

Scott MacCallum travelled to St Andrews to discuss the preparation for the 2000 Open with the man who carries much of the responsibility for a successful week...

The Patron Saint of Opens



PHOTOGRAPHY: BRIAN MORGAN



Above: Eddie Adams

In 50 years time or so, casual golf historians may well look back in the record books - or more likely the website - to see which famous names sit beside which year and venue for The Open Championship.

If the number of "hits" per Open were monitored I would guess that those which create the biggest interest might be the very first Open in 1860 when Willie Park won at Prestwick; the 1900 Open when JH Taylor won at St Andrews and the year in which the interested party was born. In my case that would be Arnold Palmer at Troon in 1962. Another would most certainly be the 2000 Open at St Andrews. Yes the Open Championship we are about to enjoy will be one of those few which will attract attention for as long as golf is played, because of its unique time slot.

The man who carries much of the responsibility for ensuring that such a significant Championship is a true cele-

bration of the sport is the St Andrews Links Trust's Old Course Head Greenkeeper, Eddie Adams, a man who is St Andrews through and through and whose experience when it comes to Links preparation is formidable for such a young man.

His first Open Championship was in 1990 when, as an apprentice, he was responsible for cutting the 1st and 17th greens. Five years later he had risen to become Head Greenkeeper at the Old Course working under Links Superintendent Walter Woods.

"It was, as the magazine said that year, 'Walter's Swansong.' He let me do a lot in '95, but it was definitely Walter's course. He was the man at the presentation, just as in 2000 it will be me," said Eddie.

Asked if that responsibility was weighing more this year Eddie said it was quite the reverse.

"It was terrible in '95 because I always

had Walter to please and I didn't want to let myself down this year. I have got the rest of the team to think about but I know I've got a really good set of guys who are really good at their jobs. So I don't have much to worry about on that score," said Eddie who added that they work very closely with the R&A Championship Committee.

While this Open is the first of a new millennium a greenkeeper from times past wouldn't see much that would make his hair stand on end if he watched his modern day successors carrying out their work on the famous links.

"My philosophy on greenkeeping for St Andrews is minimalistic. Steve Isaacs, of the STRI, called it anorexic greenkeeping," explained Eddie.

"The tees have only had a minimal application of fertiliser - straight nitrogen with some iron - the greens haven't had any fertiliser and the fairways



Above: Greenkeepers walk over seven miles to cut this green



Above: Where fairway ends and green starts, nobody knows!



Above: The infamous 10ft high rivetted Hell bunker dwarfs even the mightiest of players

haven't had any fertiliser for 10 years now.

"Our irrigation system hasn't been used this year. The only time it has been on was when the engineer needed to test it and I don't expect to use it until after The Open to assist the reinstatement," said Eddie, who revealed that despite this a completely new irrigation system is shortly to be installed on the course.

The one thing that might have brought our time travelling greenkeeper up a little short is the use of astroturf mats to protect the fairways.

"We use these from November to April in normal years and to May in Open years and I think we'd have struggled to get this policy through ten years ago. However, it's the only way to protect the Old Course which at the end of the day is an international monument to golf and it should be protected over the winter months when there is zero recovery rate," said Eddie, who added that the Old, New and Eden courses run at virtual 100% capacity with around 41,000 rounds of golf each.

The traditional course management philosophy extends to the course set up where players will certainly be required to play links style golf to succeed.

"We want to get it fast and linky, although with 92 mm of rain in May and June starting off just as bad we are very much in the hands of the weather when it comes to that," explained Eddie.

However, there are elements within his control that can ensure conditions that can only be found on a links course.

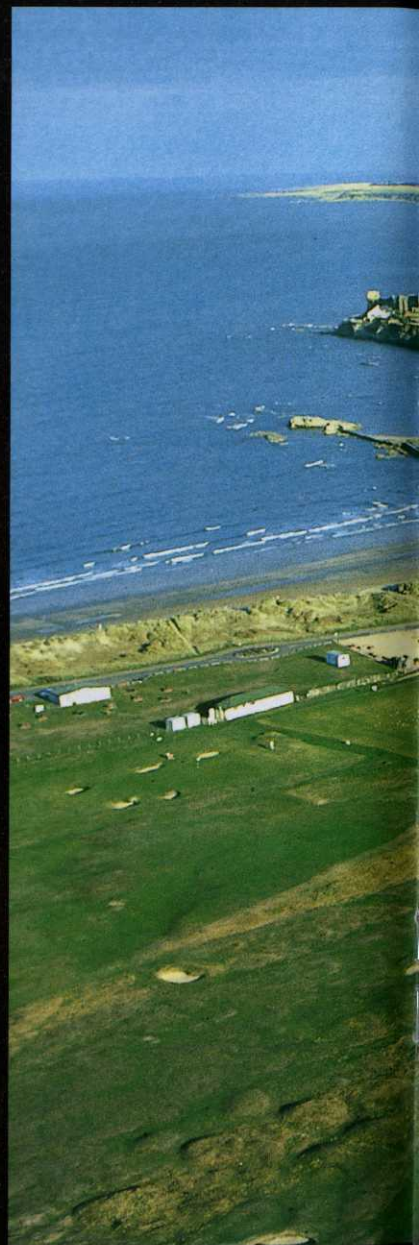
"The fairways will be kept very short - eight mil - so it will be difficult to get underneath the ball properly and hopefully the greens will be stimping about 10.5."

One element of the set-up which could perplex players is the fact that there is no definition between tee and green so that when they stand in the fairway there will be no visual reference to where the green starts or ends.

"It will make clubbing more difficult. The caddie can stand till he's blue in the face saying it's 137 to the pin but it won't look like that," said Eddie, adding that it was also causing the R&A a slight headache because of the difficulty in determining what was on or off the green for ball marking purposes.

The biggest task in advance of the Championship has been a complete bunker rebuild of all 112 on the famous Old Course.

"We did Shell and Hell bunkers last year because they were such big jobs but



we did about 100 between the end of the Dunhill Cup and this March. It's the first time we've done the whole lot in the space of 12 months with our own team and the guys did a fantastic job."

The statistics behind some of the bigger bunkers are quite mind blowing.

Hell bunker is seven feet tall on one side and 10 feet at the other and is 60 feet wide. To build a 10 feet high face takes 80 pieces of turf and the whole job takes 20,000 turfs in all and it takes two months to build.

"Greenkeepers who revet will know that building above head height is difficult as gravity takes over," said Eddie, who recalled the time in 1990 when some Canadian Superintendents were playing the course.

"My now Deputy, Billy Nicol, and I were just finishing off two month's work on Shell Bunker and Billy was giving the Canadians all the stats. I was on top, just cutting off the final row of turf, and looked down to see the bunker beginning to bulge. I jumped down and stuck my spade in to hold it but eventually had to jump out of the way and the whole face collapsed. Only about 10% was left.

"The Canadians played the loop and



PHOTOGRAPHY: EIRWAN MORGAN

when they came back round were gobs-macked to see what what had happened. Billy told them we hadn't liked it so had pulled it down and they went off thinking what perfectionists we must have been. But we were devastated as it was two months work down the drain."

They have since learned from that and the biggest bunkers now have concrete foundations to provide a firm base for the retvetting.

The St Andrews bunkers are all very deep as, if it is particularly windy, the sand can swirl and gather in the most sheltered part of the bunker.

"It can be fine for the first 20 or so matches but after that a player can find himself in an area with no sand. We tried watering them but with so much rain recently haven't needed to," said Eddie as he sat in the £1 million maintenance facility - one of two similar buildings on the links, just part of a huge investment by the St Andrews Links Trust over the last few years.

The rough won't be any different from previous St Andrews' Opens with a three metre band of semi and the rest of it four to five inches thick.

"The Old Course rough has never

been thick and that's a deliberate ploy because we take a huge amount of play and we have to get people round the course.

"From my point of view golf is for everybody regardless of handicap or stature and they should be able to putt from tee to green if they wanted to. Hence the reason we don't have rough such as you see at a US Open venue."

Such is the strategic way the Old Course has been designed the rough adds a degree of difficulty rather than making the next shot impossible.

"If you land in the rough left off the tee at 17, although you've got a terrible line to the green, a well struck shot might get you to the front right of the putting surface and you could two putt for par. I don't have any problem with that.

"Like most of the holes, if you go right off the tee - the more dangerous line - you have a much easier shot to the green. It's all about risk and reward and that's what makes the Old Course the test it is. We'll be trying to encourage the golfer to play down the right a riskier tee shot but an easier approach."

Pin placements are vital at St Andrews and decisions on these will be taken very early on each morning of the Champi-

onship, possibly using an on-site fore-caster and done by 4am.

"St Andrews is a funny place for weather. It can be pouring everywhere else but sunny here. Forecasting is only about 50-60% accurate when it comes to St Andrews," revealed Eddie.

Pin placements are different for the first two days of the Championship than for the final two because of the famous double greens.

"Pins are further apart because of the amount of play on Thursday and Friday then come Saturday and Sunday we can come in a bit tighter."

The huge greens are another unique St Andrews feature. Where else could a slightly misjudged approach lead to an 80 yard putt?

"The 5th-13th green is 6,500 square metres and the two guys who will double cut it will walk seven miles in the morning and seven miles at night. It's tough but a guy from England gets that job," smiled Eddie.

"They need very good cutters because you need to walk 80 or 90 yards in a straight line and it's obvious if you go wrong because there will be a camera high above that green. Greenkeepers will know just how difficult that job is."

With the Old Course team of 18, plus three Interns from the States and a Wentworth greenkeeper who asked if he could join the team for the week - "We brought him in just in case it rains," joked Eddie - joined by the rest of the Links Trust greenkeeping staff bringing the total team to over 60. Eddie reckons he will be able to get the course prepared each morning in an hour and three quarters.

"Championship preparation is all about being able to do a week's work in three hours. There is no great science. It's all about extra pairs of feet to do the job - that and having enough kit to do the job and Textron have been great in providing us with whatever we need."

With the enviable man power and equipment at their finger tips the St Andrews team which will also be joined by the BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Team for the week have all of the bases covered for the third week in July and you can be sure that the 2000 Open Championship will go down in history and be remembered for all the right reasons.