

A first for Bulgaria



BIGGA member, Jordan Fairweather, describes his time working in one of the world's newer golfing destinations





“ Bulgaria is a relatively new country to the game of golf but in 2011 it has taken further steps in recognising itself as a golf destination.

The country has recently been awarded the 2012 “Undiscovered Golf Destination of The Year” by the International Association of Golf Tour Operators and now has six 18-hole facilities open, offering two Gary Player Signature designs, a Peter Harradine, a Paul McGinley and two Ian Woosnam’s, all excellent facilities with teaching academy’s, residential apartments, hotels and spa resorts. Pravets Golf Club is the first to offer a fully flood light range and short game area.

Back in April, 2010, the then soon-to-be opened Pravets Golf Club, designed by Peter Harradine and managed by Braemar Golf of St Andrews, was awarded the “PGA Professionals championship of Europe” by the PGAs of Europe, to be staged annually for three years from last September. This would not only be a return of a tourna-

full six months earlier than ideally preferred. Due to the geographical location of Pravets the weather changes dramatically and temperatures will rise from 3 degrees to 18 degrees in little over 10 days and will never drop below that until autumn. Summer temperatures rise to approx 36 degrees Celsius, coupled with high humidity, and during 2010, I had witnessed all kinds of disease on the turf from Dollar Spot, Pythium, Take All and Fusarium in a six week period.

Warm season grasses would grow here for three to four months with this climate. Pravets is the first golf course to be seeded with traditional fescue bent in Bulgaria rather than creeping bents found on all other courses. When specifications for the course were drawn up, long term management costs had to be considered.

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ment to the yearly calendar after a six year absence but the first professional tournament to be held in Bulgaria.

The final fairway and greens at Pravets were seeded in September 2010 with construction completed on December 11, and snow fall then covering the course from December 14 until early March. Grow-in of the last fairways had to be quick before temperatures fell, so a quick release ammonium nitrate product was sourced from local agriculture. Fairways were sand capped but suffered from erosion damage before being handed over to the maintenance team.

With limited supply of fungicide available in Bulgaria we managed to get together enough to apply Azoxystrobin to all surfaces prior to snowfall. When snow melted all surfaces were 100% free of disease and the first goal was to be ready for a grand opening on May 15 by the Bulgarian Prime minister, a

be significantly higher.

With a greenkeeping team of 19, of whom 50% speak English, we worked towards opening. This was a task which was problematic due to four greens receiving major contamination from erosion of soil and clay before being handed over to us by the contractor along with some fairways, and also lack of access roads and infrastructure hindering us until mid July did not make it easy. A total of 1025 tonnes of sand was spread on the course in conjunction with needle tinning and hollow-coring to smooth out surfaces and remove soil contamination. Always In the back of our minds was the tournament in September and if we had not committed to the grand opening in May we probably would have re-laid four greens and three fairways.

One thing we are very fortunate is our client, Terra Tour Services, wishes to see its golf course at the same level as their hotels, all luxury



4 star resorts. Due to this TTS signed a deal with Toro, a partner of Braemar Golf, for the biggest fleet of Toro equipment in Eastern Europe along with a state of the art maintenance facility.

With grow-in near complete and the golf course open six months earlier than we would have liked we turned our minds to an agronomic programme to, not just suit our fescue turf, but to cope with the unknown stresses of the site.

With no history of the site we have dealt with outbreaks of which at the time were unknown grasses germinating which had been in the native soil below the sand cap and worked their way up due to rotating of the surfaces before sand spread, a lesson learnt for future construction!

Common Bermuda grass encroachment from adjacent land, which thrives in our summer tried to invade; the need for golf carts on a relatively new sward in 35 degree heat has been a big stress but, with the revenue they provide, it is not something we can ban.

Changing roller types and HOC on certain fairways and greens, a combination of hand watering and day watering being required to micro manage situations which were not only dealing with daily

stresses but still at a growing in stage.

With September approaching, and the greens and fairways now near a year old and having matured to the comfortable stage, we moved into more education.

After having introduced the locally recruited staff to the nature of golf course management in the matter of months we moved on to furthering their knowledge by introducing them to tournament preparation.

The "PGA Professionals Championship of Europe" event was to be filmed by Golfing World TV and shown to a TV audience of 350 million including 18 international in-flight entertainment TV, along with social media networks. We had been monitoring our fertility and pesticide programmes and after we were comfortable with the micro management of the grow-in we then started to tailor this to achieve consistency throughout surfaces.

One thing professional golfers want is consistency, not colour and not always speed, but consistency. The PGA's of Europe use the same set of agronomy guidelines as the European Tour so the standard was to be the same as you would expect to find on any Tour event.

Green speed has never been a



LEFT: Winner: Hugo Santos
ABOVE: 9th and 18th at the ceremony



Jordan Fairweather has been working in the greenkeeping industry for 14 years. Originally from Scotland where he spent seven years at Loch Lomond Golf Club while working on 11 European Tour events. Working at the 2007 US Open at Oakmont Country Club and 2008 Ryder Cup at Valhalla Golf Club he then moved to the Middle East- Dubai, and Abu Dhabi saw him take the position of Construction Superintendent.

concern of mine for our members as with average 30 degree heat and only 18 days of rain from June through September our fescue greens were more than quick enough.

The PGA's of Europe asked us to set them at 10-10.5, which was not far off daily speeds. In the lead up to the tournament we were single cutting at 3.6mm and grooming at 3mm twice weekly. On the first day's practice we followed up a single cut with a roll using salsco greens irons and with the mid afternoon temp around 28 the greens were stimping at 11.2 - 11.4 so the rollers were only used once later that week.

Instead we preferred to cut morning and evening. The fescue bent mix was never really stressed through the week and received only some hand watering in the evenings. I had my reservations as to whether the fescue being the dominant grass would cope in a country where we would deal with temps over 30 all summer.

With a client's expectations for a green, aesthetically pleasing course while maintaining the firm surfaces with speeds required for an event like ours, but it has been excellent

and shows that with preventative stress measures and still with very little fertility input it can be done.

Here at Pravets we tissue test every six weeks and base our foliar and drench applications of fertility around this. We mix up our own fertiliser on site which not only allows us to tailor the needs of the plant exactly what it wants when it wants but actually reduces our fertiliser costs and wastage. We have found this essential this year to deal with our surfaces where leaching is very high with higher irrigation water usage.

Fertilisers like potash, calcium, manganese and magnesium are very easy to source here in Bulgaria due to the large agricultural produce of cucumbers, tomatoes etc so helps us greatly. Environmental Turf Technology, in the UK, is very helpful in not only helping us source and what we cannot source locally but helping us to analyse the makeup of certain fertilisers available in Bulgaria.

Controlled release fertilisers have to be imported from the UK, Germany and Holland and sometimes transport costs outweigh the fertiliser costs. Due to this the only granular application we applied

after the grow-in phase to tees and greens was a controlled release potassium nitrate in the autumn, which we will stick with in 2012.

Working abroad always brings new challenges and you either have a bug for it or you don't. There are many great opportunities for greenkeepers out there in the market, you just need to find them, as the new countries to Golf and Sports

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Turf are numerous. The grasses are the same along with the methodology.

I know greenkeepers in Tatarstan, Azerbaijan, Oman, Russia, Morocco and many other countries with few golf courses' or turf surfaces. They all love their job as we do. The willingness to succeed and a love of Turfgrass keep us abroad!

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