



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.

