

This Time it's for Real!

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Scott MacCallum reports on the National Championship, sponsored by Ransomes Jacobsen, which produced a case of *deja vue* for the winner.

If there is such a thing as fate Noel Crawford could certainly vouch for it. Last year he was leading the BIGGA National Championship, held at Alwoodley Golf Club in Leeds, but had to leave early to catch a plane back to Northern Ireland. So that we had a picture for the magazine he posed with the Trophy before heading off. While he was in mid air though Graeme MacDonald, playing towards the rear of the field, came up on the rails to take the top prize.



Above: National Chairman Kerran Daly dusted down his clubs and defeated Bert Cross

Right: A spectacular Seve-esque escape from a bunker



Below: The attractive par 3 4th at Sherwood Forest



Right: The devilish Sherwood greens produced some knashing of teeth



This year, thanks to some fine golf and a change in the rule which meant the top gross score won the top prize, he got his hands on the trophy for real. And what do you know when it came to the photographs the battery on BIGGA's camera went dead just before the top prizes were presented and if it wasn't for the quick thinking of Arnold Phipps Jones and his personal digital camera, we might have been relying on the picture taken the previous year for this year's magazine.

"I won the gross prize three out of the last five years and I was delighted when the rules were changed so the person with the lowest gross score became the National Champion," said the Royal County Down greenkeeper and +1 golfer.

"I think it's quite right that the lowest score should win and hopefully it will encourage some of the top golfing greenkeepers to take part - I saw that the runner-up in this year's Amateur Championship (John Gallacher) was a greenkeeper," said Noel, who despite his undoubted skill very rarely practices.

"I think I've practiced twice in the last five years," said the man who is a former Ulster Youths' Champion and a multiple winner of the Royal County Down Scratch Cup.

Noel is part of quite a golfing dynasty with his brother, 2 handicapper, Eamonn, also a regular attendee and winner at the National Championship, although not this year, and his nephew, Gary, currently the Northern Ireland Section Chairman, is also a regular visitor.

"I always enjoy the National Championship. Everyone is very friendly and the golf courses are excellent. I hope to be back to defend at Burton Golf Club next year."

The event proved to be an superb two days of golf with Worksop and Sherwood Forest fine challenges and a credit to Course Managers, Barry Lax and Kim Kirkham, respectively.

The first day was remarkable on a number of scores.

None more so that the emergence of National Chairman, Kerran Daly, as a real golfing force. Noel Crawford may not have practiced much for five years but Kerran hadn't picked up a club at all in years. He proved rustiness was merely a state of mind as he defeated his fellow National Board Member, Bert Cross, 2&1 in a hastily organised bounce game at the back of the field. The fact that Bert had spent three hours on his feet as Official Starter before quickly changing for the match shouldn't deflect from the achievement.

Another match, just ahead of Kerran and Bert, saw Rupert Price



Above: Gary Rowe collects the prize for Best Nett

and Sean Winn, representing Ransomes Jacobsen, sponsors of the National Championship narrowly lose out to John Pemberton and Scott MacCallum for the Worksop plate which was donated to the Association on the morning of the match by Worksop Secretary, David Dufall.

These were merely golfing side shows not to deflect from the serious stuff being played up ahead and when the dust finally settled the first piece of silverware to be decided was the Regional Trophy which went to the Midland Region with a score of 595 the eight man team comprising - Simon Woolley, Nigel Colley, David Fellows, Carl Small, Neill Smith, Charlie Milbourn, Russ Moody and Brian Robson - finishing 11 shots ahead of the South East and their team of Keir Grimwood, Gary Rowe, Adam Marrable, David Beale, David Badham, Robert Kemp, Tony Bremer and Chris Wells.



Right: Yes he does look younger, Champion Noel Crawford with the trophy last year!

The form men of the opening day in the individual event were 1 handicapper George Mitchell and 2 handicapper Shaun Richards, who both shot two over par 74s. Noel Crawford was just one shot behind after a 75.

Leader of the nett competition was Gary Rowe, who shot a nett 70 off his 10 handicap, and Kier Greenwood, who also shot a 70 off a handicap of 12.

Worksop Golf Club did everyone proud at the Championship dinner after the first round during which Kerran Daly thanked and paid tribute to Ransomes Jacobsen, the sole sponsor of the event. The Team prize was presented to the Midland Region, as was the Nearest the Pin to Carl Small, (39 inches to the final hole followed by a missed putt) and Longest Drive to Gary Burgess, who needs to be tested for performance enhancing drugs!

Below: Kim Kirkham and Barry Lax, Course Managers at Sherwood Forest and Worksop respectively



Above: The victorious Midland Region

Below: Champions all!



John McLoughlan obviously had moderation at the forefront of his mind at the dinner as the next day at Sherwood Forest he produced the best round of the entire Championship, a one over par 73, posting a two round total of 152. That hauled him up to third place overall one behind Shaun Richards, who added a 77 to his opening 74. The eventual Champion, Noel, playing with John and another scratch man David Coupland, added a second successive round of 75 for an unbeatable total of 150.

In the nett competition Gary Rowe added a 71 to his 70 for a 141 total two ahead of Simon Woolley and a further clear of David Fellows.

Everyone was extremely impressed by the quality of greens at both venues and particularly Sherwood Forest's that were cut at three mil and in perfect condition. They were so slick many people fell foul particularly if they found themselves on the high side.

Next year the National Championship will be held at Burton Golf Club on October 2&3.

Additional photography by Arnold Phipps-Jones