

More Belfry blues



Scott MacCallum and National Chairman Pat Murphy arrived to cheer BIGGA's team in the Kubota Challenge. Unfortunately they didn't make it in time to inspire the team into the final.

They came, they saw, they finished third.

It doesn't have a great ring to it but alas it does sum up the fortunes of the 1997 BIGGA Kubota Challenge team where a horrendous back nine in the semi finals consigned our men to the third and fourth play-off during which they finally played to their potential.

Since becoming Editor I have attended three Kubota Challenges and in that time the BIGGA team, competing against the Golf Club Secretaries, the English Golf Union and the Golf Foundation has never finished in the same position twice.

Guess the one position for which I am still waiting?

In '95 we finished last. It was our worst performance in the history of the event and, at the time,



Steve Sullivan

I took full responsibility as "new boy" for my inability to halt the team's slump to such lowly depths. Last year things looked up and we claimed second place losing in the final to the then defending Champions, the EGU, but this year we dropped a place



Paul Neve

beaten in the semi final by the EGU over the new PGA Course at The Belfry.

The EGU went on to win the event for the third successive year and are beginning to dominate the Challenge in the same way BIGGA did in the heady years



Stefan Antolik: "Captain Fantastic"

between 1985 and '93 when we won every time – count them. That's nine wins in succession.

The eight man team, led by Stefan Antolik, did redeem itself with a convincing win in the third and fourth place play-off against the Golf Foundation but it was

in the Kubota

the failure to compete for the "big prize" which really rankled.

What made it all the worse was that at the turn during the semi-final BIGGA was up in seven matches and level in the other. Shades of the Americans in the Ryder Cup at Valderrama.

It would be unfair to point the finger at those players, many of them extremely solid ball strikers, for losing their match in that semi final. As they say, anyone can win over 18 holes and there has to be a loser, but I think it is important that those players who did show fighting spirit and won the three points in what was ultimately a 5-3 defeat should be given credit. Step forward John Waite, Paul Neve and Captain Fantastic Stefan Antolik.

It is perhaps worth highlighting this very point to someone like Seve Ballesteros who had considered being a playing Captain in the Ryder Cup. Seve, it doesn't work. Speak with Stefan. You'd be so wrapped up in your own game that you wouldn't be able to keep the wheels on the respective wagons of the rest of the guys.

Whatever lessons were learnt from the disappointment of the semi finals were put to good use in the third and fourth place play-off against the Golf Foundation. Although a day too late, they

were inspired:

National Tournament Champion, Steve Sullivan, fought back from an unpromising position to reach the infamous final hole of the Brabazon course all square. Once there he held his nerve and holed a long putt to clinch the match. Whisper it, though, he won the hole with a seven.

Mike Hughes demonstrated a skill on the same hole which, if he could market, would make him a very wealthy man. Relaxed, having already clinched his game on the 16th, he landed his approach some distance short of dry land but two Barnes Wallace bounces later and he was in a position to chip onto the green.

John Waite earned full points over the two days but things had looked less than promising when he arrived on the 8th green with nothing to do. He had found the water off the tee and conceded the hole. It didn't dent his confidence, however, and he expressed his confidence in his ability to close out the match... which he did on the 15th.

Archie Dunn was forced down the last having been dormie two but kept a cool head and hit a fine five iron to the left edge of the green to close out the match.

Trevor Pipe fought gamely but by his own admission has spent more time recently on the bowl-



Archie Dunn

ing green holding a jack than on a golf green wielding a putter and was undone by the length of The Belfry course.

Captain Fantastic, up against a man who chipped in twice in the first seven holes, fought back to halve his match by winning the final hole. Using a golfing brain which would have done Ben Hogan proud he laid up a yard in front of the lake after his opponent had found water then showed his steely nerve by firing

an approach into the heart of the green. That's Stefan's story anyway!

Paul Neve was BIGGA's secret weapon and could lay claim to the title of "Finest 24 Handicapper in the Country". Having been one of the three heroes on the first day he produced the biggest victory of the second day when he rounded off his match on the 13th green.

The man given the responsibility of playing the anchor role was Antony Bindley a man who is the possessor of the most violent practice swing in golf. It is quite remarkable that after an act which would induce hernias in all but the fittest he can produce such unerring accuracy and he put that to good use in his 5&3 win.

So third place and I'm eagerly awaiting next year when I hope to complete a full set of places with a victory. However 1997 will be remembered for the high degree of camaraderie displayed by all 32 competitors, the magnificent organisation masterminded by Peter McEvoy and Sporting Concepts team and, perhaps most of all, the extraordinary hospitality of Rene Orban and everyone at Kubota who make the event one of the highlights of the season for all who are lucky enough to attend.



The Greenkeepers team