



# BIGGA National Championship 2012

# Golden Browning

Steve Castle reports from Ayrshire on a glorious **BIGGA National Championship 2012**, sponsored by Charterhouse and Kubota







# BIGGA National Championship 2012



**Oly Browning, assistant greenkeeper at Stocks Golf Club in Hertfordshire, blazed round the formidable links at Irvine Golf Club in Ayrshire to claim the title of BIGGA National Champion 2012.**

67 players flocked to the extremely challenging course from as far afield as Ireland and the South Coast all dreaming of glory.

Incredibly, after a miserable summer across the UK, Scotland enjoyed what BIGGA Chief Executive Jim Croxton described as “the best two days of weather imaginable” with unbroken sunshine teaming up with the rolling countryside to provide a breathtaking vista for play.

Theoretically, the tremendous weather should have led to perfect conditions for play – but the course still proved difficult throughout with a number of players posting no returns, mainly due to the heather and gorse waiting to gobble up slightly errant drives.

Even triumphant Oly did not enjoy two trouble-free days as he explained while proudly clutching the BIGGA Challenge Trophy.

He said: “I four putted on the 17th, but I kept it on the fairways and didn’t take any chances – I only got my driver out three times over the two days.

“I think the key was hitting the

greens – I hit a lot of them which was pleasing. It’s a difficult course but despite that, it can still be forgiving in some places.”

Playing off scratch, the modest 23-year-old explained he has won minor events in the past but this was the proudest moment of his golfing career.

“This is probably the biggest trophy I’ve ever won. It’s the fourth time I’ve entered, I came fourth last year so it feels really good to get my name on the trophy at last.

“I drove up with my brother, it’s been a real pleasure to play here. I’m not going to drink to celebrate because I’m teetotal, but my name on the trophy is enough.

“The golf itself was terrific but it’s also been really good fun, I had a good laugh with all of my playing partners.”

Steve Mason, his Course Manager at Stocks, said: “Oly has won Club Championship four years on the trot, a feat I’m sure will not be repeated.

“He had spoken about turning pro but tried a Europro event and was disheartened by the outcome as he was 24 shots off the lead after 36 holes of qualifying.

“But he has gained strength from this experience and goes out after work every day whether it be practice or playing.

“To win the event is a massive boost for him, we all hope he can

use this to build his confidence and achieve his dream of becoming a star on the big stage.”

Ryan Binns from Roundwood Golf Club in Barnsley had the honour of striking the first tee shot on a bright October morning.

At the end of the first day’s play, Oly led the way with a magnificent par 71, establishing a two-shot lead over Gary Burgess from Grange Park and George Morgan from The Mendip.

The Monday evening saw the competitors, sponsors and BIGGA team enjoy excellent hospitality in the traditional clubhouse, with a three-course meal and speeches from Jim and BIGGA Chairman Tony Smith.

Both made a point of thanking the sponsors Charterhouse and Kubota, who once again offered first-class support for the annual event.

Once again the Scottish sun rose over the course on the second morning, eventually clearing the cool crisp frost from the fairways, paving the way for another spectacular autumn day.

Almost every golfer returned to the BIGGA registration area with tales of woe – including Tony who wrecked a potentially respectable



ABOVE: Head Greenkeeper Derek Wilson tees off

TOP RIGHT: David Nelson, Sam Fuller, Kenneth Mitchell, Oly Browning and Gary Burgess



Breaking barriers to better turf.





round with eight shots in a bunker on the 18th.

But they were delighted by the challenge, and hugely impressed by the quality of the course – indeed Head Greenkeeper Derek Wilson and his team were overwhelmed with congratulations.

Simon Woolley, from Bricken-don Grange Golf Club, said: “The course is absolutely gorgeous, it’s in fantastic condition. Everything about it is superb. The greens are brilliant. If you don’t hole a putt it’s your fault!”

Gavin Robson, from Burton-on-Trent Golf Club, said: “It’s an awe-some course, the greens are beau-tiful and true. It’s a true heathland golf course and a true test of your golf. You can’t stray off line because if you do, you’re in the heather and you’re in trouble.

“But the real highlight for me has been the camaraderie. It’s a great opportunity to catch up with old colleagues and also meet new people from across the industry.”

Derek Wilson himself enjoyed some rare relaxation time with a couple of rounds of golf in the sun-shine.

He commented: “It’s been a very good couple of days, everyone’s thoroughly enjoyed it - not just the golf but the evening do was a great night.

“I played alright on the first day, not so well on the second. I don’t think I had any advantage knowing the course – there are too many bushes on it which I found!”

The excitement grew during the second afternoon as the returning players enjoyed a well-earned drink in the clubhouse.

However it soon became clear that overnight leader Oly was in no mood to relinquish his slot at the top of the leaderboard as his 75 ensured a memorable victory - a gross score of 146 enough to win by three shots.

Carnoustie’s Duncan Cairnie and Cathkin Braes’ Gordon Sang-ster were his nearest challengers on 149 – Duncan claiming the runner-up spot by virtue of a superior second round.

Kenneth Mitchell from St Andrews won the Challenge Cup for best nett score with 141.

As the sun set on a hugely suc-cessful tournament, thoughts turned to next year’s venue - Frilford Heath Golf Club in Oxfordshire. Keep an eye out for how to enter in forthcoming issues – it’s a competition not to be missed.

Thanks to Derek Wilson, his team, everyone at Irvine Golf Club and all the competitors who flew or drove vast distances to play.

## BIGGA National Championship 2012

### BIGGA CHALLENGE TROPHY

(Best gross score over 36 holes)

- 1) Oly Browning (Stocks) 146 (71, 75) - £100 prize
- 2) Duncan Cairnie (Carnoustie) 149 (75, 74) - £50 prize
- 3) Gordon Sangster (Cathkin Braes) 149 (74, 75) - £25 prize

### BIGGA CHALLENGE CUP

(Best nett score over 36 holes)

- 1) Kenneth Mitchell (St Andrews) 141 (70, 71) - £100 prize
- 2) Gary Burgess (Grange Park) 145 (70, 75) - £50 prize
- 3) George Morgan (The Mendip) 151 (73, 78) - £25 prize

### BIGGA CHALLENGE PLATE (Stableford)

Sam Fuller (Lewes) - £50 prize

### BIGGA CHALLENGE BOWL (Affiliate)

David Nelson (Nelson & Vecchio) – £50 prize

### DAILY HANDICAP - DAY 1

- +2 - 5 Gary Burgess (Grange Park) 70
- 6 - 12 David Nelson (Nelson & Vecchio) 71
- 13 - 24 John Wilson (Irvine) 73

### DAILY HANDICAP - DAY 2

- +2 - 5 Kenneth Mitchell (St Andrews) 71
- 6 - 12 Iain Barr (Largs) 72
- 13 - 24 John Wilson (Irvine) 76

