

# 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

**TORO**  
**Student**  
**GREENKEEPER**  
*of the year*

*The* **TOROs**

after their machinery. All I had to do was pick up on the greenkeeping element of the job and I took to it better than I could have expected."

At Wortley Steven worked under Barry Heaney, BIGGA's 1995 National Chairman, and after a year Barry placed him at Askham Bryan College.

"I did a two year Level 2 course which I passed while I also passed my spraying exams while I was there.

"I can't get enough of greenkeeping. I watch videos. I read about it. It is more than just a job, it is part of our life," said Steven, who is a member of the Sheffield Section which has a strong winter lecture programme.

Part of Steven's prize for winning the Toro Student of the Year Award is to undertake a six week residential study course at the University of Massachusetts early next year and it is his attendance

at on this which will delay his starting Level 3.

"I'm going to pick that up next September, but I'm really looking forward to what I'll learn while in

**'Winning this award is going to give me a lot more confidence'**

America. I'm sure it will open my eyes and I'll learn how greenkeeping is progressing around the rest of the world. It may be a different climate where different methods

are used but I'll certainly learn things which I can bring back to Wortley," enthused Steven.

"Winning this award is going to give me more confidence and I believe it will open up many more opportunities for me."

The club helped Steven cope with the pressure of being in the final and the feeling that if he hadn't won he would have disappointed a lot of people..

"The club sent me a letter on the Friday before the final to say that in their eyes I was a winner for getting to the final and that took a bit of the pressure off me because I was feeling it at bit. It's true though because we were each one of eight who had got through to the final from hundreds who could have done."

One element of the competition which Steven did enjoy was the linking of the Student award with that of the Excellence in Greenkeeping Competition.

"It was great talking with some of the older guys and they gave me great support on the day. Bill Sparrow and I were both waiting for our interviews and when we got talking all my nerves went and before I realised I was in and the interview had started."

"I've always wanted to visit the States so I just couldn't believe I'd won when the announcement was made."

Steven's success was greeted by great celebrations from his club, family and friends.

"My girlfriend, Michelle, is 200% behind me and burst into tears when I told her I'd won, while my mum and dad have organised a celebration for me when I get back. I'm also happy for Barry (Heaney) because he started me off and was one of the main driving forces behind my getting on. I know that greenkeeping is his life and that he loves BIGGA," said Steven who also paid tribute to the encouragement given to him by Steven Hulme, a close friend who had been the Acting Head Greenkeeper at the club.

"I'd also like to thank Toro for sponsoring such a great competition, BIGGA for organising it so well and Wortley Golf Club for all their support."

In addition to the six week study course. Steven will also visit the Toro factories in Minneapolis and California and, if time permits attend the GCSAA Conference and Show in Anaheim, California.

The two runners-up, who will also attend the Anaheim Show are Alan Owen, of Royal Birkdale Golf Club and Myerscough College and Christopher Rawlings of Rodway Hill Golf Club and Hartury College.



**At the presentation: back row, from left, Jeff Bailey, Mark Hunter, Pete Mansfield, Gordon Child, Ken Richardson and David Ansell. Middle row: Andrew Baker, Daniel Crowley, Neil Robson. Front row: Alan Owen, Steven Nixon and Christopher Rawlings.**