

A potential cast of thousands

We have arrived at the time of the year when the "gongs" are handed out in the Association's top competitions - the BIGGA Environment Award, in association with Amazone and Rhône-Poulenc and the Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping and Toro Student of the Year Awards.

These competitions have grown in stature over the years to the extent that - outside of the wonderful prizes which go along with winning - the prestige value is quite incalculable.

For a student, even to reach the final of the Toro is a significant achievement and one bound to open the eyes of any prospective employer while the Excellence Award, which was also once seen as also a great lift to a career, is now sought after by people who are already at the top of the tree.

It goes without saying that "BIGGA Environment Award Winner" is a badge any golf club in the country would be proud to wear.

I say these things because competitions are often seen as glorified back slapping exercises where winning comes because it happens to be your turn and not so much because an achievement has been judged to be greater than any other.

For example the Sports Personality of the Year is invariably the person who has been on the television most frequently - irrespective of achievement or, indeed, personality, and who happens to perform in a viewer friendly sport - usually motor racing, athletics or tennis. Put your money on Tim Henman this year!

Think of the Oscars, an old favourite who hasn't picked up one of the statuettes before is usually the favourite ahead of the young star who produces a stunning performance in a superb low budget film

It is a charge to which some Awards are open but we believe that the intensity and quality of the judging in all three of our competitions takes away the accusation of subjectivity and ensures that the winner is fully deserving of the prize.

In the Environment Competition this takes the form of written submissions from each of the clubs and, in the case of the finalists, two visits from Bob Taylor, the STRI Ecologist and one from a senior representative of English Nature.

In the Excellence Award those clubs entered receive a visit from a respected local greenkeeper and then, if successful Walter Woods, the Association's first Chairman and a man respected the world over, visits the finalists before they travel to York for the final interview before a panel of industry and Association experts. Only then with the winner be identified. Students also have to come through a rigorous process starting with their own college before a final interview singles out the winner.

You can be sure that the winners of our three main competitions will be out of the top drawer and that the successors to Ian McMillan (Toro Excellence), Steven Nixon (Toro Student) and Hankley Common with the ubiquitous Ian McMillan (BIGGA Environment Award) will reap the benefits of having entered.

You never know, I could be writing about your success next October.

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Greenkeeper

INTERNATIONAL

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