

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.

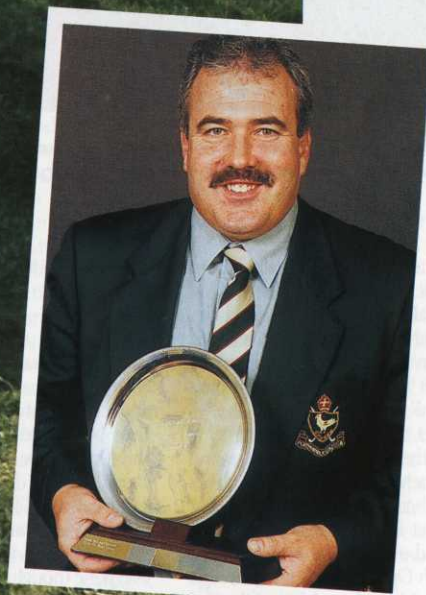
"We've upped a gear or two recently but I would say that was down to natural progression rather than a conscious decision to do so. It is also gratifying to see that Portmarnock is placed number seven in the recent Golf World magazine rankings. We've jumped four places from last year and for an old established 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.