



## Matt's Personal Thanks

There are of course people who I feel deserve a special mention as they have made a huge contribution to my life and the running and organisation of the Toro student greenkeeper award, in no particular order they are:

Peter Mansfield and Christine Watson, at Lely UK

Sami Collins, Rachael Duffy, Scott MacCallum, Jim Croxtan, Andrew Mellon, Chris Sealey, Archie Dunn and Gary Cunningham, all BIGGA

Bruce Jameson B Jamieson Golf Advisors Ltd; Andrew Stranger, Horsforth Golf Club; Billy McMillan, Tyrell's Wood Golf Club; Amy Ellingham, One Agency/Lely UK;

All of the national finalists, Rob, Miles, Blair, Rhys, Jon, Justin and Ben; Jim McKenzie and Patrick, Callaby Celtic Manor Resort; Martin Perrot, Newport Golf Club; Stuart Hall, John O Gaunt Golf Club; Alan Pierce MG Ham Manor Golf

Club; all of the hard working staff at Ham Manor Golf Club in West Sussex; David Blackmur, Nigel Ellis, Laurie MacMillan, Stuart Franks, all Plumpton College; Hugh Murray, Cannington Centre for Land Based Studies; Mick Beard, Evesham College; Richard Bevan and his family who work at Weston Garden Machinery in Somerset; all of my family and friends who have supported me throughout my life and during the award process.

And last but not least my parents, Jean and Trevor Perks. Hopefully today has re-paid them for the years of grief and monetary hardship that I put them through.

Once again I just like to say thank you to everyone and to let you know how proud and privileged I am to work in an industry that has given me not only a great life but also awarded me for my efforts.

# Perks of the job



Matt Perks is a man who plans to succeed and, as Scott MacCallum found out, it paid off at the final of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Final

**When the name “Matthew Perks” was announced as winner of the 2011 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year competition, the owner of that name felt a mixture of shock and elation and “pretty much every emotion going”.**

One thing it wasn't, however, was a complete bolt from the blue as Matt, Greenkeeper/Mechanic at Ham Manor Golf Club, in West Sussex, had been working towards just that goal for over two years.

He had been well aware of the Toro Competition for some time as his current Course Manager, Alan Pierce MG, was the 2005 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year, an achievement which assisted his own rise from an assistant to the position of Course Manager three years ago.

“I spoke to Alan about doing my Level 2 in Sportsturf two years ago and he was very positive, although I had to wait until one of the other guys had finished his Level 3 first, as we couldn't afford to have two staff members off at the same time,” explained Matt, as we spoke the morning after the Toro final.

“I was eager to get going when I did get to Plumpton College and felt that if I gave it everything over the winter months, and did really well, there was a chance I could get nominated by the College for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year.”

And with that goal firmly in place that's exactly what he did.

“I was working three and four hours every single day to answer the questions set by the Tutor and was always keen to produce the

best piece of work I possibly could.”

In this life there are certain people for whom it is very difficult not to feel a tinge of sympathy and one of those must be the poor student who was next in line after Matt when it came to handing over course work.

“It is normal to fill one of the big portfolios with work during the course. I produced two. The reason being that I always knew that I wanted to be a Course Manager and that then I'd be responsible for bringing through other students, so my thinking was that if I could produce the best portfolio of work I could while on the course it would be a great reference document or learning tool for them to look through,” said Matt, who also completed the course two months early.

“So I suppose I was already thinking five years into the future. I always have a plan otherwise things just don't happen. You've got to make them happen, haven't you?”

Matt's rare combination of inspiration and perspiration reaped dividends and he became the college's Joint Student of the Year with Abbie Holland, of West Sussex Golf Club, and was duly nominated to represent the College for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year.

The Regional interview before Past BIGGA Chairman, Billy McMillan; Larry Pearman, of Toro Dealer John Shaw Machinery, and BIGGA's Head of Learning and Development, Sami Collins flew by and Matt anxiously awaited the verdict.

It speaks volumes for how much it meant to the 28 year-old that he postponed a visit to his parents by

a day, just to wait for the post to arrive with what turned out to be a BIGGA franked letter containing very good news.

“I went back through every single piece of college work I'd done to make sure I was prepared to answer anything, whether it be on trees, health and safety or any element of the job. Much of it was already automatic as I was doing it all the time at work, but there were other topics, in areas in which I didn't have regular involvement, and I wanted to refresh my knowledge and understanding of them.”

The overriding feeling for Matt once he got to Aldwark Manor was

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**Matt Perks**

one of ensuring that he didn't let himself down.

“If I studied as hard as I could beforehand, did well in the interview and produced the best (finalists' assignment) report that I could, but didn't win I would have still slept well happy that I had done myself justice. The worst thing would have been to have not performed as well as I could and let myself down, especially when you know what winning this Award can do for you,” he explained.

Matt was born and bred in the Somerset village of Sandford, near Weston-Super-Mare, strong

on community and so small that it has one of everything - a pub, school, shop, church, and, as he reveals, with a broad grin, a cider factory!

After an initial foray into computer programming - "Being stuck in a basement room with no windows and fluorescent lights made me physically ill. It wasn't for me at all" - he was accepted for an apprenticeship with GAB Garden Machinery in Sandford, where he worked with Workshop Manager Richard Bevan, who has remained a good friend to Matt ever since. During his time there he passed his Level 3 in Turfcare Engineering at Evesham College.

With a sound mechanical foundation under his belt, and following a spell in Tewkesbury, he was attracted to a position in charge of maintaining the golf machinery at Cannington College, which had recently been bought by Bridge water College and had a half million pound's worth of investment in the fleet.

"It was something which really attracted me. I was an enthusiastic golfer and it was something which really interested me. In fact, I took a £2000 pay cut and gave myself an extra half an hour's drive each day, but I knew that I could make the job work."

Once he'd put all his procedures in place at Cannington, Matt found that he had some available time each week and asked Course Manager, Hugh Murray, if there was anything he could help with on the course.

"I went out with a zero turn mower and cut some semi rough and really enjoyed it and the next thing I was hand cutting greens and raking bunkers. I had a passion for it straight away and once you've been bitten by the greenkeeping bug you'll never go back."

A year and a half later he saw a job for Greenkeeper/Mechanic at Ham Manor Golf Club advertised in Greenkeeper International.

Matt applied, but anticipated a strong field for what is a fine golf course in a very good part of the world. However he impressed at the interview and was offered the job.

"I was offered the job at the interview and thought about it for all of 10 minutes before accepting," he smiled.

When he started his ratio was 60% mechanicing and 40% greenkeeping but since then, and he has again put his procedures in place and got the workshop to how he wanted it, it has turned to 70% greenkeeping and 30% mechanicing.

Matt's experience, of mechanic first and greenkeeper second, is not as common as the reverse but he does see significant benefits.

"Irrigation is straightforward to me because it is just a simple hydraulic system buried in the ground and I am used to dealing with much more complicated hydraulic repairs on mowers.

"I believe I need knowledge of both areas if I'm going to be a Course Manager. If it's a small club then I'll need to do the work myself or train someone else and if it's a bigger club, which employs a mechanic, it is important to know that he is doing the job properly."

One of his greatest experiences has been to be one of the volunteer mechanics at last year's Ryder Cup at Celtic Manor.

"I was one of nine volunteers who joined Equipment Manager Cal Callaby and overall team of 13 working to keep the machines going in horribly wet conditions.

"We were out on the golf course with bunker pumps to keep them going when they became blocked with gravel rather than have them brought back to the Sheds. The experience will stay with me for the rest of my life."

His time working with Cal may also have had more longstanding benefits to Matt as, following Cal's nomination he has recently become a Director of the International Golf Course Equipment Managers Association.

He is also looking forward to his trip to the United States, a place he hasn't visited before and he has already had the opportunity to chat with last year's Toro winner, Andrew Stanger, about what to expect when in the States.

He is just the sort of character who will gain immensely from the Study course at the University of Massachusetts, while he has friends who have already primed him for his trip to Las Vegas and the Golf Industry Show.

"I must thank everyone at BIGGA, Toro and Lely for all the work and money that goes into making the competition a success while I'd also like to congratulate the other finalists who are fine greenkeepers and wonderful people.

"None of this would have happened if I hadn't taken a £2000 pay cut to go to Cannington, but it has put me in a position where I can do something special with my life, and this is just the start."



**Matt has had the opportunity to chat with last year's Toro winner, Andrew Stanger (above left) about what to expect when in the States**





The 2011, and 23rd, winner of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year is Matthew Perks, Greenkeeper/Mechanic at Ham Manor Golf Club representing Plumpton College.

The two runners-up were Robert Mills, of Sunningdale Golf Club and Merrist Wood College and Miles Todd, Deputy Course Manager of Rhuddlan Golf Club and Deeside College.

The other five finalists were Justin Howard, of Cranham Golf Centre and Myerscough College; Blair Somerville, of Helensburgh Golf Club and GOSTA; Rhys Williams, of Royal Porthcawl Golf Club and Pencoed College; Jon Watson, of Burgham Golf Club and Myerscough College and Benjamin Hunter, of Garon Park Golf Complex and Myerscough College.

The Final, which took place at BIGGA Headquarters at Aldwark Manor, comprised a 45 minute interview before Pete Mansfield, of Lely UK; Bruce Jamieson, a respected golf course consultant; Chris Sealey, a BIGGA Director, and Sami Collins, BIGGA's Head of Learning and Development. The finalists were also presented with an assignment on the morning of the final and had to produce a report based on two of the Alwark Manor golf course holes.

Following the results everyone changed and went for a meal in York before rounding the day off with some high quality tenpin bowling.

Matt has won an eight week trip to the United States beginning in January where he will undertake a six week study course at the University of Massachusetts and trips to both the GCSAA's Golf Industry Show, in Las Vegas, and Toro's Californian base. Matt's Plumpton College Tutor David Blackmur also wins a trip to The Golf Industry Show.

Rob and Miles both win expenses paid trips to Harrogate Week 2012, while all eight receive a year's BIGGA membership.