

Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award

Gareth Jones reviews the 2004 Regional Finals and reveals the eight National Finalists.

The Toro Student of the Year Competition has once again scoured the UK and Ireland in search of the top student greenkeepers who are undergoing college training. There are currently over 3000 greenkeepers in the UK and Ireland studying for various qualifications, and that number continues to grow year on year.

Many previous Student of the Year Winners, boosted by their victory and the experiences gained from this, have progressed rapidly through the greenkeeping ranks to become, among other things, Head Greenkeepers and Course Managers of major courses.

Now in its 14th year, the Competition's 2004 Regional Finals were held in Edinburgh, Manchester, Hemel Hempstead, Cheltenham and Huntingdon.

As always the standard of candidates was excellent and the judges had a tough time narrowing 36 interviewees down to eight students to go through to the National Final, which will be held at BIGGA HOUSE on September 27.

BIGGA's Education and Training Manager, Ken Richardson, once more travelled the length and breadth of the country in order to evaluate the prospective finalists. Ken was joined on the Regional interview panels by a BIGGA Board member and a representative from Toro.

For the Scottish interviews, hosted in the Scottish Capital, the panel

comprised Ken, Iain MacLeod and Toro's, George McDonald. The standard of candidates was high, but one student stood out in particular. That was Christopher Kerr who was selected to progress to the National Final.

Christopher, 22, is First Assistant at Cowglen Golf Club, Glasgow, where he first started as an apprentice five years ago.

Studying for his SVQ Level 3, Christopher is keen to continue his rapid move through the ranks of greenkeeping and hopes to be a Head Greenkeeper within five years.

A top golfer, Christopher plays off 1.5, he won the Glasgow Match Play Championship in 2003 and has represented Glasgow County.

Manchester held the Regional Finals for both the North of England and Ireland. Here Ken was accompanied by BIGGA Chairman Andy Campbell MG CGCS and Peter Mansfield, of Toro.

During a long day of judging the panel witnessed some outstanding candidates, resulting in three being selected for the National Final. Peter Kennedy, Robert Finnegan and Stuart Glover will all be visiting BIGGA HOUSE in September.

Peter, 21, is a Dublin lad based in Ballymanna. Currently he is on a



three year course studying a HND at Reaseheath College.

Peter's major experience has come in the US, where he spent a year at the Pinehurst Resort, North Carolina. Working as an Intern, Peter impressed his

American counterparts and received the Employee of the Month award during his time at the Resort.

He plays off 7, and is also a big rugby, football and snooker player.

Robert, 20, cut his teeth in greenkeeping working as an Assistant at Navan Golf Club. Trained at Elmwood College in Scotland, Robert has already completed his NC Greenkeeping Course and plans to return in September to study a HND in Golf Course

Management.

He has made the most of his summer break, working at St. Andrews, on both the New and Old Courses - he is now employed as an Assistant Greenkeeper on the Old Course - and in Norway.

Robert is an eager sportsman and enjoys playing golf, football and Gaelic football.

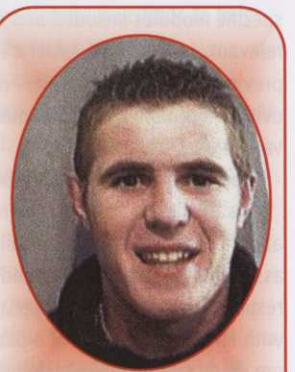
Stuart is the oldest of the 2004 finalists at 32 years old, and is another candidate from across the Irish Sea.

He is currently Deputy Greenkeeper at Lisburn Golf Club, where he started

employment back in May 2004. He has been in the greenkeeping profession for 16 years working on four different courses, including Northern Ireland's highly rated Belvoir Park.

Stuart completed his NVQ Level 2 in June at Greenmount College and has aspirations to pass NVQ Level 3 and become a Head Greenkeeper in the future.

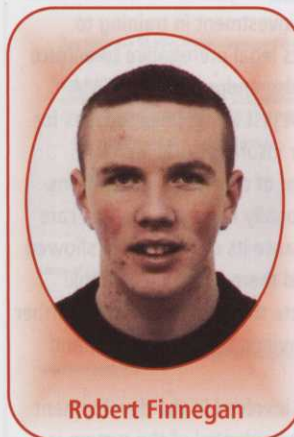
Huntingdon hosted the Midlands Final, where BIGGA Board Member David Walden joined Ken and Peter Mansfield. More stiff competition, but it was James Canham who shone through



Peter Kennedy



Christopher Kerr



Robert Finnegan



Stuart Glover



James Canham

as the ideal student to progress to the National Final.

James is just 18 years of age and is an Assistant Greenkeeper at Weston Park Golf Club.

He started his career at Ryston Park, before moving onto an 18 hole course at Weston Park one year ago. James is currently working towards his NVQ Level 2 at the College of West Anglia.

His major goal is to become Head

Greenkeeper at one of the most highly regarded courses in the world.

When not on the golf course James gardens professionally, plays football and is also keen on karate.

For the South East interviews, held in Hemel Hempstead, Ken teamed up with Ian Semple and Toro's Peter Mansfield once more. After much deliberation two Finalists were chosen from the South East. Alastair Higgs and Alex Shore will be making the trip to North Yorkshire.

Alastair is a 19 years old Assistant Greenkeeper at Calcot Park Golf Club, Reading, where he has worked for over three years.

He has spent the past four years gaining his PA1, PA2, PA6 Chemical Applicators Licence and NVQ Level 2, and he is currently studying for his NVQ Level 3 at Sparsholt College.

Between studying and supporting Reading FC, Alastair finds time to get out onto the golf course to improve on his already excellent handicap of 7.

Alex is an Assistant Greenkeeper at Woburn Golf and Country Club, where he has been for the past five years.

A passion for golf got him into the profession, and with encouragement from his Head Greenkeeper Alex decided to undertake his NVQ Level 3 at Oaklands College.

Newly wed Alex, 26, believes his study will help him realise his ambition to one day become a Head Greenkeeper himself.

The South West Regional Final was based in Cheltenham. This time Ken was flanked on the interview panel by Richard Barker and John Pike, of Toro. Here Katherine Walls greatly impressed, and she was rewarded with a place in the National Final.

Katherine works as an Assistant

Greenkeeper at Taunton and Pickeridge Golf Club, Somerset.

Katherine, or Katie, already has a NVQ Level 2 and three 'A' levels under her belt, and is currently in the first year of her degree in Sportsturf Science

at Myerscough College, the same institution 2003 Student of the Year winner Keith Scruton attended.

She has major ambitions, as she would like to get into Course Management while still in her twenties, while also playing as much competitive golf as possible. Katie, 21, plays off 3 currently and has represented both Somerset County and Wales.

The Regional Finals proved once more that there remains a rapid increase in the amount, and quality, of qualified greenkeepers in the UK and Ireland. The interview panels are increasingly impressed by the standard of the student candidates, the work that they put in and the support they receive from their golf clubs.

"We had a good young group this year, they were all very prepared and because of this there were some difficult decisions the panels had to make," said Ken.

"The support from a student's golf club and their Course Manager is crucial. When students are supported it makes a significant difference to the standard. It was obvious which candidates had received such support and guidance and we want to promote that.

"The eight candidates that progressed to the National Final stood out in particular for their determination to win the competition and progress in greenkeeping. They had done their research, one even contacted a previous winner for advice, and that was clear for the judging panels to see."

The final, at BIGGA HOUSE on September 27, will consist of two stages.

Firstly, the eight candidates will face a final interview. The interview panel will comprise BIGGA Chief Executive John Pemberton, BIGGA Board of Management Member David Walden, Peter Mansfield and Andy Brown, of Toro.

Secondly, the Finalists will conduct a survey of the Aldwark Manor Golf Course. This will involve the candidates evaluating nine holes of the course.

The Finalists will be joined on the day by the 2003 Toro Student of the Year, Keith Scruton, and the Regional Judges.

The National Winner will receive the Toro Scholarship, which includes an eight week trip to the USA. Six of those weeks will be spent on a residential Turf Management study course at the University of Massachusetts.

The lucky winner will also spend time visiting the Toro Headquarters in Minneapolis, and the GCSAA Show and Conference in Orlando.



Katherine Walls

The experiences of last year's winner Keith Scruton are featured on the next two pages.