

# A Fine Vintage

Gareth Jones witnessed another close, tense final at BIGGA HOUSE, which saw Alan Pierce become the 2005 Toro Student of the Year.

During the presentation of the 2005 Toro Student of the Year Award, judge Peter Mansfield, of Lely, commented that although the competition was now in its 16th year, due to its relatively young age it could not be yet be classed as vintage. However, he recognised that the Award was continually growing and the standard improving year on year. If the competition is not a vintage in terms of age, it certainly is in terms of quality, as once again the eight finalists who congregated at BIGGA HOUSE set a superb standard, leaving the judging panel to do a lot of head scratching to decide the eventual victor.

Alan Pierce was eventually announced as the winner with David Newton and James Lindsay claiming the runners up prizes. Both David and James win a trip to Harrogate Week, January 22-27 2006, where they will attend workshops, Continue to Learn Seminars and the Banquet. With both the winner and runners up coming from the older end of the eight finalists, both David and James proved that age is no obstruction to furthering your career and knowledge.

At 47 years of age David was the oldest finalist and showed that it is never too late to make a career change into something for which you have a passion. The First Assistant at Arrowe Park Golf Club, Birkenhead, which is a municipal course, only took up greenkeeping at 36. Since then he has set about gaining his PA1 and PA6 and completing an NVQ Level 2 at Reaseheath College. He has just finished his NVQ Level 3 and plans to continue his rapid development and work on a Links course one day.

James is Deputy Head Greenkeeper at The Bedfordshire Golf Club, which boasts a 6, 565 yards, par 70, Championship course. James cut his greenkeeping teeth at 14 at Ringdufferin GC, Northern Ireland. He has studied NVQ Level 3 in Sportsturf at Merrist Wood College and has previously earned a National Certificate in Amenity Horticulture and a National Diploma in Turf Science. After his achievement in the joint BIGGA and Toro competition the Deputy is keen to test his abilities at the highest level by eventually becoming a Course Manager and hosting a Major event.

The final highlighted the importance of support and encouragement and also the number of people submerged in the background who play such a vital part in the success of rising greenkeepers. All eight finalists thanked their club, college tutors and bosses for the help they had received in making their participation in the final possible. Alan Pierce summed this up best when he produced a long list of all the people who had aided him in his quest to become a successful Deputy Course Manager and 2005 Toro Student of the Year.

"I have to thank everyone from Ham Manor, particularly Jon Budd, the greenkeeping team and the Committee, Roy Brown, Secretary, Tom Lance, Club Chairman, David Cloughley, Club Captain, Wallace Grace, Vice Captain and Alan Calder, Greens Chairman, along with my tutor at Plumpton, Dave Blackmur, Jim Simmons, at Royal Eastbourne GC, and Les Shrubbs, my first boss. From the final itself I must thank all the judges, the seven other finalists, who were great, Alex Shore, the 2004 winner, and all at BIGGA and Toro for making this important competition such a success," finished Alan.

The five other finalists, Darren Leith, Tommy McFadden, Emmet Reilly, all from Elmwood College, Alastair Ogilvie, The College of West Anglia, and Daniel Spencer, Oaklands College, echoed the winners' comments.

"The support you get is crucial and you have to thank your golf club and the Course Manager, in my case Stefan Schon at Haga Golf Park in Norway, for sticking by you. You can't forget the colleges either, they do an excellent job, as Elmwood did with me, and I'm grateful for that," said Darren.



Judge Peter Mansfield, left, and 2005 Winner Alan Pierce