



Living the dream



Scott MacCallum meets the 2010 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year

Back in 1997 a 12 year-old schoolboy explained to his Careers Advisor that he loved cutting grass and really would like a job that paid him to do just that.

The Advisor suggested that he think about greenkeeping and recommended that he check out the internet to find out more. When he did, the first thing he came across was a report on the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award in Greenkeeper International.

If young Andrew Stanger had been keen to cut grass for a living prior to that the realisation that you could also win prizes and make a proper career out of it set a rocket under his ambitions and 13 years later he has emulated 1997 winner, Steve Nixon, and become the 2010 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year.

"I'm absolutely thrilled to bits," said Andrew.

"Before I got to Aldwark Manor I'd read about all the other finalists in the magazine and realised just how tough a competition it would be.

"It was very intimidating and when the runners-up names were read out, and it was win or bust, I looked across at the others and saw a number of potential winners sitting there. When my name was read out I could hardly move."

While Andrew was shocked to win, it would have come as no surprise to anyone who has come across him during the last five years.

Since then he has achieved his NVQ Level 2 in six months; worked at Liberty National Golf Club, in New York, as part of the Ohio State University Intern programme; worked at Augusta National for a period including the 2009 Masters, and was snapped up as Course

Manager of Horsforth Golf Club, in Leeds, on his return to the UK.

Andrew can trace his passion right back to the age of five when he used to join his dad at weekends as he worked at Sowerby Bridge Cricket Club.

"I used to stand on the back of his roller and go round and round for hours. I was just fascinated by the stripes, the grass clippings, the smell of petrol... everything."

He got his first job selling lottery tickets at Halifax Rugby Club when he was just seven and started working on gardens when he was not much older.

Wetherby every night after school and I'd get changed and have my sandwiches in the car on the way. Ultimately though, I didn't fancy the life of a professional footballer and turned down the offer to stay with the academy."

Having done well at school, and looking to make his greenkeeping dream a reality, Andrew was accepted for the turfgrass science degree at Myerscough College, but left after a couple of months.

"I'd never been on a ride-on machine, or even been on a golf course, and it didn't feel right. The course content was brilliant but

"When I was 14 I got a job at a stables. It was a big stately home and the owner asked me if I could make it a full day and work on the gardens in the afternoon. I was there for six years and I always used to leave the lawns until last because that was my favourite bit"

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"I just thought then that if someone would pay me to cut grass every day I'd do it."

All this time Andrew was combining his gardening with school and football – he was a member of the Leeds United Academy and played alongside future England player, James Milner.

"My dad used to drive me from Halifax to the training ground in

I was with guys who all had golf course experience and I felt that I was sitting on my backside getting money from my parents which just wasn't me."

Returning home he put together a CV and sent it out to 50 clubs within an hour of his home. One of them, Calverley GC, invited him over for a chat and he met Course Manager, Clive Walton, who immediately offered him a job, starting the following day.

With Calverley short of staff Andrew was in at the deep end and loved it.

"I pestered Clive all the time about the job. I think he enjoyed it and he trained me by the book, no short



cuts. After two years they sent me to Askham Bryan College to do my NVQ 2," he said.

Having been trained in advance by Clive, he sailed through in just six months and picked up the College's Student of the Year prize.

"I thought Steve Prinn, the Head of Turf at the College, was amazing. He'd come in without notes and reel off information and facts. I couldn't believe that he knew so much and it showed me that I had a mountain to climb."

Andrew had already applied to the Ohio State Intern programme, putting himself under pressure to achieve his NVQ within the timescale, and it was while he was working in a pub, something he did on Saturdays, Sundays and Tuesdays, that he got a call from Mike O'Keefe, asking him how New York sounded and offering to send him to Liberty National Golf Club for six months.

"It sounded brilliant, although I was terrified. I checked the club out on the website and, at that time, it was the most expensive course ever built, costing, I believe, \$250 million and laid out on an old toxic wasteland using rubble from the Twin Towers," said Andrew, who handed in his notice to Calverley, got his visa and, within a couple of weeks, was off.

Andrew's enthusiasm and drive soon caught the attention of the Liberty National Superintendent, Greg James.

"I said yes to everything and never took a day off. I was spraying greens within a week, rolling greens and lapping it all up. I'd often be there on my own at weekends carrying out the greens check and reporting back to Greg," said Andrew.

felt I'd got the Golden Ticket but, again, I was terrified."

As before he threw himself into it and, keen not to allow home sickness to kick in, immersed himself in work, even swapping with guys from the sister squad so that he could work every weekend.

"We'd start at 4am and I knew I wouldn't finish until at least 5pm, but would often work until 7, 8 or 9.

"The attention to detail was incredible and it never ends. Once, early on, I went back and said I'm done and they said, 'what do you mean you're done?' By the end I knew every inch of my holes!"
Andrew Stanger

After just two months Greg asked him where he would be going after New York and Andrew explained that it very much depended on the feedback and how well Greg would say that he'd done.

"He told me that he had friends at Augusta National and that I might like to think about going down there. I said I didn't need to think about it and sent my CV down to Superintendent, Brad Owen, I then had a three hour telephone interview and after an intense process was told that I'd got the position. I

They got the picture pretty quickly that this kid was keen, and a bit nuts!

"I spent the first two weeks with the Bunker Technician and was then put on the Hole Care team initially being responsible for holes 8 and 9 but within a couple of weeks the prize holes of 11 and 12 on Amen Corner became available and they said that they thought I'd be good down there and did I fancy it?"

So Andrew spent the rest of his time at Augusta solely responsible

for two of the most famous and spectacular holes in golf making sure they were in perfect condition before and during the 2009 Masters.

“The attention to detail was incredible and it never ends. Once, early on, I went back and said I’m done and they said, ‘what do you mean you’re done?’

“They took me back and said what about this bit, and what about that bit. I got the idea pretty quickly. By the end I knew every inch of my holes,” he said, revealing that during Masters week itself he worked 115 hours alone.

Andrew’s visaran out the day after the Masters finished and although Greg and Brad both offered him jobs he’d already decided to return home.

It wasn’t long before he was snapped up. His old boss at Calverley, Clive, rang him to say that he’d been contacted by Horsforth Golf Club about taking over for three weeks as the Course Manager had been badly injured in a car accident.

“He said he couldn’t do it but had told them that I’d do it. I must admit that I wasn’t sure that I could, but I was still brimming with confidence from my time in America and went along.

“All the guys were older than me bar one and I hadn’t had much people management experience but I felt that as it was only for three weeks and I was capable of keeping the place tidy and mown.”

That three weeks became three months and then, with the returning Course Manager due to retire earlier this year he was offered the job on a full time basis from June and at the Final he had been doing the job for two and a half months.

The club is right behind Andrew and know that it is unlikely that he’ll be with them for 40 years like the previous head.

“I’ve told them that I’ve still got a lot to prove and many goals in my career but right now Horsforth will get my full attention for as long as I’m there.

“I believe that given the right resources I can present a very well maintained golf course. I’m not bothered about the money or the club’s name on my shirt, it is about pushing myself as far as I can go. I’ve got a long way to go, but I believe I can do it.”

Thirteen years on Andrew is now that young greenkeeper on the front cover of the magazine and there could be no better role model or advert for the greenkeeping profession.



ABOVE: Andrew Stanger (central) won the Award and an eight week trip to the United States where he will undertake a six week study course at the University of Massachusetts and visit the GCSAA’s Golf Industry Show, in Orlando, and Toro’s Californian Headquarters.

Runners-up were Sebastian Cavilla (above left) of The Manor House H & GC, and Sean Borrett (above right) of Ellesborough GC, who win all expenses paid trips to Harrogate and the Continue to Learn programme next January.

The other finalists were Robert Mills, of Sunningdale GC; Craig Boath, of Carnoustie Links; Gavin Moore, of Launceston GC; Tom Hayward, of Frome GC and Stephen Thompson, of Bearsted GC.

RIGHT: The finalists celebrate a strike when out bowling in York, the evening of the awards day

