our successes and things which haven't worked so well," explained Ian, who has produced four of these 24-25 page reports.

'We do set our goals high. We like to achieve'

"I get lots of comments from members who find them refreshing and interesting because we try to write them in such a manner that they are readable for members.

"If we were to do them more frequently than we do it wouldn't give us enough time to achieve some of the goals we set," he added.

The Hankley team – Gareth Roberts, Paul Hutton, Michael Jennings, James Andrews and Gavin Baldwin – are all over the moon about the club's success and Ian is quick to give them credit.

"You are only as good as the guys around you and none of these things would have been possible without them.

Ian's self confessed passion for the environment has been with him for many years and developed from his love of heathland golf courses.

"I realised that heathland was disappearing at a phenomenal rate and that developed to an appreciation of wildlife as well. That has grown through time."

Asked to comment on what answer he would give to other greenkeepers who might ask what he possesses which has helped him to two national competitions Ian gives a practical answer.

"These competitions are there to be won and the way to do it is by application and endeavour and I think we did that. If you can exhibit the history of the work you have done on your course by keeping a well documented file of slides it also helps.

"There are a tremendous number of fabulous greenkeepers out there and what I can say to them is that I've been runner-up in both competitions before and that made me focus more and made me realise that I had to work a bit harder to win...So we came back a second time and won them both."

He also has praise for both competitions and what they do for the profession.

"They highlight the professionalism that's around in the industry. BIGGA is very much to the forefront of initiating lots of that through their education training programmes," said Ian, who is married to Karen with three children Callum, 8, Hannah, 6, and Daniel, 2.

"It has been an absolute pleasure to represent my golf and the staff at both of these competitions. I'm just the ambassador and an awful lot goes on behind the scenes."

Speaking with Jack about his son he pays him a tribute to which greenkeepers would probably relate.

"He's like me," he explained, "the grass talks to him."



Steven Nixon collects his prizes from Gordon Child, right, as Bob Buckingham and Pete Mansfield look on

The best of both worlds

Steven Nixon has shown he can excel in two careers

To reach the top in one field takes dedication, effort and no little ability. It's a reason to feel extremely proud and self satisfied. After all, there can only be one at the top at any one time.

To reach the top in two fields, singles a person out as quite exceptional, and to have done it by the age of 26 is even more remarkable.

Such a person is Steven Nixon, winner of the Toro Student of the Year Award, who adds the title to that of MAA YTS Mechanic of the Year which he won seven years ago.

"Having won another national competition I didn't go into the Toro Student of the Year thinking that it was so far out of reach not to be worth bothering about. You do get a belief in yourself having won a big competition and I was quietly confident when I arrived for the final... That was until I started to talk with the others. They were all good guys," explained Steven, speaking in the foyer of the St George Hotel, Harrogate, the morning after the results had been announced.

Steven was entered for the competition by his tutors at Askham Bryan College but had been aware of its existence since he first came into greenkeeping four years ago.

In hindsight the fact that Steven ended up working on a golf course should be of no real sur-

prise. He lived on Wortley Golf Club near Sheffield from the age of 13, where his parents were Steward and Stewardess, and the golf bug really bit him hard.

"I was a fanatic. I absolutely love golf and I always fancied working at Wortley Golf Club. Unfortunately people tended to stay for a while and jobs didn't come up very often."

To that end, once he had left school it was to become a mechanic and was soon showing himself to be an outstanding apprentice.

"The Mechanic of the Year Award went on college work and I was monitored at my placement," explained Steven, who worked at David Bentley's Subaru/Isuzu dealership in the centre of Sheffield.

"My exam results were the highest in the country," he added, in a quiet manner which betrayed not a hint of boastfulness.

On the strength of his success he was chosen to appear in a career video for the Mechanical Industry and this is still shown in schools today.

Steven worked at David Bentley's after finishing college then, for two years, was self-employed during which time he worked on the machinery at Wortley.

"It is great that both jobs, mechanics and greenkeeping are moving together and that is why I got the job at Wortley when it came along. The club saw the benefit of me being able to look