

The field for the 1998 Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping final was by common consent the strongest ever, and produced a fine Champion who, as this year's Ambassador for Greenkeeping, will do a marvellous job in promoting the profession...



From Strength to strength

John Coleman is a man of drive, determination and talent who would stand out in any walk of life. It is our good fortune that he has chosen to make his mark in greenkeeping.

He is supported by a fine golf club, Abbeydale in Sheffield, and they will benefit from John's success with a new Toro triple mower worth around £20,000. John wins a trip to the GCSAA Conference and Show while each member of his team receives a set of BIGGA waterproofs. The other finalists each received a cheque for £100.

The Toro Student of the Year Award saw the emergence of a young woman who again will stand as a fine example of the quality of people being attracted to the profession.

Sally Doherty is a university graduate who has thrown herself into her job at The Belfry with such enthusiasm that she is already a key member of the team which is preparing the Brabazon Course for the 2001 Ryder Cup. Sally wins a place on a turf science course in the United States as well as a trip to the Toro Headquarters in Minneapolis and the Toro's irrigation Headquarters in California as well as the GCSAA Show in Orlando.

We are indeed fortunate to have two such able Champions and it says much for the success of the two competitions that people of their quality strive to succeed in them.

Toro are owed a debt of thanks for enabling the events to go on and for the hard work and commitment the people of Toro and Lely UK put into them.

THE MAN WITH THE **ABBHEY** HABIT

New Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping Award winner John Coleman has packed a lot into his 28 years...



Take a close look at the picture of the smiling dark haired man which accompanies this feature.

Stare into the eyes and there's a fair chance that you'll detect the steely determination to succeed. The eyes also reveal a depth of experience which belies the rest of the relatively youthful face and hint at the story behind the picture. A tale which describes the route which culminated in John Coleman, Abbeydale Golf Club's Course Manager, becoming the 1998 Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping Award winner.

It is a story of bloody-mindedness, hardship, confidence, prejudice and of a close and rewarding relationship between a greenkeeper and his Chairman of Green.

The first element emerged when he eschewed the chance of joining Dumbarton-based J&B Whisky, where his father was Industrial Manager, in a job which many young men would have welcomed with open arms.

"A lot of my family automatically went into J&B and it was assumed I'd do the same, and I'd have earned decent money for a guy of my age," explained John.

"But it was partly bloody mindedness which made me go into greenkeeping. I just wanted to do it myself. Also I was a keen golfer and like many thought I'd be able to play all the time so I started at Dumbarton Golf Club as a YTS on £27 a week. Peanuts!" recalled John, who is now 28.

He'd gone into it at full tilt with a view to greenkeeping being his career but after two weeks of being put through the mill by his boss, Frank Scullion, now of Dunstable Downs GC, John began to doubt the wisdom of his decision.

"I raked all the bunkers myself and used the hand mower the rest of the day and it was walking the legs off me. I said to my dad that I was absolutely knackered and that I didn't know if it was worth £27 a week. But my dad

was clever because he said 'Well, if you don't think you can handle it...' That was like the red rag to a bull and I worked hard from there on."

A top student at Langside College he reached the National Finals of the Toro Student of the Year Competition, - he admits now that he was out of his depth in the final won by David Norton - and was promoted to Deputy Head Greenkeeper. He also represented the apprentices on BIGGA's West of Scotland Section.

"It was great experience. I was on committee with the likes of Chris Kennedy and remember playing golf at a Section meeting with George Brown when I was about 17. He was absolutely great to me but I'd doubt if Chris or George would remember me."

It was at this stage, still at the age of 19, that John decided that his career needed to take a different course. The path he chose was education.

"I felt that I could have stayed at Dumbarton for a couple of years and



THE MAN WITH THE ABBEY HABIT

then gone down the road of trying to get experience at different golf courses, which is a good way of doing it. But I wondered how I would be able to stand out from the crowd doing it that way," explained John.

"So I thought I'd try and go a bit further with my education and the three year BTEC National Diploma in Turf Science and Sportsground Management at Myerscough College was the highest level you could get at the time in greenkeeping."

It meant some drastic action. He handed in his notice at Dumbarton sacrificing a regular income, moved south without a grant and he funded his progress through a succession of bar jobs.

Having made such sacrifices, and passed the Diploma, you might think a host of potential employers would have been knocking at the door to speak to this talented and ambitious young man

It didn't happen and the clue to the

abject failure of golf clubs to take notice of John is revealed in the second last word of the previous paragraph.

John was only 22 and over qualified for anything other than the top job at a golf club and clubs were reluctant to put the affairs of their golf courses in the hands of someone seen as no more than a callow youth.

"I was back living with my parents and applying for every Head Greenkeeper's job which appeared in the magazine but wasn't getting any response. It's funny but even now when I go home to Dumbarton and come downstairs in the morning I always look at the front door to see if there's any mail for me," he recalled.

While John was becoming more and more disillusioned a Chairman of Green in South Yorkshire was putting together an advert for a Head Greenkeeper's job after the previous incumbent had moved on.

Jack Copeland took his role seriously at Abbeydale Golf Club. He attended, and still attends, every lecture put on by the Sheffield Section and had also visited BTME.

"At Harrogate I heard a talk by a young man who made a huge impression on me. It was the first time I'd seen a young Course Manager and it showed me where greenkeepers were going. I knew this was the future," explained Jack.

"That was in the January and that October I was put in the position of appointing a new Head Greenkeeper."

That young Course Manager was Anthony Davies, of Prestbury Golf Club, by coincidence the first winner of the Premier Greenkeeper Award which has become the Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping Award John has now won, and a Master Greenkeeper.

"I remember reading John's application and being interested, but then noticed his age and was depressed by it. But, remembering the young Course



Manager at Harrogate I still chose to interview him," said Jack.

In the middle year of his course - which incidentally he would have no hesitation in recommending others - John had worked under Bill Lyon at Royal Mid Surrey, in Richmond.

"Bill Lyon was a major influence in John getting this job," explained Jack.

"He got a superb reference from the college highlighting his leadership qualities - despite being the youngest on the course he was a class spokesman when a dispute arose regarding some elements of college life - and another excellent reference from Bill which I decided to take up.

"We had a long conversation during which time I said that it would be a gamble taking on someone of his age. Bill said that wasn't a gamble, the real gamble would be in not taking him. He said that of all the people he'd been involved with he was the brightest. That stuck with me and encouraged me to go down the path of employing John," said Jack, whose decision was not universally applauded at the time by the rest of the membership.

It didn't take John too long to win round the membership particularly in his work on a new irrigation system, bunker renovation and the masterminding of a new maintenance facility brought about by a threat to close the club down by the Health and Safety Executive (See Greenkeeper International October '97.) Oh yes, he's also proved himself to be a bit of an inventor coming up with needle hollow tines which some of the major companies now produce.

The close relationship between John and Jack is highlighted by the fact that Jack was the person on the end of the phone when John made his first call both, after his interview and after the announcement of his win.

"This has vindicated my decision to go down the education route as I've achieved a status that would have been out of my reach if I'd gone down the more orthodox route. It means a lot to

me and from Jack's point of view proves to us that we were right. I wanted to win it for him as well as the team - Craig Richards, Lee Mason, Barrie Wild, Glynn Hancock, Paul Mason and Steve Hewins - and for lots of members of the club."

On the future John is well aware of the benefits such success can bring but he is too level headed to get carried away.

"I'm the same greenkeeper now as I was before I won the competition. I'm not any different. I don't want to come across as a mercenary so unless something comes along that I really feel I couldn't turn down as far as I'm concerned things will continue the way they are at the moment.

"I want to continue my education. Myerscough College is offering a correspondence degree course which it is going to do on CD Rom the year after next and I've also applied to go on the Master Greenkeeper programme."

Jack is sure that if and when the day comes that John does decide to move on, and he confesses that the club Board were concerned that it might happen if John won the Toro, it would not mean the end of the relationship.

"John would never leave this club spiritually. He's done too much here. I'm sure that if he went anywhere else he'd always be available to support whoever got the job."

Having won the Toro John will devote some of his incredible energy to promoting the industry and BIGGA.

"I'll shout it from the roof tops that I've come through the education system that BIGGA is promoting and that it has worked.

"There are too many people coming into the profession by default and I'm willing to go into schools and, taking a leaf out of Ruud Guillet's book, try to make greenkeeping sexy and a more appealing profession to get into."

With such a fine example of modern greenkeeping promoting the cause we can expect an influx of new talent on the next few years.

Above: John very much a double act with Jack Copeland

Below: A valiant effort; (from L-R) Back row; Andy Campbell, Peter Wisbey, Richard Whyman Front row; John Quinn, John Coleman and Allan McDougall



TOP STUDENT – BAR NONE

Sally Doherty's elevation to Toro's top student came after a chat across a bar changed the course of her life...



Above: A delighted Sally poses with her well-earned trophy

Below: The finalists (from L-R) Back row; Gary Gruber, Mark Allen, Nick Webber, Geoff Mills, Richard Aitken Front row; Paul Shelley, Sally Doherty and Steven Myres

A chance remark in the Golf Bar of The Belfry changed the course of Sally Doherty's life and led her to the title Toro Student of the Year for 1998.

"I'd just handed in my notice at the bar when got speaking with Derek Ganning. I said 'Go on. Give me a job.' It was just pure chance as he happened to be in the bar and to be honest I was bored with life at the time. After humming and hating for a while he agreed and I started full time. That was three years ago," explained Sally, whose progress since has been such that she has recently been promoted to First Assistant on the renowned Brabazon Course.

Born and raised in Tamworth, near Birmingham, Sally completed an Environmental Science Degree at Wolverhampton University, and had worked at The Belfry in the bars and restaurants for several years during holidays and after completing her course.

"Despite that I'd never thought of working on the golf course until that time and I certainly never dreamed I'd end up greenkeeping," said Sally.

Having taken the plunge it then dawned on Sally that when she walked into the Mess Room for the first time she would be the lone female amid 40 males.

"I was super nervous on my first day but the guys have been brilliant. They do give me a bit of stick now and again but I'd rather have that than be treated with kid gloves."

Sally has not regretted her decision to take up greenkeeping one little bit.

"Once I started, and after the initial shock of working outside in the winter, I loved every minute of the job," she explained, enthusiasm oozing from her voice.

Although her Environmental Science degree did involve soil science and looked at trees and grasses there was little cross over into the golf side but Sally threw herself into education for her new chosen profession.

"When I found out about the NVQs I wanted to do them straight away and started a block release course at The Warwickshire College. I've just finished my Level 2 and started work on my Level 3. I'm also an assessor to Level 2."

Progress in the Toro Student of the Year Award came when her tutor, Graham Martin, nominated her as the college representative for the Regional Finals.

"I attended an interview in Shropshire and wasn't nervous at all. I just thought I'd give it a go and wasn't particularly worried about it," she explained.

Nerves did start to build, however, when two weeks later she was informed that she'd made it through to the National Finals.

"Just before the final interview I was very very nervous," she admitted.

However, she shone in the longer, more technical, interview conducted in BIGGA HOUSE by Mark Gunter, of Toro; Peter Mansfield, of Lely; Ken Richardson, of BIGGA and BIGGA's National Chairman, Gordon Child and was delighted when her name was announced at the Toro Awards dinner held in Aldwark Manor Hotel that same evening.

Part of Sally'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.

"The thought of going to the States is exciting, but a little bit scary as I've never travelled on my own before, but I'm looking forward to being able to feed back to the lads at work on what I've learned."

It is not the first time she has been to the States having been on a University field trip to Boston a few years ago.

"I was working in the hotel at The Belfry at the time but even so the Americans were excited to hear that I worked at the Ryder Cup venue even although at that time I didn't work on the course. No doubt the students on the course this time will be interested to hear about what's The Belfry," said

Sally, who was working in the restaurant serving the players and assembled starts when the last Ryder Cup was played at the course in 1993.

She has and will be more involved for the next match as she has been carrying out the work which has and is being done to make the Brabazon an even greater test for the Ryder Cup in 2001.

"I've been lucky to have been involved in the renovation work on the course - new paths, bunkers and bridges - and pick up such valuable experience.

"The course is looking brilliant and it will continue to get better as it will be closed every winter between now and 2001," explained Sally, talking about an initiative made possible by the opening of the new PGA course.

It all means that Sally is going to be busy between now and the playing of the Ryder Cup but you get the impression that she wouldn't want it any other way.

"I'd like to thank my tutor Graham Martin for setting me on the way for the award and of course Derek Ganning for giving me the chance in the first place. I'd also like to thank David Samuel (Courses Superintendent for all three Belfry courses), Bevan Tattershall (Head Greenkeeper of the Brabazon) and all the rest of the guys for their help."

The joint runners-up in the Toro Student of the Year final were Steven Myres of Glenisla Golf Course and Elmwood College and Paul Shelley of Chesfield Downs GC and Oaklands College who each win all expenses paid trips to Harrogate next year.



SETTING THE STANDARDS

Walter Woods visited all six finalists as part of the judging process and came away enthused by the quality of work that he found

The Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping was initially organised to raise standards of the greenkeeping profession and judging by the quality we have seen in the two years of the competition this has undoubtedly been achieved.

Last year's competition, won by Ian McMillan of Hankley Common GC, was a huge success thus ensuring that entries for this year would be increased. That was the case and it meant that changes to the judging procedure had to be made so that all entries had to go through a qualifying round before a short list of finalists was decided. This judging was carried out by a distinguished panel comprising Jimmy Nielson, Barry Heaney, Bill Lawson, Paddy McCarron, Eric James and the BIGGA Chairman, Gordon Child.

Being asked to perform the final judging for the second year running was an honour, giving me a personal insight into the improvements in standards, even from last year.

Starting off in early September I set out by car on a tour of Britain which took in the six finalist's golf courses.

I first headed for Carden Park, near Chester, to meet Course Manager, Andy Campbell, who is in charge of 45 holes of golf, including the recently-opened Jack Nicklaus course which is set in magnificent scenery.

Andy is one of the modern type of Course Manager who is setting the standards for others to follow and is already the holder of the Master Greenkeeper Award.

When walking the fairways with Andy I could detect a pride and passion for the greenkeeping profession, coupled with a great ambition for his golf course.

Leaving there I headed south, through heavy rainstorms, to meet Richard Whyman, who has been Head Greenkeeper at the delightful Bude and North Cornwall links course for the last 14 years.

When arriving at the clubhouse my first impression was one which you would see anywhere on the east of Scotland as it is a course which starts and finishes in the town.

Richard is an enthusiastic greenkeeper constantly having to compete with the weather, mainly strong winds coming straight over the Atlantic from America.

Royal Mid Surrey, in Richmond, was next on my list and a chance to meet Allan McDougall, whom I have known for many years, as he was an enthusiastic committee member of the old SIGGA regime.



Allan's golf course is one of the old traditional type which you find in the London area. Situated next to Kew Gardens, the club is now well into its second century with a colourful history involving famous professionals and tournaments. Having 36 holes it is difficult to believe that there could be a stretch of land with such perfectly maintained grass, surrounded by mature trees of every description.

Allan has continued to develop and learn over the years and now appears to thrive in the quality atmosphere which abounds at this famous golf club.

From London it was north to Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire to meet Peter Wisbey who returned from Portugal to manage the English Golf Union National Golf Centre including the old Hotchkin course and the successful growing in of the new Donald Steel designed Bracken course.

This is a wonderful place to visit or play golf with its rugged terrain, heather, trees and abundant wildlife - an environmentalist's dream.

Peter has settled into his job over the last two years and is using his vast experience to produce high quality results.

The following day I made my way to Abbeydale Golf Club, near Sheffield, through countryside which could have come straight from an episode of Emmerdale with narrow winding roads sided by grey stone walls.

On arrival I was met by John Coleman, the Course Manager, who

has been at the club for the last six years. My first impression was of how tidy everything appeared. From the clubhouse, the perfectly maintained gardens with colourful bushes and flowers of every description and overlooking a golf course maintained to perfection.

This young man was given the opportunity to work at a very progressive golf club which knew that without bringing in a talented greenkeeper it would be unable to meet the main objectives of its mission statement to its members.

On my return to Scotland my last but not least visit was to Elmwood College where I have a personal relationship with the very progressive greenkeeping learning centre which has recently constructed a perfectly laid out 18 hole golf course which visitors can play.

The main objective, however, is to train greenkeeping students who travel from all over Europe to train and improve their greenkeeping education.

John Quinn, the Course Manager, arrived a few years ago to oversee the planning and growing-in of this delightful golf course.

Once each of the six finalists had been visited the final assessment was made, sticking strictly to the criteria laid down by BIGGA and Toro whose duties it was ensure that, as near as possible, an "apple for apple" situation could be applied. Markings of one to five applied to criteria relating to golf course conditioning; the continuing development of education; the individual's

role in the golf club coupled with his ability to manage every department of given authority dictated that only confident, progressive, ambitious individuals were selected.

At the end of October the six finalists descended on BIGGA HOUSE to complete round two which was the personal interview - conducted similar to Mastermind but probably more difficult.

Each candidate was questioned for 45 minutes on all aspects of his job. Once complete the individual was again assessed and marked on his performance before the winner could be announced.

On this occasion it was John Coleman, from Abbeydale, with only a few points separating all six contestants.

However the main objective of the competition, as I said at the start was to raise the standard of greenkeeping and management and I have no doubt that this has been achieved.

I would like to congratulate the Toro Company for their valuable contribution in making such a valuable competition within the greenkeeping profession a success.