



The Open Aftermath

By Melissa Toombs

Thursday, July 20 2006. It's hot. Oh dear god it's hot. The 135th Open Championship has just got underway and thousands of sweaty golf fans are traipsing around Royal Liverpool Golf Course donning straw hats and caps, wishing they had remembered the sun cream, hoping to catch a glimpse of Tiger in action.

With the soaring heat in mind, conversations at the Championship quickly turned from the game itself to the links on which it was being played. The sandy, parched, desert like appearance of the course shocked many and became a hot topic at this year's sizzling Open.

Despite spectators expecting lush green pastures, Links Manager Craig Gilholm, received a warm tribute at the Open prize giving as well as the press showering him with compliments, for providing a magnificently presented course.

It's been nearly three months since the star-studded event and the long days of drought, has the course recovered from hosting several thousand spectators? Assistant Editor, Melissa Toombs, talks to man of the moment, Craig Gilholm, and asks "Just how do you go about restoring Hoylake to its magnificent pre-Open standards?"



Name: Craig Gilholm
Position: Links Manager
Age: 34

A keen golfer at Harburn GC, Craig started his career as a YTS trainee. He moved down to East Lothian after seven months and was lucky enough to get a summer job at Muirfield golf course. Consequently, Craig was kept on as an apprentice and completed three years training at Oatridge College.

After eight years working at Muirfield, Craig was promoted to Assistant Course Manager and remained there until he left in June 2005 to become Links Manager at Royal Liverpool GC.

The links had been called "obsolete" and "a thing of the past" before this year's competition but judging by this year's Open the course is set to remain an important part of the future of the Championship. Just how much preparation went into ensuring the course was in tip top condition for the Championship and was it worth the effort?



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"Lots of preparation had been done, large and small scale, for the past five years and overtime for my staff increased from 12 hour days to 20 hour days for the final preparations for the Open, I would do it again next year without a doubt."

So, how do you go about restoring a golf course after the Open?

"After all the infrastructure has been removed, all holes and ruts are filled with soil and seed, also lots of aeration will be required and lots of help from the weather."

How long do you anticipate it will take for the course to return to its pre-Open standard then?

"After such a hot dry Open the course playing surfaces will be back to normal by the end of this summer and with a mild wet winter and spring everything else should recover for next season."

How much over seeding is necessary and whereabouts on the course?

"The only overseeding that will be done is on my spectator cross-overs and on my main practice area."

What variety of seed will be used and how much?

"The seed which will be used is Johnson's j fescue and the quantity will be in the region of 1000 kgs of seed."



Will any fertiliser be applied to aid recovery?

"A light fertiliser will be applied to the practice area for recovery and seed germination, the quantity at the moment is not known."

What aeration work will take place?

"All practice areas and cross-overs will be verti-drained along with spectator paths."

There has been much controversy over your greens not being green. The golfing public has a tendency to think green is best, however, the course looked burnt and bleached but received wonderful praise from the professionals. What are your thoughts on this and what is your secret to such a successful links course?

"I do not understand the controversy as The Open is the only links tournament played at the height of summer and when you have practice days with temperatures reaching 100 degrees and when you need to produce a hard firm bouncing course, the last thing I could do is over water."

The condition of the course has been a hot topic on our bulletin boards; many greenkeepers feel that the hot weather helped contribute to the course playing like a true links should. What are your thoughts on this?

"The hot weather had a lot to do with the course playing like a true links but also through choice not a lot of irrigation was used pre Open, in case of heavy rain the week of the tournament."

Our Open Support Team said they have never been worked so hard at an Open. Is this because you are a perfectionist?

"I think most Head Greenkeepers are perfectionists. The Open Support Team had a tough job this year with the bunker raking being changed from normal tooth raking to flat raking and with damp weather this caused problems, but a little hard work has not harmed anyone and a big thank you goes out to Scott and the troops for a job well done."

A few unexpected incidents happened on the 18th green on the final day of the Open. What are your thoughts on the duck eggs filled with purple paint that were hurled onto the green and also the male streaker that managed to get onto the green?

"These things happen in life and the damage was small on the scale of what could have happened, the streaker was a bit of fun and will have put a smile on some golfing widows' faces."

After the Open the greens are a mess. The purpose of this is to get the amount of grass that is left on the greens after the Open.



What was the reaction of Hoylake members to the course after it was all over?

"The members were all delighted that it was such a success."

Have they grumbled about the mess that was left from the Championship and when were they able to start playing again - uninterrupted by trucks and cranes etc?

"Nobody really complained too much and they were able to get playing on the following Monday without too much disruption."

When were you and the team finally able to have a break, or at least a return to normality?

"Things are getting back to normal and myself and the lads are getting through our days off."

And finally, are you keen for the championship to return to Hoylake?

"I can only use one word to answer this question, yes!"

Craig has no idea, as yet, how much the restoration of the course will cost.



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