



The **BIGGA** test

The BIGGA National Championship 2012, sponsored by Charterhouse and Kubota, will be played at the glorious Irvine Golf Club, at Bogside, in Scotland. In this 25th year of BIGGA, Irvine GC is 125, so the championship in October should be a celebration to remember. Jim Cook returned from the trip north with splendid photography and words to match



The course offers a behemoth of a challenge and as it has been known to reduce professional golfers to whimpering wrecks is definitely not one for the faint hearted.

Head Greenkeeper, Derek Wilson, said: "The Scottish pro Alan Tait brought three young pros down to play and they were saying 'it's only six-and-a-half thousand yards, it must be easy' then in the clubhouse at the end of the round he said 'tell them what you scored' and one, in tears, admitted he hadn't broken 100!"

A true links challenge, the course sits on sand with fairways divided roughly by thick gorse bushes and heather which lay in wait for any wayward shots.

"If you hit the ball straight you'll get a good score. Accuracy off the

tee is a must because if you end up in the bushes, you're in trouble," Derek added.

It was built in 1887 and some of the present character of the course comes from James Braid's designs in the 1920s. His use of nature as a tool is greatly in evidence around Irvine GC and part of its individualistic charm can be attributed to the great Scottish course designer.

The course has not changed much since then and all the bunkers still sit in their original positions. In the past 25 years, new tees have been built at the 2nd, 6th, 12th, 17th and 18th.

Derek said: "The basic shape of the golf course hasn't altered and with some of the lengthy carries we have around here, can you imagine trying to hit them with hickory golf clubs? It's the same with all of the courses down this stretch and you



The 12th at Arran

look at the scores they made back then it's incredible."

One man who can imagine this is Derek himself as he often plays in the Hickory Championships.

He started as a greenkeeper at Irvine GC in 1975, went to Turnberry in 1981 and stayed there until 1986 when he was offered the job of Head Greenkeeper back at Irvine.

Irvine GC is regularly used by the R&A as a Final Open Qualifying Course and in 2003 the club co-hosted the Amateur Championship with Royal Troon. In 2007, the British Seniors Open was co-hosted with Turnberry and in 2009 the Ladies Home Internationals were hosted at the club.

One of the many pros who have played Irvine was the charismatic Christy O'Connor Jnr, now on the senior tour. "He's well known for



hitting that two-iron on the 18th at the Belfry and he must have sold that two-iron ten times in the clubhouse here! He qualified no bother by playing conservatively with irons off the tees. He said that you cannae win the Open here, just get into it, so he didn't do anything silly."

Out on the course itself, the greens consist of around 60% bentgrass and 40% Poa annua and the fairways are mainly bentgrass with small bits of fescue. "We say around here that you don't play fairway shots from grass, you play from turf," added Derek.

He explained the reasons as to why sleepers were installed on the faces of several bunkers around the course: "The ones on the 18th fairway have been in over 20 years and the reason we put them in is because they last longer. It's

normally very windy here and the wind erodes the turf. Then you have under-hanging lies in the bunkers, so we went with an experiment with sleepers after we had seen them at Prestwick Golf Club. For a traditional golf course like ours, it suits it because they are fitted into the banking."

Earlier this year, sleepers were installed into the large bunker in front of the green on the par-three 16th. This work was done in-house by the six staff on the course and took about two weeks.

"All the front sleepers have wires attached to ones at the back so they can't fall, so there's a lot of work in it. If one fell it could cause serious injury so we've got to make sure they can't move at all. We decided to use traditional rail sleepers rather than new ones as it looks



better when they are weathered. New sleepers just tend to look like plywood,” said Derek.

The only maintenance the sleepers require is a coat of creosote once-a-year.

When playing the course, each hole offers unique challenges and it is interesting to note that there is just one par-five and two par-threes at Irvine. Five of the par-fours are over 400 yards and the overall yardage is 6423 yards from the white tees.

The 4th runs parallel to the main West Coast railway line which also acts as out of bounds to the left. The raised green can be tricky because a long approach may find the River Irvine and a short one will leave a difficult chip.

Number five is menacingly

called ‘Sandface’ and lives up to its name with a gigantic bunker set at the foot of an incline in front of the green. This 279 yard par-four requires a 250 yard carry in the air if a player wants to be bold and go for the green.

The 7th hole runs alongside where the old Bogside racecourse used to be. The racecourse was one of the oldest in Scotland with a history dating back to the 17th century. It was the home of the Scottish Grand National until it was moved, due to the closure of Bogside railway station, to Ayr Racecourse in 1966.

Of the 119 bunkers on the course, the 8th boasts six of them. This, one of the two par-threes, is 180 yards and once again demands an accurate tee shot.



16th With new sleepers in bunker



The par-four 14th is called 'The Specs' because of the resemblance of two bunkers in front of the green to spectacles. It is also worth noting that the 14th at Carnoustie's Championship Course is named 'Spectacles' for the same reason. There are two flags on the pole on Irvine's 14th green. This is because it is two-tiered and two flags indicate a pin placement on the top tier, whereas one indicates a lower tier pin position.

When you stand on one of the higher tees out on the course, such as the 15th, the industrial past of the area is still in evidence as well as the beautiful nature offered by this part of Scotland. The Arran Mountains rise in the distance on one side whilst the now defunct ICI factory, that made munitions during the Second World War, can be seen between the course and the Firth of Clyde. A busy train track runs alongside parts of the course and smoke rises from factories across the river in Irvine.

The 15th is named 'Bartonholm' after a now-demolished mining village which lay just north of the 16th hole. The story behind this miner's row is interesting as three Scottish amateur champions lived here during the last century. Hammy McNally, Jack Cannon and Jimmy Walker all honed their golfing skills at Irvine GC and the latter was the last amateur to play Jack Nicklaus in the 1961 Walker Cup.

This golf course demands accurate shot-making and nowhere is this fact more apparent than on the final three holes. The par-three 16th has the large bunker, complete with new sleepers, guarding the front whilst a slope at the back means recovering from a long shot is tricky.

The par-four 17th is probably the hardest hole on the course. Off the tee, heavy rough and gorse awaits a shot leaked to the right, whilst a sloping fairway punishes shots which are even slightly too far to the

“The par-four 14th is called ‘The Specs’ because of the resemblance of two bunkers in front of the green to spectacles”

left. A tee shot hitting the left side of the fairway is destined for the rough or heather, so an accurate iron shot to the right hand side of the fairway is required here.

The 18th poses a formidable test of golfing skills. From the tee the player is greeted by the sight of two very ominous looking bunkers with gorse jutting out to the right and the rail track to the left. The blind tee shot to reach the fairway must carry 190 yards from the back tees to clear the bunkers. A good target to aim for off the tee is the right hand side of the clubhouse. Even after breathing a sigh of relief due to an accurately placed tee shot, the



golfer will notice a green guarded by seven bunkers and a gully at the front.

Even under calm conditions these holes require precision, but imagine the golfer approaching these final holes with a good score under their belt, perhaps with the nerves jangling and palms sweating. Add blustery conditions into the equation and the perils are heightened to a frightening level.

As BIGGA celebrates its 25th year what better way to mark this than to have the National Championship at a course celebrating its 125th year. The record of previous successful National Championships combined with the challenges of the fabulous links course that is Irvine GC make this year's competition, on 8 - 9 October, one not to be missed.

Irvine GC Kit Inventory

*John Deere 3235B fairway mower
Toro Sidewinder with rotary heads
John Deere triple mower
Jacobsen Mk 4 greens cutter
6 x Jacobsen 523B hand mowers
(3 older model and 3 newer)
Iseki Tractor
John Deere 955 compact tractor
Wiedenmann Terra Spike verti-drain
John Deere Hercore aerator
Ransomes 180 diesel*




The par-four 14th: called 'The Specs' because of the resemblance of two bunkers in front of the green to spectacles



Blowing clumps of grass near the 12th green

Book your spot now...



Challenge Trophy results from the last five years of the National Championship

Last year's championship, at West Lincs Golf Club, saw Jason Hunt, an Assistant at Addington Palace Golf Club, keep his composure in blustery conditions to win by one shot from Kevin Boxall, of Guildford GC, whilst Garry Duncan, of Carnoustie Links, came third.

2010: 1st - Paul Frith
2009: 1st - Derek McJannet
2008: 1st - David Simpson
2007: 1st - David Simpson

BIGGA National Championship 2012, The Irvine Golf Club, October 8-9 • Entry Form

Please select the relevant category:

- Full Member
- Affiliate Member

The entry fee of **£95** includes all golf fees, lunch both days and dinner on Monday evening. Please note that there is no accommodation provided.

Name

Address.....

..... Post Code

Mobile

E-mail

Membership No.

Handicap

BIGGA Section.....

Golf Club

Payment method (please tick)

- I enclose my cheque made payable to 'BIGGA Ltd' value **£95**
- Please debit my Mastercard / Switch / Visa / Delta card with the fee of **£95**

Card number

.....

Start Date Expiry Date

Last 3 security digits

Issue No. (Switch/Delta only)

Signature

Date

Or E-mail your details to:
rachael@bigga.co.uk
 Ensure you receive confirmation of entry by return email.

Deadline for entry is 11th September 2012.

Completed entry forms should be sent to:
BIGGA National Championship, BIGGA House, Aldwark, Alne, York YO61 1UF



The main tournament for the Challenge Trophy will be played over 36 holes, medal play, with the best overall gross score producing the BIGGA National Champion, who must be a greenkeeper member. The greenkeeper player with the lowest nett score will be presented with the BIGGA Challenge Cup.

There will be prizes for 1st, 2nd, 3rd over 36 holes in both the nett and gross categories, additionally after each day of 18 holes there will be prizes for winners of handicap divisions. The BIGGA Regional Team Cup and prize will be calculated from the 8 best nett scores over the first day of play. If you have a poor first day an alternative Stableford competition will be held on the second day of play.