

Open all hours

The BIGGA Open Support Team 2012 worked tirelessly from dusk until dawn at a rain-soaked Royal Lytham & St Annes GC in July. Here are the snapshots and memories from another joyous occasion, writes Steve Castle





Thirty minutes after Ernie Els remarkably captured the most coveted prize in golf, a large matching red polo-shirted group attracted bemused glances as they posed for photographs on the 18th fairway close to the spot where Adam Scott's dreams finally crumbled.

The BIGGA Open Support Team 2012 wearied by a challenging week knew they had played an important part in the success of the event whilst many lasting friendships had been cemented.

As The 141st Open ended, the exhausted but happy group reflected on their vital role in preparing the bunkers each morning - a mammoth task as the famous old links boasts over 200 traps, match raking, divoting and attending to the practice areas. As the week progressed and the weather finally improved they were able to enjoy the sight of the sun rising across the course during one of their regular 5am starts, something they will treasure for the rest of their days.

The home greenkeeping team led superbly by Paul Smith consisted of his own regular crew of twelve, a further twenty or so local volunteers, four John Deere staff and six more provided by the R&A from other Open Championship venues fully embraced the BIGGA team, including greenkeepers from across the UK and as far afield as Australia and America.

The advance BIGGA team assembled on the Monday to begin bunker preparation from Tuesday onwards. The remainder were all present and correct in time for the traditional Wednesday afternoon start and their first sight of the glorious links during the R&A Briefing by Grant Moir, Director of Rules.

The course was already damp after a horrendous summer, which has left greenkeepers cursing across the land. But it was tested to



the absolute limit after hours of torrential rain throughout Thursday night and into Friday morning.

Head Greenkeeper Paul Smith described watching the rain clatter down as "probably the worst feeling of my life" - but the tireless work of his extended team and the BIGGA boys and girls ensured that miraculously, play began on time on the second day.

The walkways between holes were at times reminiscent of a particularly damp Glastonbury, and the incredibly high water table meant that some of the bunkers retained standing water despite everyone's best efforts, illustrating quite how much rain had fallen. But there was not a murmur of complaint from the players, showing what a professional job had been done.

They then trod the same meticulously prepared fairways as Tiger Woods, Tom Watson and Rory McIlroy, springing into action when a hook or slice found the sand. In many cases the divot team worked until 11pm - a whole 18 hours after the first members of the team had been on the course.

	1995 St. A's	1996 Lythm	1997 Troon	1998 B'dale	1999 C'stie	2000 St. A's	2001 Lythm	2002 Mfield	2003 St.Gs
Bnkr	112	185	84	117	115	112	197	148	106
Rd 1	214	501	344	355	539	148	557	359	388
Rd 2	201	577	272	406	468	164	547	372	405
Rd 3	130	269	107	226	202	65	224	175	149
Rd 4	156	271	136	153	265	71	257	169	181
Total	701	1618	859	1140	1474	448	1585	1078	1123

	2004 Troon	2005 St. A's	2006 Hlake	2007 C'stie	2008 Birkdale	2009 T'berry	2010 St A's	2011 St Gs	2012 Lytham
Bnkr	93	112	96	113	123	85	112	104	205
Rd 1	393	252	352	442	472	272	149	291	453
Rd 2	371	203	353	482	379	332	200	391	456
Rd 3	148	100	183	189	219	172	77	175	260
Rd 4	185	121	204	198	198	185	85	159	268
Total	1097	676	1092	1311	1268	961	511	1016	1437

Support Team Statistics

Bunkers on course - 205
Prepared by BIGGA early morning support team six times - 1230

Repaired each day by BIGGA Support Team -
 Thursday 453, Friday 456, Saturday 260, Sunday 268, Total 1,437



MAIN TOP IMAGE: Bev Blair observes Tiger Woods and his entourage. FAR LEFT: Asa English, LEFT: Richard Whyman and Graham Blum; TOP RIGHT: Richard Whyman and Andy Unwin



Celebrating 25 years of BIGGA





Open letters of thanks from Royal Lytham & St Annes GC Head Greenkeeper, Paul Smith and Grant Moir, The R&A's Director - Rules of Golf

A BIG thanks to the BIGGA brigade

The Open Championship was a fine example of team work across the board. I have nothing but praise for the active support at silly o'clock in the morning when faced with dealing with variety of bunker conditions. The BIGGA support team did a sterling job of preparing the bunkers each morning, which was a difficult task under the circumstances.

The course that the spectators and competitors were met with on the Friday morning, was not the same course that the Home and BIGGA team faced. Several intensive bands of rain fell early Friday morning, which had not been forecast. It felt as if the weather gods had conspired against us.

Our spirits had truly been dampened and although feeling numb, the whole team rallied with pumps, pipes, generators and squeegees to clear the course and tented village of standing water.

Despite the weather the course stood up extremely well, and started to show its true colours over the weekend as conditions and drier weather prevailed.

My thanks go to all those volunteers who assisted the Club and R&A in preparing the course under difficult conditions. A job well done by all the team!

Paul Smith, Head Greenkeeper, Royal Lytham & St Annes GC

To the team

Thank you for everything that you did to assist at Royal Lytham & St Annes.

It was not an easy week, and it was reassuring to know that we had the back-up of the BIGGA team, and great that I could make an emergency call at 4am and get an immediate response!

The team did a great job in the mornings in very difficult circumstances with, firstly, wet bunkers and then wettish bunkers drying out.

I hope that things will be less complicated at Muirfield next year.

Grant Moir, R&A



BIGGA Open Support Team 2012

Back Row: Stephen Hopkins, Robert Bemment, Jamie Acton, Paul Griffiths, Rhys Norville, Simon Forshaw, Ashley Marshall, Jez Hughes, Gavin Robson, Gary Cunningham, Alan Donlevy, Richard Saunders, Darren Jones, Darren Abbs, John Keenaghan, Asa English, Daniel Woodcraft, John Young.

Second Row: Jason Brooks, Graham Blum, Geoffrey Beaucham, Matthew Hutchinson, Ben Scrivener, Robert Hill, Andrew Slingsby, Rober, Bruce Hicks, Tom Woods, Tony Smith, Chris Sealey, (Kneeing Down) - Billy Merritt, John Wells MG, Steve Mason, Douglas McIntosh, Mark Brooks, Robert Sandilands, Brian Hunter, Scott Thomson, Richard Jenkins, Steve Castle, Sean Sullivan, John Geddes, Jim Croxton

Front Row: Andrew Unwin, Kevan Glass, Paul Young, Miles Todd, Mark Fry, Bev Blair, Miles Wood, Rachael Duffy, Tracey Maddison, Sandra Raper, Phillip Graham





TOP LEFT: Jason Brooks;
MIDDLE ABOVE: Royal Lytham
Greenkeeping Staff
LEFT: Robert Bemment and
INSET LEFT: Miles Todd



*Celebrating 25
years of BIGGA*

Steve Mason, from Stocks Golf Club, knew he was in for a busy opening morning when his three players all found separate bunkers with their opening tee shots on the notorious par three first – and he went on to rake 17 in total, the highest of the day.

He said: “You have to be on your toes, and I knew it would be a long day from the first three shots. But that’s what we’re there for, and it was an honour not only to walk alongside the players but also to work on The Open course.”

Some enjoyed unexpected surprises, like Miles Todd from Rhuddlan Golf Club. He was expecting a quiet final day when he joined Andres Romero and Chad Campbell’s early morning pairing – so imagine his amazement when footballer Carlos Tevez suddenly appeared as caddie for his compatriot.

Miles said: “I thought it looked like him and I went up and had a little chat with him. He was a really nice bloke and loves his golf.

“From very few spectators at the start, word quickly got round and it had become a circus by the back nine. People were calling out to him and there were photographers running around everywhere, numbers swelling after every hole.

“I’m not sure Chad Campbell was too happy about it. Tevez kept standing behind him as he played and at one point Romero had to stop Tevez from slamming a club into the bag as Campbell was taking a shot!”

Paul Griffiths of Seaford Golf Club added: “It’s been an amazing experience. It’s my first Open and it’s been out of this world. People would pay thousands to experience this.

“It’s really hard work and everyone finishes the week absolutely shattered. But I enjoyed it so much. I might tell the lads at the club it was rubbish then I’ll get to go next year too!”

John Keenaghan from Chipping Sodbury Golf Club was given the honour of accompanying odds-on favourite Adam Scott up and down the fairways on the final day, and raked the final bunker of the tournament on the 18th where the luckless Aussie allowed the Claret Jug to slip from his grasp.

The team spent their rare spare time recuperating in the BIGGA marquee, with the internet access provided by Sherriff Amenity proving popular yet again.

The marquee itself was a bustle of activity throughout the week, with Head of Membership, Tracey



Maddison and Learning and Development Executive, Rachael Duffy holding the fort admirably.

The first day of play saw the ceremonial passing of the BIGGA baton from outgoing Chairman Andrew Mellon to new Chairman Tony Smith.

Andrew, who is departing to become General Manager of Hydro-turf in Qatar, handed the badge to previous vice-chairman Tony in the BIGGA marquee.

The tournament ended with Paul Smith personally thanking the team for their terrific efforts, a sentiment that was echoed by Chief Executive Jim Croxton.

See you at Muirfield 2013!

