

Royal Birkdale wins the Open

The Claret Jug may have gone to the man currently in possession of the Green Jacket, and the hearts of everyone to a 17 year old amateur, but the real winner during the 127th Open Championship was Royal Birkdale itself which had been brought to a peak by Chris Whittle and his superb team.

That there was not a blade of grass out of place was testimony to the course preparation. That the winning score was level par showed that despite the space age advances in ball and club technology in the

hands of the finest exponents of the game in the world, 18 magnificent holes and a testing wind can still produce a stalemate.

The excellent work over the last few years by Chris and his team was complemented by that of the BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team, sponsored by Stylo for the first time, who provided a divoting team before and after each day's play as well as someone to rake the bunkers with each of the matches every day.

In difficult conditions the Support team produced professional performances on the course, particularly during the play-off - which involved speeding to the chosen holes in advance of the players and raking every bunker from there to the finish - and many stories to take home off the course.

Top of the latter list must come from Russell Black, of Westerhope GC, and Kevin Bell, of Elmwood College GC, who, having missed the last mini bus back to their hotel on the final day, were given a ride back into Southport by none other than Mark O'Meara, the new Open Champion, himself.

The BIGGA Marquee in the Tented Village was graced by visits from the Association's President, Viscount Whitelaw, as well as Jaime Ortiz Patino, President of Valderrama Golf Club.

Great BIGGA Bunker Competition

For the fourth successive year BIGGA ran a competition in the Media Centre to estimate how many bunkers the BIGGA Support Team would rake during the course of the four days. Each member of the team was issued with a score card to record every bunker a player went into which, as well as supplying the data for the competition allowed BIGGA to supply valuable information to the press and media on a daily basis covering how many bunkers were found, which hole had been most and least costly and who, among the players had spent most time in the sand.

As the Support Team members also recorded any incidents which occurred with their match these were also put together in a daily press release which was distributed to the press, BBC Television and Radio Five Live.

A separate competition was also held for the members of the Support team

Chris Whittle, right, and his magnificent men



The Royal Birkdale Bunker Raking Statistics

Day 1.	355
Day 2.	406
Day 3.	226
Day 4.	153 (including one in play-off)

Overall 1140



Action men including (above top) Russell Black, Westerhope GC, raking the bunker from which Brian Watts played his stunning recovery to force the play-off, and (middle) Scott Purdy of Ashbourne GC, and above, the team preparing the 18th for the play-off.

Below: Robert Hogarth, Cathcart Castle GC, after running all the way to the 15th in the play-off!





COMPOSITE



Winners Press and Media
 Day 1. Anne Wilson, STRI Turfgrass Bulletin, 351.
 Day 2. David Hamilton, Press Association Sport, 401.
 Day 3. John Huggan, Golf Digest, 222.
 Day 4. Mark Garrod, Press Association Golf Correspondent, 160.
 Overall winner Tim Glover, The Independent, 1160.

Tim wins a Hayter Harrier 48 lawn mower. The presentation will be made in due course by Kim Macfie, Sales and Marketing Director of Hayter, who kindly donated the mower.

BIGGA Support Team Winners
 Day 1. John Berry, Penrith GC, 354
 Day 2. Robert Hogarth, Cathcart Castle GC, 405
 Day 3. Ian Semple, Old Fold Manor, 224
 Day 4. John Berry, 156.

Overall winner, John Berry, Penrith GC, 1234.

Left: With the new Open Champion. Above: Marcus Hamon, of Royal Guernsey with Tiger Woods' ball. Below left: Close to the action. Below right: About to receive the acclaim.

History of the Bunker Data

	St Andrews ('95) (117 bunkers)	Royal Lytham ('96) (185 bunkers)	Royal Troon ('97) (84 bunkers)	Royal Birkdale ('98) (117 bunkers)
Rd 1	214	501	344	355
Rd 2	201	577	272	406
Rd 3	130	269	107	226
Rd 4	156	271	136	153
Total	701	1618	859	1140

Total for four years = 4418



Support Team Snippets

Bob Estes found sand so often during the first round that his caddie asked BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team member, Anthony Davies, of Prestbury GC, if he would mind joining the US Tour as their personal bunker raker.

Tiger Woods nipped off to the loo after teeing off on the 11th but finding the Gents engaged used the ladies instead. Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team member Russell Black, of Westerhope GC, in the north east.

The BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team has provided support to the resident greenkeeping team at every Open Championship since St Andrews in 1984.

This year the team contains greenkeepers from golf clubs including Wentworth, East Sussex National, Royal Guernsey, Clondeboye, in Ulster, and Valderrama and from as far north as Tain and south as St Enedoc in Cornwall.

Mark Calcavecchia came up with an excuse many club golfers would have been proud of during the second round. On the 15th hole he ripped off his hat saying that it was too tight and he couldn't think!

Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team member, Terry Crawford, of Clondeboye GC, in Ulster.

Stuart Appleby encountered some of Royal Birkdale's renowned wildlife during his second round. He found the rough to the right hand side of the 16th green but had to wait for a frog to move from beside his ball before he could play. Last year Royal Birkdale was the Northern Regional winner of the BIGGA Golf Environment competition in association with Amazone and Rhone Poulenc. Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team member, Ian Semple, Old Fold Manor GC.

Darren Lee had a spectator to thank for saving him on the 18th in the second round. He had lost his ball on the right hand side of the 18th but a spectator who had watched it land jumped over the barrier on the left side of the fairway and led Darren straight to his ball. He returned to his place arms raised in triumph to a round of applause from the gallery. Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team member Chris Sheehan, of West Derby GC.

BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team member, Stuart Hogg, certainly impressed one of his players, Dudley Hart, during the second round. Dudley was watching as Stuart raked one of his bunkers and turned to his caddie and said, "Now that's how a trap should be raked." They then offered to take Stuart with them to the US Tour. Stuart works at Fortrose and Rosemarkie GC.

US Open Champion Lee Janzen was cleaning his contact lens between tee and green in Saturday's third round but dropped one near a ditch. Fortunately he was able to find it just before the Rules Man stood on it! Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team member, Billy Merritt, of Allerton Park GC.

BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team member Anthony Davies, of Prestbury Park, who was with Nick Faldo's match met Prince Andrew on the 17th fairway. The Prince came up behind Anthony and asked what club he thought Faldo would be playing. "A 7-iron maybe?" Anthony replied "Maybe for you, Sir. For Faldo a 9." The Prince agreed. Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team member, Anthony Davies, of Prestbury Park GC.

Anthony also had to rake a bunker after a Faldo supporter fell into it trying to get a little closer to his idol in the third round.

Justin Leonard called a shot on himself at the 2nd when his ball moved slightly in a bunker. No-one noticed apart from himself and the Greenkeeper Support Team member Robert Hogarth, of Cathcart Castle GC. The referee was called, the ball replaced and an extra shot added to the score. Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team member, Robert Hogarth, of Cathcart Castle GC.



Above (top): Tom Woolley of Eastbourne GC on the 7th.

Above left: Chris Kennedy, Gordon Child, George Brown and Walter Woods share a joke.

Above: Some well-known faces share a drink in the BIGGA marquee.

Left: The divoting team on Saturday evening.