

# Rain stops play...



## ...but not for long, thanks to the team at Slaley Hall

Jim Cook completes our series on the PGA Seniors Tour, as the De Vere Club Championship concludes at Slaley Hall

**“In all my years of greenkeeping, I’ve never squeegeed rough before.” So said Slaley Hall Golf Club’s Course Manager, Steve Cram, when talking about the inventive methods used to ensure play could continue at the ISPS Handa PGA Seniors Championship in June.**

When a deluge of rain caused play to be abandoned, tremendous work by the team at Slaley Hall led to the resumption of play and the eventual conclusion of the tournament.

Steve said: “We had the double shotgun pro-am on the Wednesday before the tournament and we had a lot of comments from the players that the course was looking as good as it has ever looked.

“We had the greens running at 11 feet and got the Thursday done, which was the first tournament round, then on the Friday we had 25mm of rain and they suspended play at 11am.

“Then on the Friday night into Saturday we had another 20mm, so we had 45mm of rain over about 24 hours.”

He continued: “So that was fun and on the Saturday we were using the squeegees on the greens and pushing water off the fairways, just to try and get play happening. It was a tough day.

“We had heavy showers all day and there were two or three greens that couldn’t take any more water so we had guys on those greens with squeegees all day, taking water off when the players were coming through.

“My staff and also the PGA and Senior Tour officials all mucked in, it was all hands to the pump. You’d get a radio message saying which green to go to and we were jumping around like that all day. It was a great team effort by all concerned; tremendous really.”

He added: “Our normal golf course set up routine for the tournament was gone on the Saturday and it was just a matter of making the course playable. The bunkers were big work because we had to get rid of every drop of water in them. We pumped it out and even used buckets to move the water. All through the tournament we started at 4am and we were finished at

about 8pm, with a little break in the middle, but on the Saturday we worked all the way through as there was so much extra to do with the squeegees.”

This was when he mentioned about having to use squeegees in parts of the rough. He said: “The water was right in the landing area and there was nowhere for them to drop so we had to push the puddles away.”

Another inventive method employed was to lift up the tines and use the roller off their verti-drain to move water away from



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landing areas. "I've never done that before either, so that was another new one. But it worked and that was the main thing," Steve said.

Previously they had used the verti-drain in its usual guise to help water drain from a few of the landing areas.

He spoke about how cutting became impossible: "Right up until the Thursday we cut everything every day, so greens were cut three times a day and rolled, fairways, tees and semi were cut every day, but when it got to Friday it was so wet that we couldn't cut anything except the greens.

On Saturday morning though, we couldn't even cut the greens because there were ball-markers everywhere from when play was suspended. Then on the Sunday we tried to cut as much as possible as the weather improved. So our schedule was severely impeded because whilst the course still looked good as we had put a lot of work into it beforehand, we couldn't present it how we would have ideally wanted to."

The tournament should have been 72 holes but was cut down to 54 holes.

Steve said that preparation over previous years had helped enable the tournament to be played: "If it had just been a general play day, the course would have been closed and a lot of the courses in the area were closed at the time. I think the big thing for me was that the work we have done over the last four years helped. Without some of the work we've done on fairways and especially greens, the tournament wouldn't have been completed. Whilst it wasn't great, it was still a success because we managed to get it played."

Their efforts were much appreciated by the players, as Steve highlighted: "The feedback we got was excellent. You always get good feedback from the player who wins, but all the way through the field people were positive and just happy that it could be played.

All the players had played either in the Wednesday pro-ams or had practiced on the Tuesday, so they saw what condition the golf courses were in before the rain.

The greens were running really well and true. I think they felt a bit of disappointment on our behalf, but just pleased that it could be played.

A lot of them were thanking us on their way around when we were using the squeegees. "Well done lads, you're doing a great job, keep it going", they would say."

He summed-up his thoughts



about how the tournament went overall: "There is a mixed feeling really. On one side a bit of disappointment that we couldn't present the golf course to how it should have been and how it was before the rain. On the other side though, there is that sense of achievement that we managed to get it played under adverse conditions."

The next big tournament at Slaley Hall will be the PGA Cup in September 2013 and Steve said they were now busy working on what might need to be done to the greens in preparation for future downpours.

At every level in greenkeeping there are constant occurrences of fortitude in the face of adversity, often in the form of Mother Nature! The efforts by the team at Celtic Manor in 2010 would be a fine example. The endeavours at Slaley Hall were another such accomplishment.



**"In all my years of greenkeeping, I've never squeegeed rough before"**  
Steve Cram  
Courses Manager



ABOVE: Paul Wesseling and RIGHT: receiving the ISPS Handa PGA Seniors Championship trophy

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