

# Getting Better Every Year



Justin Waddell

"The standards keep going up and up and the decision was a difficult one." How often have you heard those words from a judge just before he announces the winner of a competition.

So often, in fact, that to say, "It's a cliché to say 'The standards keep going up and up and the decision was a difficult one.' is a cliché itself."

However, just to say it's a cliché doesn't detract from the truism that is being spoken and that was very much the case with the final of the 2003 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award, which was contested by eight evenly matched and extremely talented individuals.

The final judging was carried out by John Pemberton, of BIGGA, David Waldon, Chairman of BIGGA's Education Sub-Committee; Andy Brown, of Toro, and Pete Mansfield, of Lely UK.

As it was Keith Scruton, Head Greenkeeper of Colne Golf Club and Myerscough College, emerged as the winner and John Talbot, Head Greenkeeper of Ravensworth Golf Club and Askham Bryan College, and Justin Waddell, Assistant at Fortwilliam Golf Club and Greenmount College in Northern Ireland, runners-up.

Keith wins an eight week trip to the United States incorporating a six week course at the University of Massachusetts and visits to the Toro Headquarters in Minneapolis and California and the GCSAA Conference and Show in San Diego. John and Justin win trips to Harrogate next year for BTME & ClubHouse and access to all the educational events which make up the Continue to Learn programme.

The other six Regional winners were Paul Todd, Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Lanark Golf Club and Oatridge College; Dylan Jones, Pwllheli Golf Club and the Welsh College; Bobby Vining, Assistant at Mendip Spring Golf Club and Cannington College; Martyn Gray, Assistant at Bramley Golf Club and Merrist Wood College and Robert George, Deputy to last year's winner Murray Long at Coombe Hill Golf Club and NESCOL.

The competition continues to go from strength to strength and Toro must be thanked for providing such an incentive for the country's greenkeeping students.



John Talbot

# Life is a Rollercoaster

**Keith Scruton has experienced the lows and highs of life over the last 12 months but, as Scott MacCallum found out, he has certainly ended the year on a high.**

"A year ago this Friday I was called to a meeting at my golf club and told that I was being made redundant," said Keith Scruton.

This isn't the start of a harrowing tale of a Head Greenkeeper who becomes disillusioned with the industry and begins to look for a job outside greenkeeping, but the story of a man who spots a silver lining around a potentially very black cloud, picks himself up and within a year has triumphed.

More of a Stephen Spielberg style "Against all Odds" film script than an Eastenders "Doom and Despair" story line.

A bit over the top?

Well, you be the judge. A mere 12 months on from being the recipient of bad news from a golf club which treated him poorly, Keith has a new job as Head Greenkeeper at a progressive golf club and has just become the 2003 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year.

"It is just starting to sink in now but when my name was announced I was just dumbstruck," said the 29 year-old Head Greenkeeper of Colne Golf Club, in Lancashire.

Keith is a character full of perseverance as highlighted by the fact that he had been an entrant in the Toro Student of the Year Award about 10 years before but failed to progress beyond the first stage. But the new resilient, tougher than teak, version took it all in his stride and can sit the



# TORO STUDENT GREENKEEPER *of the year* AWARD

trophy alongside the Ernest Jones Award he won for being the top HND Student at Myerscough College earlier in the year. He was the first part-time student to win that particular prize.

The Toro Award brings with it an opportunity to spread his professional wings further as the six weeks study course at the University of Massachusetts will build on his knowledge immensely.

Although delighted to have reached the final eight from an initial field of 3500 applicants, and extremely impressed by the qualities of the seven other finalists Keith had told his family that he was heading to Aldwark Manor to win.

"There is no point in going to the FA Cup final and not lifting the trophy," said the Blackburn Rovers fan.

"But when he arrived at Aldwark for the final and found himself in a formal dinner on the Sunday evening with his fellow finalists and the judges it was not a football analogy he came up with.

"Sitting in the Barnes Wallis Suite in the Hotel with the huge chandeliers it was all very surreal and I couldn't help but think it was a bit like Fame Academy."

Having "sung for survival" and won over the judges he is now ready to take advantage of the superb prize.

"Nowadays everyone is looking for that extra five percent and the sort of experience and knowledge I will pick up in the States will be invaluable in enabling me to do that."

Keith was able to quiz the outgoing Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year, Murray Long, Course Manager at Coombe Hill GC, at BIGGA HOUSE after his win had been announced and what Murray was able to tell him increased his excitement still further.

"He said that if he hadn't won the prize he would have gladly paid to go on the course himself, he had got such a lot from it. There can be no greater recommendation than that," said Keith.

"One other piece of advice he gave me was to get a warm coat and some warm gloves because Boston is freezing at that time of year," added Keith, of the trip which begins in January and also takes in a trip to the GCSAA Conference and Show in San Diego, California and the Toro Headquarters in Minneapolis and Irrigation Headquarters in California.

A great time lies ahead and all too different from the gloomy prospects which faced him when he lost his job the year before.

"I must admit I was delighted with the support I received from BIGGA. It was fantastic and I can't speak highly enough of the staff who, from the moment I got on the phone, couldn't do enough for me in taking on my case for unfair redundancy."

But he soon realised that BIGGA wasn't just there for a rainy day.

"I've also made full use of the BIGGA library in studying for my HND and also got hold of the BIGGA field guides which are really invaluable.

"I suppose I didn't have any particular perceptions of BIGGA before last year other than wondering what we got for our money. It's only when you look below the surface that you see how hard everyone works on behalf of the members."

He has also taken advantage of the Association's Ransomes Jacobsen Scholarship Scheme which helped him fund his HND.

Keith began his greenkeeping career at Darwen Golf Club where he was a junior member.

"I did some summer work during my holidays and getting good money for a 16 year old.

I told my dad that I wanted to be a greenkeeper and he wasn't happy as he wanted me to become an electrician, a plasterer or a brickie. There were a few arguments, particularly when I turned down some jobs."

Not to be dissuaded Keith wrote to Myerscough College for their greenkeeping package and with that in hand he was able to persuade his dad that there was a career to be had in greenkeeping.

"I was keen to learn the theory so if things went wrong I had that to fall back on."

One thing very much in Keith's favour was Darwen Golf Club which had a history of looking after its young greenkeeping staff - another of them Ryun Holden, now Course Manager at Oakmere GC, featured in the magazine earlier in the year.

"Darwen had a magnificent Chairman of Green, Len Sharples, who went through everything with me when I started in a two hour meeting. He told me exactly what the club would do for me with regard to college and my wages.

"I was on a YT Scheme six months trial to begin with and I remember my first wage was £36 and I remember thinking I'd need to save for two weeks just to get a pair of Levi jeans. Still I didn't question it because I enjoyed the job so much."

With the trial period successfully negotiated Keith saw his wages increase and in the end he remained at Darwen for eight years having spent six of them as Deputy.

Indeed one year Keith was the Level 3 Student of the Year and Ryun, a year younger, was Level 2 Student of the Year at Myerscough which reflects extremely well on the golf club.

Keith has been at Colne Golf Club since January and he is delighted to have joined a very supportive and progressive club whose previous Head Greenkeeper, Andrew Eddison, did his job in a very professional manner with good practices and procedures in place.



Keith Scruton





Standing L-R. Bobby Vining, Dylan Hughes , Murray Long, Ken Richardson, Pete Mansfield, Andrew Brown, John Pemberton, David Walden, Andy Campbell. Seated. Robert George, Martyn Gray, Justin Waddell, Keith Scruton, John Talbot and Paul Todd

"I have put my stamp on the course but it is very much fine tuning, evolution rather than revolution."

A nine holer Keith has developed his practices around the need to manage wear and concentrate on traffic routes more than on an 18 but he, along with his two staff, feels able to give more TLC to a course spread over 70 acres than one over 150 acres.

"There is a temptation for the golfer to go for an 18 hole course but we have a lot of quality and some excellent holes some of which are tackled from different tees on the back nine. There is talk of possibly increasing to 18 at some stage but we'll just have to see."

Few people have been in quite such a good position to appreciate the support the industry gives to greenkeepers and he is particularly indebted to Toro for supporting the competition.

As he prepares to head to the States he is thankful of the overwhelming support he has received from his wife Louise, who will be left in charge of three year old Matthew and the latest member of the family, Joshua, who was just four months old when his dad lifted the crystal bowl confirming his success.

He will no doubt grow up to be very proud of a father who turned his life around in the space of 12 rollercoaster months.



The 2003 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year flanked by the two runners-up



Every one a winner