

What a week

Peter Holmstrom has always dreamed of helping Europe win **the Ryder Cup**. Ideally this would be during a tournament played in front of a packed home crowd in Wales. It just so happens that some dreams do come true. Peter picks up the story...

“I have been working with Jim McKenzie, the Course Manager at Celtic Manor for over four years through my role as a Technical Sales Regional Manager with Countrywide. As a result, Jim invited me to join the 70 strong greenkeeping Support Team for the duration of the Ryder Cup. I knew it would be a special occasion and a high point in my career, but I didn’t anticipate just how memorable the whole event would be, for the players, the staff, the spectators and for Wales itself.”

Peter is a proud Welshman, Newport born and bred, and whose links with Celtic Manor go back many years:

“I am so fond of the resort anyway. I remember when construction at Celtic Manor first started, as a teenager I watched as the resort gradually took shape, and at 16 years of age I first worked at Celtic Manor as part of my schools work experience scheme.

To be invited to return to the resort 15 years later as part of a specialist team of greenkeepers was a huge honour, plus I am a massive Ryder Cup fan!”

The Support Team was divided into teams comprising of five members, and each member was allocated specific roles, including

cutting tees, bunker care, replacing divots, course maintenance and assisting with cutting greens and fairways when required. It’s not only the course itself that needs attention, but the putting and chipping green practice areas and VIP enclosures.

The team was due to work from Monday, September 27, through; preparation and practice days, the tournament itself starting on Friday October 1 and finally for the first time ever, Monday, October 4.

Peter was aware that the biggest challenge would be the weather, “If it’s wet then moving moisture off the course becomes key. The course has been prepared for the worst, for example, on the chipping and putting green practice area, which has limited irrigation, I have worked with Celtic Manor in the build up to the event by supplying a maximum moisture retention material through a 4mm screened peat and sand mixture dressed into the grass sward. Although we know how disruptive the weather might be, no one anticipated the impact the rain would eventually have on the tournament”

Peter was asked by Countrywide if he would capture his time at Celtic Manor in a daily blog to appear on the Countrywide website.

Here follows a selection of the best of that blog...



ABOVE: That’s me, mopping one of the greens, and BELOW: on a mower.

Mon 27 – Thur 30 Sep

Each day we would start work before 5am, arriving at the greenkeeping service compound to be greeted by Jim McKenzie and to be given our respective jobs. We would work until lunchtime, and then following some free time, do our jobs for the afternoon. 12 – 15 hour days were not unusual.

I was delegated the task of being in the special maintenance group for the week which means that I support the fairway cutting crew, possibly raking bunkers during the matches and any other special maintenance to be carried out on the course.



During my allocated time off, I was lucky enough to meet some golfing superstars. On the first day I went to watch Ian Poulter practice, he was accompanied by Darren Clarke, who bizarrely gave me a driver during a golf tournament 17 years ago. I reminded him of this, "Can you use it," he asked, to which I said, "No, it's too stiff."

"That's why I gave it to you in the first place," he replied!

On the Wednesday the rain came, 15mm fell in four hours. With both teams out on the course practicing the rain came down heavier and puddles were starting to form on the greens, I joined up with three other greenkeepers to remove water from various putting greens.

On Thursday, walking from the 8th to the 9th tee, I had the opportunity of a lifetime. Would I be brave enough to ask Tiger Woods for his autograph, I did and he obliged. I have his signature on the back of my identification card, and a beaming smile from ear to ear.

After lunch we were allocated the job of placing wood chip bark onto the course for players and spectators to get easier access around the wetter areas of the golf club. In convoy we headed out in club cars loaded with chip. We stopped to watch the Opening Ceremony, including the raising of the flags, introduction of the players, all accompanied by Katherine Jenkins singing.

Following this we headed out with more chip bark until it got dark, completing a 15 hour shift. Exhausted, I arrived back at the yard to see another 29 tonnes of wood chip being delivered!

Fri 1 Oct - day one of the Ryder Cup

My day began again at 5am. 45,000 spectators were on their way; heading to what would be a trying and testing day for everyone concerned.

The rain was pouring down, so only a few of us had jobs. I was to sit and wait for my call. The matches started on time but the rain was getting harder. The shout came and my colleague and I ran from our sheds to the 1st green to push the water off.

We got there just in time to see Jeff Overton, (USA team), hole his putt from off the green. As that was the last match, we headed out to the 5th to squeegee the fairway

clear of water. The weather was getting worse and we were facing a losing battle.

The second match arrived but play was suspended. We tried to clear the course at midday but to no avail.

The rain just came harder. The final shout came at 3.15 - we were to try again. I left with my "pump team" to clear water from the bunkers and push water off the greens and fairways - it was hard work. Finally, seven and a half hours later, play resumed.

It took us until nearly 7.30 to clear the rest of the course. It was a huge effort and I cannot believe, after seeing the pictures on the TV, what an achievement it was. We had a final briefing from Jim McKenzie. He was fresh from the Media Centre where an American journalist had commented that no other greenkeeping team in the world could have achieved what we had.

I have to mention my colleagues for together working so hard to pull off that miracle.

Also to the crowd who stayed throughout the day and kept us all motivated, encouraging us every time we cleared a green, a bunker or a fairway by giving us the loudest cheers, and to the gang of American Vikings who sang to us all on the 6th fairway!

Sun 3 Oct - European golf's (and greenkeeping's) finest day

Rain was falling hard again and all the talk was about how the course had never been this flooded - would this be the first Ryder Cup to be cancelled?

Overnight Europe were leading in all six matches but if play did not start by 18.43 all matches would be deemed a half and Europe would be two points down going into the singles matches.

The weather broke and at 10.30 we hit the course hole by hole pushing water off greens and fairways, pumping water out of the bunkers and raking up all the washed down sand (that evening I watched myself raking a bunker on the 18th fairway on the news!).

We all worked so hard and were absolutely shattered by the end but somehow we managed to get play started by 1.20pm - a day that would go on to be remembered as European golf's finest day!



ABOVE: Our convoy.

Mon Oct 4 - The final day

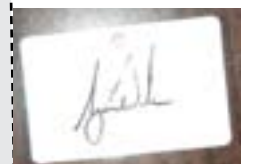
As this was the final day, everything was to be cut and presented perfectly, and despite the rainfall of the last five days, the course was immaculate.

With our work finally completed we were able to go out and watch as Europe reclaimed the Ryder Cup by a single point. We watched as the players celebrated with countless thousands of fans. As a team, we walked down the 17th fairway, crossed the bridge to the 18th green where we gathered to make our way to the closing ceremony and trophy presentation. As we walked toward the ceremony the fans recognised who we were and a clap quickly turned into a huge standing ovation.

I have never been so proud in my life. As a team, we were getting the recognition that was rightly deserved for our unbelievable achievements in making this Ryder Cup playable, for our part in the success of the European team and for raising the profile of greenkeepers and turf professionals worldwide.

This was the tournament where a small team of skilled greenkeepers became one of the most respected groups of people within the golfing world.

BELOW: Recognise this man? It's amazing how close you get to the stars!



ABOVE: Tiger's autograph

BELOW: Some of the team

To read Peters blog in full go to: www.countrywidefarmers.co.uk/celticmanorblog

