



## Toro Fever

BIGGA HOUSE was alive to the sound of sharp answers to incisive questions when the third combined running of the Toros was held in October.

The six finalists of the Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping and the eight in the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year were put under the spotlight by the two sets of judges and it would be fair to say that if any one of the 14 had taken the place of Brian Turner, of Sunningdale, and Tommy Givnan, of Bowring Golf Course and Myerscough College, there could have been no complaints.

To have even made the final each of the Excellence finalists had to impress a judge on a course visit at regional level - there was one wild card used at the judges' discretion - while the students had to be nominated by their college before surviving another regional interview.

It ensured a rich crop of talent arrived at BIGGA HOUSE to be put before the judges.

The Excellence judging panel was Walter Woods, who had also visited each of the finalist's courses; Graham Dale, Managing Director of Lely (UK); Bob Buckingham, Toro's European Sales Manager, and Neil Thomas, BIGGA's Executive Director. The Student judging panel comprised Andrew Brown, Toro's Corporate Accounts Manager for Europe, the Middle East and South Africa; Pete Mansfield, of Lely (UK); Jim Paton, BIGGA's Education Sub Committee Chairman, and Ken Richardson, BIGGA's Education and Training Manager.

In the end after a full day of interviews and deliberations, at which Walter's assessment of the finalist's golf course and course management practices were built into the final marking, Brian Turner, emerged as the narrow winner.

Brian received a trophy, a trip to the GCSAA Show in New Orleans and visit to Toro's US Headquarters; Sunningdale wins a Toro 3000 triple and his team a set of BIGGA waterproofs each.

The five runners-up each received a crystal trophy to commemorate their achievement in reaching the National final.

The winner of the Student Award was announced as Tommy Givnan, with the two runners-up Michael Bush, of St Mellion G&CC and Cannington College and Andrew Wood, of Singing Hills GC and Plumpton College.

Tommy won a residential study course in the States while Michael and Andrew won all expenses paid trips to BTME.

**Brian Turner has no doubt about what becoming Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping Award winner means to him as he told Scott MacCallum**

# Icing on the cake

When Sunningdale Course Manager, Brian Turner, was asked what becoming the third Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping Award winner meant to him he said "It's the icing on the cake."

And in Brian's case, when the cake in question means his own greenkeeping career, you can tell he is particularly proud of his achievement.

Sunningdale Golf Club has always played a huge part in his life. He is a native of the town, he'd caddied at the club, he was, and still is, an Artisan member and, when he started greenkeeping, it was as a 19 year-old member of the Sunningdale staff having shelved thoughts of becoming a professional golfer - his current handicap is 1 and he has been as low as +1.

That affection was the magnet that drew Brian back to the club three years ago when he had an excellent job at Worplesdon Golf Club.

"It was always my dream to return to Sunningdale as Course Manager and I was delighted when I got the job in '96," said Brian.

His CV contains the names of three prestigious golf clubs located within a radius that would be covered by very few number of Tiger Wood drives.

"I left Sunningdale to move to Wentworth. I was in my early 20s, about to get married and there was accommodation with the Wentworth job," explained Brian.

Over the next 12 years he rose to become Head Greenkeeper on the West Course before the job of Head Greenkeeper at Worplesdon came up. He spent 13 years at the club, even winning the famous Worplesdon Foursomes during his time there.

"Sunningdale was the only place I would have left Worplesdon for

as I had a really good job there - I could play golf with the members and had a very good relationship with everyone at the club. I thoroughly enjoyed my experiences," he said.

When the job became available in '96 Brian wasn't going to apply as, for him to get it, a tradition going back to when the club was founded, would have to be broken.



"All the club's Head Greenkeepers or Course Managers had been Scotsmen until I came along," explained Brian.

"But the club also broke with tradition when appointing its last club professional because when Keith Maxwell got the job he was the first not to have been a Ryder Cup player. They obviously don't mind breaking with tradition now and again... which was good for me."

"Finally I decided to give it a go as there was no harm in trying and I made the short list."

The fact that he felt he had nothing to lose relaxed him come the big day.

"I went in and it was a carefree interview for me. I've played here

all my life so I knew the courses inside out and when I was asked questions I gave totally honest answers," said Brian, who was 50 when he took the post.

Since taking on one of the most sought after jobs in greenkeeping, Brian has concentrated on the presentation of the Willie Park-designed Old Course and the Harry Colt-designed New while he has also worked hard to reduce the thatch build up in the greens.

"We do a tremendous amount of aeration which can be a nightmare for the golfer and, as a result, a nightmare for us...you know you're going to get flak but you just have to bite the bullet."

Should the golfing calendar oblige, Brian likes to do his major aeration in August, something he started while at Worplesdon.

"Hollow tining was always something that was done in spring and autumn but I never felt it was the right time of year because the recovery rate is slower and the greens are bobblier because they are softer. I thought August would be a great month to do it as the soil is warm and the grass is still growing, while you don't have to worry about smearing as the cores come out nice and cleanly."

"I said to Worplesdon that I'd like to do it, we tried it and within two weeks you wouldn't have known we'd hollow tined. You'd be surprised how many people now hollow tine in August," said Brian.

In addition he makes a point of combining his hollow tining with vertidrainage.

"The vertidrain does leave the surface a little bobbly and uneven but if you put the hollow tiner on it smooths out the vertidrain holes to the extent that you can't tell it's been vertidrainaged."

Brian has a team of 22 plus a gardener and this includes a full time mechanic a mechanic/greenkeeper



and someone who handles the irrigation.

While Brian is overall Course Manager his Deputy and Head Greenkeeper on the Old Course is Mark Openshaw with Tony Bonnett, Head Greenkeeper on the New Course. Each course is maintained to the same high standard.

"One of the problems we have is that we have many more rounds over the Old than we do the New - 35,000 against 27,000. If members have a choice they would just play the Old so we have course order on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday with two balls on one course and three balls on the other and we change this around.

"Since '97 when Abbotts installed the new irrigation system we've closed the old for four days a week Monday to Thursday through January to give the course a rest and you can really see the difference on the strength of it."

In recent years Sunningdale has been the venue for several large events including the European Open and the Walker Cup while it hosted the Weetabix British Ladies in '97 and will do so again in 2001.

"During the biggest of the events the practice range was used as a car park and the 18th hole of the New Course became the practice range and it's not really big enough for European events now.

"We do miss them as they are a real buzz and I admire people like Chris Kennedy who cope with two a year."

That's not to say that big name players don't visit Sunningdale which is close to where many of Europe's top golfers base themselves.

"Darren Clarke and Paul McGinley play a lot, Paul actually walks his dog around the course, while Sam Torrance was at Sunningdale as an assistant, and often comes over for a game."

Others include Wayne Riley, Richard Boxall and Tony Johnstone, who often can be seen honing his renowned sand skills in the practice bunker.

Brian was entered for the Toro Excellence Award by his Secretary, Stuart Zeuill.

"I'd thought about entering before but there was always an element of fear that you're not going to do well and coming from a well known club puts on added pressure.

His regional course visit was conducted by Eric James and Brian wasn't 100% confident of getting through to the final.

"I didn't think I was going to get through, to tell you the truth, as Eric also had to see other people who entered before who must have had a very good chance."

This modesty continued to BIGGA HOUSE where Brian was genuinely surprised when his name was read out as the winner.

"It was a bit like being at the Oscars hearing 'And the winner is...' and I was really surprised when it was my name that followed. I'd spoken to the other five guys and any one of them



could have won it.

"The thing I was pleased about was the experience of taking part. It's all right reading about it in the magazine but until you do it you don't know what it's about and what you can gain from it," said Brian.

"I was self taught when I started as BIGGA wasn't around then. To learn about the grass plant I went to evening classes at Kingston College and had to pay for it myself."

The reaction within the club to Brian's triumph has been very positive.

"The Secretary is over the moon as are the lads here as it is not only a feather in my cap, but for them as well."

Above: Matt Maryon, Graham Dale, Bob Buckingham, Walter Woods, Neil Thomas, Stuart Hogg, Kim Blake, Brian Turner, Andy Campbell and Barrie Lee

