

With the Masters out of the way our attention now turns to the high profile international tournaments that will take place in the UK this year.

In future editions Greenkeeper International will feature the excellent work undertaken by BIGGA members Chris Kennedy, Paul Smith and Curtis Tyrrell MG for the BMW PGA Championship, Open Championship and Ryder Cup Matches respectively.

This month, Jim Cook kicks off a series of articles offering an insight in to the preparations for the ISPS Handa PGA Seniors Championship at Slaley Hall

Preparing Slaley Hall



Slaley Hall Golf Club will, for the fourth year running, host the De Vere Club PGA Seniors Championship event this summer.

Steve Cram, Course Manager at Slaley Hall, spoke about the preparation involved for this Seniors Tour event and improvements made since Andrew Oldcorn secured his Maiden Senior victory last year

He said: "Last year we got really good feedback from all the players, who said the greens were running well and the tournament officials were pretty happy with it.

"We did a lot of drainage work on fairways with our Sandmaster and saw improved surfaces all around the course.

"Our 9th fairway was a big problem so we used the Sandmaster on that and put about 80 tonnes down into the landing area. Four years ago you couldn't walk on it, it was so wet you could nearly roll the turf up and now we've sorted all that," he added.

Slaley Hall sits 1000 feet above sea level, in Northumberland, and the conditions are often cold and wet. The weather has been dreadful this year with almost continuous

rain except for two weeks in March and even snow in the middle of April. Since the previous tournament last summer, the team at the club have been putting a lot of effort into improving drainage especially around the greens.

Steve said: "We had some greens areas that weren't draining very well so we got a drill and fill machine and we've done some major work on them, so they will drain pretty well now if we have any downpours.

"When we were hollow coring some of the problem areas, we brushed in crumb from shredded rubber tyres to keep them moving and we've had great results with that as well. I'm willing to try anything to keep them draining," he continued.

Of the two championship-standard courses at Slaley Hall, it is the Dave Thomas designed Hunting course which will see the action in June this year.

The course is challenging and long, measuring over 7,000 yards from the back tees and is considered one of the toughest tests on the European Senior Tour.

Steve went on to explain some of the changes made in preparation

for the tournament. He said: "The bands around the green, the surrounds, are cut at 7mm and then were up to 25mm on the areas out from that. The PGA wanted that lowering a little so it was a bit easier for the guys to chip onto the greens. So we've lowered that.

We've also widened a few of our approaches because some of them were previously quite narrow going into the green. We widened the 4th and the 18th so the players have

"The weather has been dreadful this year with almost continuous rain and even snow in the middle of April!"

a chance to run the ball on rather than fly it all the way to these tricky holes. The 18th is one of our most difficult so with it widened they can fly over the left-hand trap and get a bounce onto the green."

Tournament officials have also asked Steve to make some changes to help them as well as the players. Rhododendrons have been cleared





for this year's event in certain areas to allow for more accurate water hazard definition. On the 8th hole they have also been removed to provide a fairer, more visible landing area which will make one of the Senior Tour's toughest holes a little easier whilst helping considerably with pace of play.

The early June position on the schedule is a little early for the latitude and altitude of the course so Steve has had to bring forward his usual routines and programmes including verti-draining the greens and top dressing in March and verti-cutting regularly from then on. The fertiliser programme was also brought forward considerably to late February and has certainly paid dividends.

He added: "Unusually for a high profile televised tournament we don't close the course to general play until the Sunday prior to the event. Because we're so busy divots are a major issue so we do a lot of preparation work about six weeks before the tournament on the fairways and especially on the landing areas.

"We have ten full-time staff and two casual workers over the 36 holes."

Steve has prepared both courses for numerous European Tour and Seniors Tour events in the past. So does he still get a buzz preparing the course for a tournament?

"Oh yes! That's what it's all about and I think it tests you out. That's the way I look at it, to see how good we can make the course look with whatever conditions are thrown at us. Each year we strive to make it better."



The PGA Seniors Championship, is organised by the PGA, who along with BIGGA and the GCMA are jointly working together in the Golf Club Management Partnership, which aims to improve the interaction between all these who are involved in the management of golf clubs

Entry to the ISPS Handa PGA Seniors Championship is free if tickets are downloaded in advance, go to www.devere-hostels.com/pga-seniors

Win the ultimate golfing experience at Slaley Hall

This June will see the return of European Senior Tours flagship event, the ISPS Handa PGA Seniors Championship, to De Vere Slaley Hall in Northumberland.

Taking place over the venue's stunning Hunting Course from the 7th – 10th of June, the event promises to boast one of the strongest fields of the season.

We've teamed up with De Vere to offer one lucky reader the ultimate golfing experience, as the winner and guest receive a complimentary Sunday Driver at Slaley Hall. They will enjoy luxury accommodation at the stunning Slaley Hall Hotel and golf on the venues two championship courses, The Priestman and The Hunting.

For your chance to win this great prize, simply answer the following question:

Who won last year's PGA Seniors Championship at De Vere Slaley Hall?

- a. Barry Lane**
- b. Andrew Oldcorn**
- c. Ian Woosnam**

Please email your answers to comps@bigga.co.uk with your full name and membership number, by June 30 2012

www.devere.co.uk/golf

* Prize valid until end of October, subject to availability