

Scott MacCallum will never forget The Open Championship's return to Carnoustie. Indeed he very nearly had a nasty bump on the head to take home with him...

Open Glory

The 1999 Open was another occasion which gave BIGGA's Greenkeeping Support Team members the opportunity to say "I was there". And by "there" I mean the 18th green because it has been the scene of some amazing scenes over the last few years

Remember Costantino Rocca's exploits at St Andrews in '95 and Justin Rose's holed chip at Birkdale last year. Astonishingly both of those pale into insignificance when measured against Carnoustie's contribution.

The finish to the Championship was something that any script editor would dismiss as far to fanciful to be remotely believable.

First Jean Van de Velde, whose golf through 71 holes - plus the 36 holes of qualifying at Monifieth - made him more than deserving of the title, threw it all away on the final hole by taking

seven when a double bogey six would have seen him the winner.

Then another outsider, this time the man in the field born closest to the Carnoustie links, played the fiendishly difficult final two holes of the play-off birdie birdie to become the first home grown, home based Scot to win an Open since James Braid. Paul Lawrie also became the first qualifier to win since the present qualifying system came into being in 1963 and only did so at Downfield by shooting four under par on the back nine of the final round.

In addition there can rarely have been an Open when the spotlight fell so firmly on the man charged with the responsibility of preparing the links and if John Philp felt some stabbing pains on various parts of his anatomy it must surely have been as a result of superstar golfers sticking pins in curly headed John Philp lookalike dolls.

Not that John took the comments lying down. He was widely quoted in the press - including the back page of The Sun - defending the set-up of the course and by the end of the week he had more or less won the propaganda war with the public attacking pampered whingeing golfers.

Sure the course was tough and perhaps the rain had caused the rough to grow a little more than was ideal but, as John himself said during the week, the players don't question taking a penalty drop if they go into water or having to play three off the tee if they go out-of-bounds but they think they should be able to still make the green after they'd hit into the rough. The rough is meant to be a hazard.

He was also adamant that the course was set up strategically and not penalty and that had the players attacked it more on certain holes they may have found more reward in the shape of wider landing areas.

He Didn't Want to Do That

Jean Van de Velde's fateful approach to the final green in regulation play was the start of his demise.

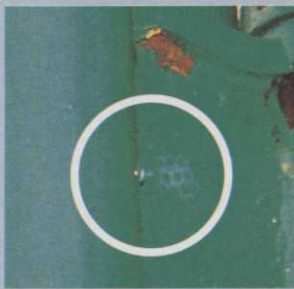
With the gallery by the green waiting to greet the unexpected but well deserving Champion the Frenchman had played his tee shot wide out on the 17th fairway. All he had to do was reach the green in at most four and two putt to be Champion but he decided to go for the green.

His long iron veered right and just missed the heads of your Chairman, his wife and your Editor by no more than two feet. Had the ball, in conventional fashion, merely clattered into the stand he would have faced a relatively easy shot from the dropping zone, the same if it had bounced off the front of the stand and into the trampled rough beside the green. But it hit the one thing capable of propelling the ball into real trouble - a metal plate, no more than three inches square (see pics), attached to the pole which joined the wooden bottom portion of the stand to the upper fenced element. This was at a right angle to the rest of the structure and hitting it flush caused the ball to fly back over the burn and into thick rough.

Even if it had gone back into the burn he would still have had a shot to spare after he'd taken a drop and played to the green but it could not have turned out worse for him.

The rest is history, he plopped the next in the burn then having taken his penalty shot played the next into the bunker and made a brave seven footer to make the play-off but he'd missed his golden opportunity.

However, despite the folly of the shot selection it just shows how unlucky he was. Even if he'd hit Gordon or myself we might have gone to hospital but he would certainly have gone on to be Open Champion.



Above (top): The shot Van de Velde was faced with after his unfortunate rebound

Above and right: The mark of failure. How close Van de Velde came to success and certain heads



At one point early on Friday morning, a member of the BIGGA Greenkeeping Support team raked the 5,000 bunker in the five Opens since records began. In total since St Andrews in 1995 the Support team, in addition to their other duties during the week, have raked 5,792 bunkers.

The press competition was won by Kay Smart, of the Mid Glamorgan Press Agency, whose four round estimate was 1398. The daily prizes were won by Paul Kiddie, of the Edinburgh Evening News; Dermot Gilleece, of the Irish Times; Neil Mulligan, of the Scottish Sports International (Tayside) and Kay Smart.

Kay wins a £700 Hayter Harrier lawn mower courtesy of Hayter Ltd and the prize will be presented to Kay by Kim Macfie later in the year.

The Support Team winner was Anthony Davies, of Prestbury Park, with the daily winners, Steve Oultram; John Selwood; Robert Hogarth and Tom Glover.

Open Notes

Justin Rose obviously had energy to spare during his first round. Lining up a putt in his inimitable style he carried on to do a couple of press ups. Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team Member, James Braithwaite, of Long Ashton GC.

The Craig Spence, Raymond Russell, Scott Verplank Friday match had some expert local knowledge within their ranks...if only they knew. Their lady scorer was an eight time Carnoustie Club Champion, a former runner-up in the British Girls and a lady who once beat Laura Davies as a junior. Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team Member Andy Sheehan of Bentley GC.

Greg Turner lightened the mood on the 1st tee on Friday when he went up to the scoreboard carrier assigned to his match pulled out some of his red numbers turned to Jose Maria Olazabal and Phil Mickleson and said "What are these?" Olazabal said that they wouldn't be needing any of them. Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team Member Chris Sheehan, of West Derby GC.

HRH The Duke of York took an interest in the work of the BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team when he asked Alex Robertson, of Grangemouth, how much sand he had raked in the Bernhard Langer/Steve Pate match.

Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team Member, Alex Robertson, of Grangemouth GC.

Nick Price offered a beer to the person who could find his ball when he went astray during the third round. It was found by playing partner Santiago Luna and Price was as good as his word getting a beer for the Spaniard. Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team Member, Stig Persson, of Sweden.

During the final round Sven Struver broke his 8-iron in a bunker on the 7th and was told by the rules official that it could be repaired. Struver said that he would need it for the 13th and it was taken off to be repaired. When he got it back he was told the glue would need half an hour to set but as he didn't have the time he went ahead and used it anyway. Information supplied by BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team Member, Chris Sheehan, of West Derby GC.



One of the boys. Paul Lawrie shares his moment of glory with the BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team

Open Championship bunker history

	St Andrews (95) 112 bunkers	Lytham (96) 185 bunkers	Troon (97) 84 bunkers	Birkdale (98) 117 bunkers	Carnoustie (99) 115 bunkers
Rd 1	214	501	344	355	539
Rd 2	201	577	272	406	468
Rd 3	130	269	107	226	202
Rd 4	156	271	136	153	265
Total	701	1618	859	1140	1474





Right: Paul Lawrie enjoys the moment in the company of Carnoustie's greenkeeping team



The Youngest Player

Downfield Course Manager, Paul Murphy, presented qualifier Zane Scotland, of Surrey, with the flag from the 16th hole of the Dundee final qualifying course. Zane, at 16, was the youngest qualifier for years and the flag will be a permanent memento of his achievement. "Everyone at the club was extremely impressed with Zane and delighted with his success and we wanted to mark it with something," explained Paul, who was also thrilled when another Downfield qualifier lifted the Claret Jug at the end of the week.



Above: Three members of the Support team prepare one of the 18th's greenside bunkers for the play-off



Above: Ian Semple, of Old Fold Manor, puts his back into it