

Two superb golf courses played in testing conditions by a strong field containing some of the finest golfers BIGGA has to offer. Photography: Alan Birch

What could be better?

Yes, the 2001 BIGGA National Championship was a wonderful occasion and in Royal Birkdale and Southport & Ainsdale we had two golf courses which ensured that the entire field were tested but most of all felt privileged just to be there.

Played on the Monday and Tuesday after the Ryder Cup was scheduled to be played it shouldn't be forgotten that between them Birkdale and S&A had hosted four Ryder Cups and in Birkdale's case a host of memorable Open Championships. So it was with a sense of real history and awe that the maximum field - reduced slightly by last minute call-offs - teed off at Birkdale on the Monday.

The conditioning of both golf courses was a real tribute to Chris Whittle and Mike Mercer and their teams at Royal Birkdale and Southport and Ainsdale respectively. A wind gusting at up to 50mph meant it was never going to be easy so tribute must be paid to Ian Semple, National Board Member and Course Manager at Old Folds Manor who knocked it round in 74.

That score can be put into perspective by some of the high scores of his fellow competitors. One player actually holed a 20 footer to keep a 20 off his card at the par-3 12th while there was a 17, a 13 and numerous double figure scores. Ian was joined at the top of the leaderboard by local man Chris Ball at the end of the first day whose fine 81 gave him a nett 73. He put his fine form down to finding an Irish penny at the back of the 1st green which he used as a ball marker for the rest of the round.

It was Chris, an assistant at Hillside and former junior member of Royal Birkdale who set a target on the second day that wouldn't be beaten. A 78 nett 70 was good enough for victory and it was the 29-year-old who lifted the majestic trophy at the end of the day.

"When I saw the Championship was to be played at Birkdale and S&A I knew I had to enter it," said Chris as he savoured his triumph.

"Since then it had been on my mind and I knew I had to win it. I hit it low and when the wind blew I told the guys at the club that I knew I had a chance," said Chris who won the event held at Royal Birkdale to celebrate Tom O'Brien's retirement a few years ago.

The fact that the Championship will again be held in the Southport area, on his own Hillside course as well as Hesketh, sees Chris already looking 12 months ahead. "I'll definitely play next year and defend the title. There will be more pressure on me as it is on my own Hillside course and I never play well round there," he said, already trying to reduce the expectation that will weigh upon him.

Ian Semple couldn't reproduce the heroics of the opening round but he hung on to lift

the scratch prize following a second round 77 for a one shot win over +1 handicapper Tony McLure. Tribute must also be played to Walter Woods who played some sparkling golf on both days to finish high up the prize list and, more importantly, see him ahead of his old rival George Brown, of Turnberry.

Next year's National Championship will be played at Hillside on September 30, 2002 and Hesketh on October 1, 2002

Titbits

Barry Holt did a Justin Rose at Birkdale's 18th by holing a chip for a birdie. It produced scenes not seen since the 17th green at Brookline with a display of over enthusiastic celebrating from the delighted left hander. As a follow up he also birdied the 1st at S&A and completed his two days of work with another birdie on the 18th, on this occasion followed by a slightly more restrained punch of the air.

Even now Past Chairman Elliott Small is hot on the trail of the player who played his ball - a Titeleist 3 - on the 16th at Birkdale causing him to return. As the purple mist descended he finished his round birdie-eagle which perhaps only compounded his fury.

As yet it is not known whether any BIGGA members were responsible for Liverpool and England's Steven Gerrard getting into trouble prior to the England-Greece game. Gerrard was spotted out drinking in a Southport bar at 2am on Tuesday morning, around about the time many greenkeepers were also frequenting bars in the area.

36 HOLES AGGREGATE NETT

1st Chris Ball (Challenge Trophy Winner)	143
2nd Walter Woods (on 2nd round)	146
3rd Chris Bitten	146

36 HOLES AGGREGATE GROSS

1st Ian Semple (Challenge Cup Winner)	152
2nd Tony McLure (on 2nd round)	153
3rd Antony Kirwan	153

Category Prizes - Monday

0-7 George Brown	75
8-15 Jason Moody	76
16-28 Kevin Caples	79

2nd Round Prizes - Tuesday

0-7 Jon McMullen	71
8-15 Duncan Gray	69
16-28 Ben Knowles-Jackson	78

Nearest the Pin Competition

Thomas Comerford

Longest Drive

Alex Hawkes



Above: Alan Ravey, Captain of Southport and Ainsdale GC, congratulates our 2001 National Championship winner, Chris Ball



Above: A huge thankyou goes to all of our generous sponsors



Above: Chris Whittle, Clive Osgood and Mike Mercer

REGIONAL TEAM CUP

Winners - South East Region 623

Mick Haynes, Raymond Day,
David Murdoch, John Donnelly,
Nigel Colley, Antony Kirwan,
Jason Moody, Ian Semple

Runners Up

Scottish Region

George Brown, Iain MacLeod,
Steve Sullivan, John Mair, Walter
Woods, Duncan Gray, Alistair
Philp, Craig Pennycuik

3rd Midland Region

4th Northern Region

5th SWest & SWales Region



Above: The conditioning of both golf courses was a real tribute to Chris Whittle and Mike Mercer and their respective teams at Royal Birkdale and Southport and Ainsdale



Walter Woods (above) and George Brown (right) battle it out



Top: Barry Holt on fine form, and above, the Regional Team Cup is lifted by the South East Team



Above: Our National Championship winners take a bow!

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