



The chosen ones enjoy refreshments during a seminar. Left to right: Stephen Privett, John Gubb, Glenn Kirby, Andrew de Wet, Barry Crawford, Paul O'Kane, Mark Henderson, Rob Welford, Roger Neale and Ian Somerville.

TRIP OF A LIFETIME

Lucky BIGGA delegate, Rob Welford, gives his take on the 2007 GCSAA Show

With the jet lag finally subsiding and the reality of the British weather hitting me once again it is time to reflect on what was a fantastic experience for us, the 10 chosen ones, who travelled to Los Angeles and to the 2007 GCSAA show in Anaheim courtesy of the BIGGA delegation, sponsored by Bernhard & Co.

So there we were 8.30 on a Sunday morning at Heathrow, standing in line, bags in hand ready to check in like school children on an activity weekend. To say that we were all excited to various extents was obvious. The only downside was the 11 ½ hour flight looming ominously before us.

Some good fortune was bestowed upon us with the flight being only half full, so some quick seat swapping ensued and everyone had legroom aplenty. The flight was relatively mundane except for the landing at Los Angeles, where we thought the captain of the plane turned into the 'Stig' from Top Gear, gentle oversteer in a 737 is not funny. Getting through US immigration was a breeze for most of us (they asked for Barry Crawford's guardian to make themselves known) and there we were, Los Angeles, sunshine, 20oC and short bus ride to the hotel awaited us.

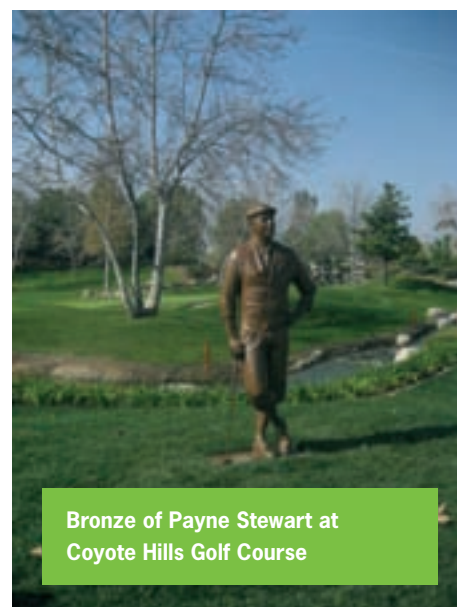
Bernhard & Co had done us proud; we were staying in the Anabella Hotel which was located next door to the Anaheim convention centre and directly over the road from Downtown Disneyland. We had the rest of the afternoon to settle in and acclimatise to the eight hour time difference, familiarise ourselves to the surrounding area and look forward to the busy schedule that had been prepared for us.

Monday morning arrived with an early morning wake-up call which prompted the need for food, and soon we were all assembled for the cross town ride to Los Angeles Country Club. Upon arrival we were greeted by Bruce Williams, Course Superintendent. LACC is one of the most prestigious private members courses in LA to the extent that the USGA in the 1980's were begging them to hold the U.S Open and it is currently ranked 18th in the top 100 US private golf club listings. Originally built in 1897 but substantially remodelled in the 1920's LACC is a 36 hole facility which consists of the North and South courses.

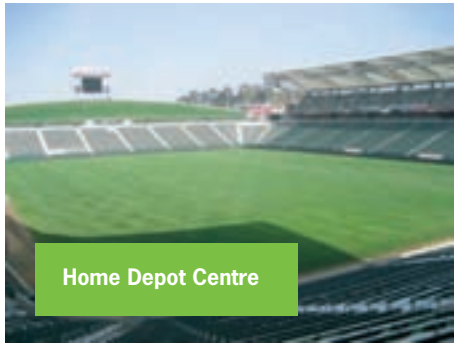
The South course is divided by Wilshire Boulevard which is a six lane freeway and facilitates the need for all machinery to be taken across the 'road' (usually early in the morning), although golf carts of which there are many can use the very narrow tunnel.

The courses are Bermuda grass which was dormant at this time of the year and unusually for

the area they only overseed the tees. The greens on the north course are Penn A4 creeping bent and were initially handpicked to minimise poa annua while the south course greens were poa, creeping bent mixture. The total number of staff for both courses was 50 all year round, this also included gardener for clubhouse lawns and flower beds (all clubhouse flowers and plantings inside and out are grown on site). The membership cost for LACC is \$150,000 joining fee and roughly \$1,200-\$1,600 per month! The annual operating budget is \$4,000,000.



Bronze of Payne Stewart at Coyote Hills Golf Course



Everything at LACC is on a grand scale with the irrigation tank having a massive 1,000,000 gallon capacity drawn from wells and during the summer 800,000 gallons are applied every night. After being shown around both courses we were entertained in the clubhouse which again is a sight to behold.

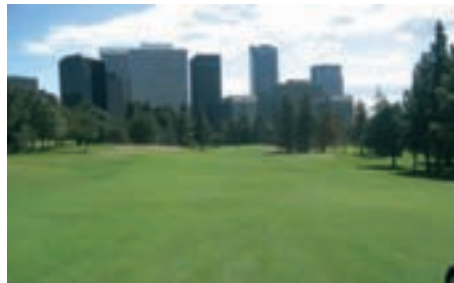
Tuesday and Wednesday gave us the chance to experience education the US way which consisted of an all day seminar on the Tuesday entitled 'Taking Control of Green Speed'. The seminar lasted from 8am to 5pm and was hosted by Michael D. Morris CGCS (Superintendent at Crystal Downs) and Tomas D. Nikolai Ph.D. The seminar looked at all the possible factors that affect green speed, starting with a history on green speed and the stimpmeter, and progressing onto golfer expectations. From there we looked at the effects of weather on green speed such as rainfall and humidity, and then onto heights of cut, types of mower (triplex vs. pedestrian), frequency and type of blade sharpening, topdressing practices, irrigation, grass species and finally rolling at which point we ran out of time, and we still had fertility and plant growth regulators to discuss!

Well what did we learn from all this? Firstly, that both the hosts were passionate and very knowledgeable on the subject as all the data was collected from various studies some lasting five years or more. Secondly, that American Superintendents seem to have more pressures placed upon them with regards to green speed by their memberships, (not saying that this doesn't happen in the UK) and finally don't sit at the front if your English as John Gubb, was asked every question under the sun during the day and spent the rest of the week in hiding. On a more serious note we all came away with ideas to try on our own courses back home, and the scale and depth of the education provided is something that BIGGA should strive for during Harrogate Week.

Wednesday was the 'Turfgrass Field Seminar' which consisted of visits to three local golf courses and the Home Depot Centre (home of the LA Galaxy). The first course we visited was Alta Vista Country Club which is a private members club where the main topic of discussion was salt management on poa greens. The Superintendent, Jorge Morales, talked at length about the

problems of using effluent water for irrigation and showed us a demonstration of a TDS-meter which he used for monitoring the salt levels in his greens. He uses the results from the TDS-meter to determine the amount of irrigation required to flush through (leach) the salts.

Our second course of the day was Coyote Hills Golf Course where we met by Superintendent, Elliot Weber, who has been at the course since 2004. Coyote Hills is the only course that was jointly designed by twice US Open champion, Payne Stewart, and to commemorate this a bronze statue stands outside the clubhouse. Another interesting fact about Coyote Hills is that on the course are 200 oil wells which produce 300-500 barrels of oil a day (nice little earner). Here we looked at the pros and cons of overseeding dormant Bermuda grass fairways and roughs. After a brief look at the fairways we had a tour of the maintenance facility which in typical American fashion was spotless.



Next we visited Westridge Golf Club where we looked at the problems facing this high volume (50,000+ rounds per year) public course which was originally established with cool season grasses, using creeping bent on greens and perennial rye in fairways and roughs. The Superintendent is currently fighting the transition of the greens to poa and is purposely trying to transition roughs and fairways to a warm season turf with common Bermuda grass.

Last, but not least, was the highlight of the day for many of us 'soccer' fans a tour of the Home Depot Centre (read B&Q Trafford). This is home to multiple sporting events such as two major league soccer teams (Chivas USA and LA Galaxy), tennis, athletics and cycling and of course the 'Dave Beckham Academy'. We were privileged to be invited onto the pitch for a team photo although the atmosphere was lacking compared to what it will be like when Beckham plays in front of a 27,000 capacity crowd.

Thursday came and finally it was time for the show. The show here is 2½ days and attracts as many as 27,000 visitors. Well what can I say? Awesome. You cannot believe the size of this show, although I was informed that this year was one of the largest yet. Everyone is catered for with such features as an international lounge, bookshop and merchandise store. Each of us did our turn manning the BIGGA stand and we were



well received by all that passed by, stopped and chatted. I was impressed with the number of BIGGA members that were present at the show and this was a truly international affair and a result for Anglo-US relationships.

As well as the above we indulged in some extra curricular activities such as the Bernhard & Co Prestige Club Reception, the Official Opening Reception for the Conference and Show, Reception for the outgoing GCSAA President as well as the Opening Session where the Old Tom Morris Award was presented to Charlie Sifford, which included a video message from Tiger Woods. The keynote speaker was golfer and commentator Johnny Miller. Bernhard & Co also gave us an exclusive audience with Gerry Byrne, from the K Club Ireland, where we looked at the processes and problems he faced holding the 2006 Ryder Cup.

So that was that with the only spare time coming on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, where with heavy hearts and some heads too we boarded the, this time full, flight bound for London Heathrow and the real world.

We would like to extend our thanks to all those companies and organisations who fed and watered us, and especially those where lasting friendships were forged.

Finally I would like to round things off by extending a huge thank you to everyone who made our trip possible at Bernhard & Co especially Kim, Sam and Stephen as well as those involved from BIGGA for giving us ten chosen ones a week that we will never forget. To all of you who have read this article and got this far (without falling asleep), let me remind you that to enter for this trip was free and I would recommend it to anyone.

