

TALKING

This month, Greenkeeper International's bi-monthly series featuring Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers from every Region profiles Competition Preparation

Competition Preparation

Compiled by Malcolm Huntington MBE



Name: David Gower
Course: The Oxfordshire
Region: Midland
Course Type: Parkland
Number of Holes: 18
Staff: 12 summer, eight winter



Name: Ivor Scoones
Course: Long Ashton GC
Region: South West and South Wales
Course Type: Heathland and parkland
Number of Holes: 18
Staff: Course Manager plus five



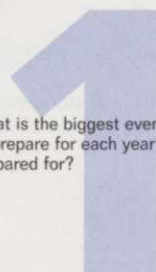
Name: Robert Patterson
Course: Royal Aberdeen
Region: Scottish
Course Type: Links
Number of Holes: 36
Staff: Nine



Name: Simon Heppenstall
Course: Howley Hall
Region: Northern
Course Type: Parkland and moorland
Number of Holes: 18
Staff: Five plus seasonal in summer



Name: Steve Jones
Course: The London Golf Club
Region: South East
Course Type: 18 holes inland links,
18 holes US style parkland
Number of Holes: 36 (four loops of nine)
Staff: 30 in winter and up to 38 in summer.



1. What is the biggest event you have to prepare for each year – or have prepared for?

The Benson and Hedges International Open each May. We also hosted a regional round of the Anderson Consulting World event for two years and we have also had the English Open Ladies' Championship

The Martini in 1967 when the joint winners were Peter Alliss and Bill Large. We have had the Carris event, the Coca Cola young professionals and the national girls championship.

We had the Northern Open last year and we also had our club bi-centenary (the club opened in 1780) in addition to our spring and autumn club medal events which are important on our calendar.

The Howley Hall Scratch 36-hole tournament, one of the North Region Order of Merit events. When I was at Fixby we had the Laurence Batley Seniors.

We had the London Masters Senior event two years ago won by John Bland, but now it is mainly club competitions.

HEADS

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2. How far in advance you you start thinking about it and how much preparation goes into the event?

We work on problem bunkers the previous October, but we begin thinking about a plan of work in August. We don't do a lot of extra work, apart from working on finer details, such as striping fairways. Our members expect fast greens all the time.

Twelve months before, although nowadays you try to get the course to its highest possible standard every day of the year. Obviously we tweak it with top dressing, striping etc for a big one.

Six months in advance preferably. But we try not to peak the course and would like to think we have it ready for a competition at any time.

As this is a members club I try to get good conditions all the year round, but two weeks before our scratch event we top dress, double cut the greens and get the fairways nicely striped or diamond cut and bring it to a peak.

A year in advance if possible but at any event as soon as we get notice of it. We feel we can reach tournament conditions in four weeks.

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3. Are there any special requests made by the organisers?

We haven't had many special requests, excepting greens of a 10ft stimpmeter reading. We have ours at eight to nine feet regularly in any case.

The Martini wanted five yards of semi-rough and then jungle and this left quite a few problems in getting back to normal again. Ladies are very particular about measurements and length of course. All want fast greens.

Not really. We are left to set up the course as we think. We are happy for people to come and play our course as it is a good challenge.

At Howley Hall I don't get special requests, but at Fixby the European Tour people specified height of cut and pin positions etc.

We have received many special requests in the past, most of them too late to act on. I recall being asked two days before an event for a stimpmeter reading of nine feet when we had them at 10 feet. All greenkeepers would like a lot of notice of special requests because it gives you time to work on them.

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4. Do you think more carefully about pin positions and sometimes give them a few tricky ones?

The European Tour choose pin positions, but we had very windy conditions on an open course for the three years before this year and even the Tour officials found difficulty in finding suitable positions.

Yes. I operate on the usual 6-6-6 principle but would give them an odd crazy one if you like, particularly on the last day. Our course is 105 years old and partly built on rock so even for a major event it wouldn't be possible to pins anywhere as there are places on some greens where you can't put them.

The PGA decided for the Northern Open and I had no control of where the pins went. But they took note of advice on different positions and places to avoid if there was heavy rainfall. Generally it's 6-6-6 so there is something for everyone.

As there are plus handicap players in the event I try to make pin positions a little more difficult on a course set up to its maximum length. As a general rule I follow the usual greenkeeper's practice of six hard, six easy and six average.

For a major event you are told by the PGA where they want pins and they mark them with a tee peg. We have little input for club events I follow the accepted pattern of six easy, six difficult and six average.

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5. Do you enjoy the excitement of preparing for large events? Would you like to hold an Open/Tour event or prefer to work on producing excellent conditions all the year round rather than peaking?

I would say it's a buzz rather than enjoyment. A lot of effort has gone in but, until this year, we have had three very disappointing years from a weather point of view and so it was tough for the staff and their morale.

Yes, it keeps you on your toes and it's a nice feeling when you get the course absolutely right. It is also good for green fees following a big event. But I prefer to try to produce the best possible standards all the year round for our members.

Yes, I do like to put our work on show as it were and to have the course tested by top players. But to be frank I like top quality on a regular basis because the most important people, as far as I'm concerned, are our members.

Yes, it's nice to see the course laid out in the best conditions as it is being played by very good players and you hope for positive feedback but I prefer working on producing excellent conditions for our club members, rather than for a Tour event.

Yes. It gets the adrenaline going. I like to produce good conditions all the year round, but we certainly also peak for special club competitions.