

Chairman's Column

A Week to Remember

It was an honour to be Chairman at this year's Open Championship, where I saw a great diversity with our guys in the profession of greenkeeping. I thought the Royal Birkdale team did an outstanding job and all the hard work in the run up to the event certainly paid off. The quality of turf produced in such poor conditions was exceptional. Talking of the weather, where has the summer season gone? Only a few days of high temperatures.

As I write this article we are enjoying a few more decent days toward the end of July and I hope we are in for an Indian summer, September to October, I hope that is not too much to ask.

I arrived at The Open on Monday night to meet with the BIGGA HQ team, before heading off to the course. On Tuesday I went to see the marquee and then helped with organising the Support Team's uniform. There were some big crowds on the practice days and some of the best weather of the week.

I attended the Association of Golf Writers' Dinner Tuesday night. Scott MacCallum, John Pemberton and I met with a lot of familiar faces throughout the world of golf. All the talk was about the injury to Padraig Harrington and would he be able to defend his title, how ironic that turned out to be.

Padraig collected the AGW Golfer of the Year award, Peter Alliss collected the Lifetime Achievement Award and, as usual, had some very entertaining stories and good things to say in his acceptance speech. We then had Nick Faldo, Ryder Cup Captain, discussing the upcoming matches with the USA later this year. All in all, a good night networking within the industry.

On Wednesday morning we were off to the R&A with John Pemberton and David Golding to discuss future investment in greenkeeping training. We then spent a few hours on the course, there seemed to be lots of spectators around on the Wednesday. By mid afternoon it was back to the hotel to organise uniform as members of the Support Team were due to arrive for their 5 o'clock meeting.

Scott did all the introductions, set out rules for the week with instructions for how the R&A and the Royal Birkdale team wanted the bunkers raking for the week.

That evening I attended PGA of Europe Awards Dinner, a good networking opportunity within the industry, and it was fitting as there was our own Gary Alliss, Head Professional at the Belfry, accepting his Master Professional Award. Gary gave a great acceptance speech - reflecting a similar humour to his dad really. He's also been named PGA Cup Captain this year.

It was then on to the first round, horrendous conditions between 6am and lunch. Anybody who was exposed to it suffered. The winds were terrible and the high scoring reflecting this and whether you were greenkeeping, scoring, or simply spectating it was hard going. The BIGGA marquee was busy as people were tending to take cover. The day improved as the weather changed during the afternoon, crowds seemed to grow and it was a very big day.

On Friday the weather improved, as did the golf, although with still strong winds and showers there were some great golf scores, 65, Villegas, birdies last 5 holes, 14 - 18. Unbelievable!

It was good to meet up with a lot of the guys from the Support Team, some old faces and some new - it's always great to meet new people in the industry. I caught the last bus back from the course with the divoters and waiting for the cut to be made so the team could figure shifts. 83 players made the cut and a very high 9+ score.

On Saturday there was a wet start to the day, high winds, creating tough conditions for golf it was great to see Greg Norman turning back the



clock and in an incredible display throughout the week, managed to take a two shot lead.

The marquee was busy and guests were popping in. I had an early finish on Saturday and got back to hotel to catch up with some more people.

On Sunday, the final day of a long week and a fitting end to the tournament, Padraig Harrington produced a fantastic back 9 - the best score of the day.

We gathered the Support Team together at the end of the championship for a picture and said a big thank you to the guys who supported the event, especially for giving up their own personal time, holidays etc. There was a great mix of young and old greenkeepers there. It all went very well.

Also to the Birkdale guys, to Chris Whittle and his team, this was a fantastic event in very trying conditions, and I think the greenkeeping profession was held in very high regard by the end of the week.

I hope to see some more new faces at Turnberry in 2009.

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