

Photo: Brian Morgan, 0141 221 6236

## Toros - Identifying the best of the best



Have greenkeeping standards risen because of the incentives of the Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping and the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year competition or do the awards merely amplify the increasing standards that have been there all along?

The reality is probably somewhere in between. Standards are rising within the industry with better education and an increasingly high quality of candidate being attracted to greenkeeping... but the Toro Awards

are very juicy carrots for the more ambitious and motivated within the profession and undoubtedly entice many into striving that little bit harder to win a Toro title. Doing so ensures that a CV stands out from the crowd for an entire career.

The 2000 Toro Awards continued to produce more evidence of growing standards unveiling as they did two fine Champions from two pools of finalists any one of whom would have worn his particular crown with genuine distinction.

The winner of the re-styled Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping was won by Iain Ritchie, of Portmarnock Golf Club, the Irish finalist... once he got there, with Ronnie Bunting, of Kilmacolm Golf Club and Scotland; Terry Farkins, of Dartmouth Golf and Country Club and England, and Gary Johnstone, of Southerndown Golf Club and Wales, all making it a difficult decision for the judges, Walter Woods; Graeme Dale, Managing Director of Lely UK; Bruce Jamieson; Toro Agronomy Consultant and Neil Thomas.





**Iain Ritchie was a little worried about entering the Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping coming from such a high profile club. But it all worked out well...**

# Risk & reward

Iain Ritchie was a little apprehensive about entering the Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping. After all, as Course Manager at Portmarnock Golf Club, near Dublin, one of the best known and most highly regarded golf courses in the world, he was putting himself up there to be shot at.

But he needn't have worried. Golf Clubs of the stature of Portmarnock don't employ run-of-the-mill greenkeepers and the judges at the new style "Home International" final at BIGGA HOUSE recognised what was already apparent to the Portmarnock members and crowned Iain the winner of the 2000 Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping.

"Obviously I'm from one of the top clubs in the country and I was putting myself forward to be knocked down. I spoke with the club about it and they fully appreciated how I was feeling. But it has gone the right way for me so it means a hell of a lot. I'm very proud of the profession I'm in," said Iain, as he spoke the morning after one of the most hectic and stress-filled days of his life - (see page 18).

"The Captain was mentioning the fact that I was the Irish Champion and that I was going to the national final in various speeches he has given and I phoned the club as soon as I knew I had won. I'm certainly looking forward to getting back to the club. I'll have a big smile on my face," said a happy man, who was modelling one of those smiles as he said it.

Iain, whose accent now betrays only a hint of his Aberdeen roots, has been at the club for 10 years and is now benefiting, much like a football manager given the time to learn the strengths and weakness of his team, from having had the time to learn everything about the golf course from 1st tee to 18th green plus all the surrounding areas.

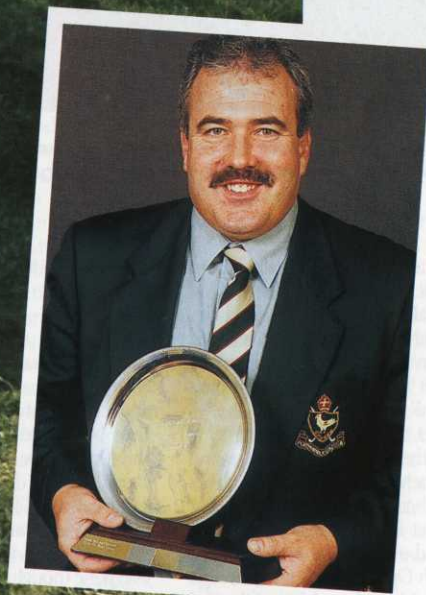
"We've upped a gear or two recently but I would say that was down to natural progression rather than a conscious decision to do so. It is also gratifying to see that Portmarnock is placed number seven in the recent Golf World magazine rankings. We've jumped four places from last year and for an old established golf club to do that with so many other courses coming in is very good. The committee was pleased and it was just reward for the efforts we've put in in the last few years. This minor tweaking, redesigning and reshaping work is starting to show, while we've just spent half a million on a new irrigation system. It's just an insurance policy really," he said.

Projects in the pipeline include the reconstruction of the 12th green which will be put out to contract.

"It's something to get our teeth into and is a big project for Portmarnock Golf Club and depending upon how this one goes there may be more to come."

Iain and his team are well supported by the the Honorary Secretary and the General Manager.

"The Honorary Secretary, Joe McAllease, is also what we call the Links Convener and he has a serious passion for the golf course, there is no other way to describe it. He loves it and gets very involved. He'll come down and have a cup of tea with the staff and tell a few jokes. It's a very nice atmosphere.



Terry actually made history having been the first man to have reached the final of both the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award, in 1991 and, eight years later reaching the national final of the Toro Excellence Award as well. His progression is a model for young greenkeepers everywhere.

Jonathan Cleland, of Helensburgh Golf Club and COSTA Training won the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award with Michael Sawicki, of Richmond Golf Club and NESCOL and Vince Harrison, of Enderby Golf Course and Brooksby College, runners-up each

winning an all expenses paid trip to BTME 2001.

Judges in the Student Award final were Jim Paton, Chairman of BIGGA's Education Sub-Committee; Pete Mansfield, General Manger Turf Products, of Lely UK; Andy Brown, of Toro, and Ken Richardson.

Getting back to the original conundrum. There is no definitive answer but let us merely delight in the fact that standards are on the up and up and thank Toro for putting in place two competitions which benefit greenkeepers and golf clubs all over the country.





## Risk & reward

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"General Manager, John Quigley, is the man who put me forward for the Toro award."

It is perhaps a reflection in the quality of golf courses in the Irish Republic that a previous attempt to win the Toro award didn't get past Section level but it did ensure that this year Iain was ready.

"After that I stood back and took a fresh look at the entire operation and tightened up many working practices, and this time I got the staff more involved in the competition. They were fully aware of what was happening, when it would be happening and what the place would be like," said Iain, who would describe himself as employing the hands-on approach to the job.

The golf club will greatly appreciate the Toro Workman 2100 which they receive as part of the prize while Iain is already looking forward to the trip to the GCSAA Show in Dallas.

"I haven't been to the show for about seven years and ironically it was at Dallas the last time I was there."

He is also complimentary of his staff of 12, whom he describes as being very enthusiastic and loyal. They benefit from Iain's success to the tune of £250 while Iain is sure that will be added to by the golf club.

"I've had very little turn-over in the last 10 years, mostly it's been retrials."

Prior to moving to Ireland Iain had been Head Greenkeeper at Ladybank, a wonderful heathland course not far from Cupar, Fife.

"I was at Ladybank for five years from '85. It was a super club to work for, I was



Above: The Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping finalists. Front row: Ronnie Bunting, Terry Farkins, Iain Ritchie and Gary Johnstone with the judging panel behind

a member as well and it was difficult to leave, particularly as in '90 we had an Open Qualifier for the St Andrews Championship and I would have loved to have stayed and prepared for that. I must admit I have very fond memories of Ladybank.

"However, there was a big carrot being dangled in the shape of Portmarnock and an Irish Open which was held 10 weeks after I got there," said Iain who adds that his arrival at Portmarnock was the first time he had ever set foot on Irish soil.

That Irish Open went well with a high profile winner in Jose Maria Olazabal

while the course achieved much more publicity when it hosted the 1991 Walker Cup.

In the run up to the match, then American amateur golden boy, Phil Mickelson, made a derogatory remark about Irish women - so unimpressed with their beauty he didn't want to go into the rough to be too near them - which caused such a diplomatic incident that George Bush, "Dubya's" dad the then US President, had to apologise.

"The course went down well with everyone though as it always does," said Iain, who is married to Yvonne with two

daughters Lisa and Lynzie.

Portmarnock has also received a couple of visits from Tiger Woods, who has taken to honing his game for the Open with a few days in Ireland tackling some of the finer links courses.

"He comes into the club afterwards and is always very open. It's nice when things like that happen on your golf course."

It seems a lot of nice things are happening to Iain at the moment and they are all much deserved. "I turned 40 last week and now this. It's been a very good Millennium for me."

## When in Rome... Find a way to get back!

For such an important day as the Toro finals you would imagine that a finalist would get an early night and be up, ready, and prepared well before the interview time.

Not Iain Ritchie. The tale of what happened on the day of the finals would make a fine sequel to John Cleese's film *Clockwise*.

To celebrate his 40th birthday Iain and wife, Yvonne, had booked to spend the long weekend in Rome only discovering later that the Monday coincided with the Toro finals.

Let Iain take up the story.

"There was nothing to do but for me to fly out early on Monday morning and for Yvonne to come back at the scheduled time later that night.

"However, the day coincided with day

one of the horrendous storms which hit much Britain.

"I left our hotel at 6am to get the 8.30 flight to Heathrow where I was due to change for Leeds/Bradford. When I got into the airport everything to and from London was delayed because of the storms. I then tried to buy a ticket to get to Amsterdam from where I could then fly directly to Leeds/Bradford but I couldn't because my luggage by this time had been checked in.

"With my interview at 3pm all I could do was keep Joe Bedford, who was at BIGGA HOUSE, informed by mobile what was happening. After what seemed like days we eventually did get airborne but there were further delays as we circled Heathrow at least 15 times. When we did land I had to run from Terminal

2 across to Terminal 1 for the British Midland lounge. I was carrying my presentation because I hadn't wanted to risk it going missing

"By this time it was already about 3pm and I had been due on the 12.45pm flight to Leeds/Bradford. Fortunately this flight hadn't left and I thought finally things were going my way... but then it didn't take off until half past four.

"Sitting waiting for this flight I was desperate and quite prepared to hire a car, and driver if necessary, to drive me to York. It meant so much to me to be there.

"I had a car booked at Leeds/Bradford and knew that Aldwark Bridge was closed for redevelopment. I'd organised a route from my computer Route Master but Elliott (Small) came on and

told me that this way was closed because of the weather so I had to go another way by memory."

"I eventually arrived at the Hotel at 6.50pm and, after a quick shave, was sitting being interviewed at 7.10pm, the scheduled time having been moved back as far as was possible to accommodate me.

"The last thing I wanted to do was jump straight out of the car and be slap bang in the middle of an interview situation but the later it got in the day the more unfair it was on everyone else. I was thinking of Ronnie Bunting, who'd been on first at the beginning of the day and how long he was having to wait.

"I feel that I had a nery start to the interview but after that they had to shut me up at the end."





**Jonathan Cleland explains to Scott MacCallum his love of greenkeeping and what winning the accolade of Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year means to him...**

# Following a dream

**Below:** A proud Jonathan displays his well-earned trophies

**Bottom:** The 2000 Toro Student of the Year finalists with their judging panel. Jonathan is flanked by Vince Harrison on the left and Michael Sawicki on the right



As a small boy Jonathan Cleland used to watch Helensburgh Golf Club's greenkeeping staff at work from his home overlooking the course. What he saw became the spark which ignited a passion for greenkeeping which carried him to the title of Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year for the year 2000.

With single minded determination Jonathan, a keen, talented golfer and junior member of Helensburgh, told everyone who took an interest in his future both within and outside school that he wanted to become a greenkeeper and set out to make that ambition a reality.

He began working at the club in the summer holidays from when he was 13 and jumped at the chance of an apprenticeship when it was offered to him by the then Course Manager, John Grainger. He gained his National Certificate at Elmwood College, and, with no full time vacancy available at Helensburgh, took a post at nearby Cameron House Hotel on the banks of Loch Lomond. There he quickly rose to become Golf Course Supervisor before being lured back to Helensburgh, by current Course Manager, Ronnie Miles, with the post of Head Greenkeeper.

It was on his return to

Helensburgh that his march towards the prestigious Toro award gained momentum. He achieved his SVQ Level 3 through Glasgow-based GOSTA training and impressed tutor Chris Bothwell to such an extent that he was put forward for the competition and following a regional interview and a final interview at BIGGA HOUSE he was announced winner.

"I'm over the moon. Winning the Toro Student of the Year Award for the year 2000 gives me a lot of satisfaction and a great deal of pride," said 25-year-old Jonathan, as we spoke the morning after some considerable celebrations in Aldwark Manor Hotel.

Asked if there was any stage at which he felt he had the qualities which set him apart from the rest he answered with honesty and in a manner devoid of cockiness.

"I am very confident and I take a lot of pride in detail in the work that I do on the course. I'm quite a perfectionist...although that can be a weakness," acknowledged Jonathan, who is proud of the fact that he prepared Helensburgh for the highlight of its calendar, the Helensburgh Golf Week, earlier this year when a late change of date meant Ronnie was on holiday.

While Helensburgh Golf Club means a great deal to him - he has a long held dream to be the Course Manager of his home course - he also feels much of what he learnt while at Cameron House Hotel has, and will continue, to stand him in good stead.

"Initially I was involved in all aspects of work on the leisure complex including landscaping and this has given me skills and experience which is useful to me on a golf course as well."

Despite ultimately being in charge of the Cameron House golf course he was delighted when Ronnie offered him the chance to return to Helensburgh.

"It was the fact of going back to my home course and returning to an 18-hole club and something which was first and foremost a golf course and not an add-on facility for residents, as was the course at Cameron House."

Jonathan knew of the Toro Student of the Year Competition but never thought he could possibly win it. He did well in his regional interview and prior to the final took a

decision which emphasises the dedicated approach he takes to his career.

"I was going to bring my girlfriend down to Aldwark Manor for the final but then Ronnie Bunting - who'd qualified for the Toro Excellence Final as Scottish winner - called me to ask if I wanted to travel down in the train with him. I thought it would be a great chance to quiz him about the Association and greenkeeping so I decided to leave my girlfriend behind."

It paid off and Jonathan is appreciative of the information Ronnie was able to pass on during that train journey from Glasgow to York.

"It is actually now, through talking to Ronnie, winning this award, and having gone through the stages, that I can sit back and appreciate what BIGGA can actually do for an individual and for the profession as a whole. I'm definitely going to get more involved with the Association," said Jonathan, who says that Ronnie Miles and Alan Glachan, Head Groundsman at Cameron House Hotel, are the two people who have helped him most with his career.

Having enjoyed a trip to Australia earlier in the year - one on which his girlfriend did accompany him - he is looking forward to heading stateside too and making the most of his Toro prize.

"The six week study course will increase my knowledge and give me a greater understanding of how things work over in the States while meeting new people and students of different nationalities will be an experience in itself in multicultural terms. What with the trips to Dallas for the GCSAA Conference and show and the trip to California I'll get a lot out of it. Toro support of this competition is wonderful and like the winners before me I'm sure I'll benefit greatly from it."

Back home he will continue his education and is currently looking at his options.

"The SVQ 3 was very useful to me in the position I hold as it included budgeting, forecasting and management skills and as I work closely with Ronnie and I'm encouraged to give my opinions on a range of things the NVQ gave me the confidence to do that. I'll be looking at perhaps a national diploma and when and if I have my own course SVQ Level 4."

You can be sure that whatever Jonathan decides to tackle next he will succeed as the little lad who watched Helensburgh's greenkeeping staff switching greens from his own garden has become a perfect role model for any other youngsters who may be making early career decisions.

