

## OCTOBER 2012

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## No doubting Thomas



**Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year 2012** is Thomas Flavelle, greenkeeper at Lingdale Golf Club in Leicestershire. Steve Castle spoke to him hours after the 23-year-old scooped the award...

Thomas Flavelle tucks into a well deserved first breakfast as he attempts to find the words to describe winning the coveted prize. Thomas, and the other six Student of the Year finalists, endured 24 grueling hours during which they were interviewed by experts, completed an 18-hole course report to a tight deadline and faced an agonising wait to see if they had emerged victorious.

"Wow, it was unbelievable. I was shocked. I was aware there were five other lads who were more than capable of winning the award, so it could have gone to anybody. It's nice to come out on top, but they were all so good - they wouldn't have got this far if they weren't - and I know they'll go on and do great things in their careers.

"Now it's all about looking forward to America. That's a really good chat with last year's winner, Matt Pells, and his advice was just to throw yourself into it and make the most of every minute. It's going to be

fantastic for me on both a personal and professional level.

"In under an hour, it's going to be a very, very intense few weeks of incredibly hard work going into highly technical detail. But I can't wait to take on the challenge, it will help my education massively."

Thomas joins an illustrious group of winners who have gone on to work on some of the UK's finest courses.

His attitude and outlook before his 23 years, and it's immediately clear how seriously he takes both greenkeeping and the sport of golf - he has a handicap of two.

His father Dave is a highly experienced greenkeeper, and while he's pleased to follow in his footsteps he's pleased to be making a name for himself away from his family connections.

"It does help that my dad is a greenkeeper, and it also means that people come up and talk to me instinctively because they know him, but I've never actually worked with him and I'm making my own way in the industry.

"I always wanted to work outdoors, and I've spent most of my life on golf courses either working or playing."

He studied A Levels but admits he was distracted because he was so intent on becoming a greenkeeper, and after completing his exams he started a trainee position at Lingdale. He then took his Level Two qualification and is close to completing Level Three at Mervinough College.

"After I've completed Level Three I'm going to probably look at doing a Foundation degree and also consider other options to progress my career."

So why did he enter the competition?

"I used to look at the faces of the winners on the front of the magazine and think 'I'll never, ever be good enough for that'."

"But, in the last 18 months, I feel I've really progressed as a greenkeeper. I now know where I'm going with my career and just entering the award was a fantastic opportunity. There's a nomination stands out

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#### Message from Thomas

"I'd like to thank both my Level Two and Level Three tutors - Kay McAdams and Jonathan Knowles at Mervinough, who have helped me so much. Lingdale Golf Club have given me time and the support I've needed to enter this competition, as well as now having to allow me two months off to go to America! They've also helped me immensely right from the start of my career as an 18 year old."

"I'd also like to thank TORO and IFGPGA, and I have to mention Lingdale's Head Greenkeeper Andy McEneaney. He's pretty much taught me everything I know since I joined the club and a half year ago."

"He's helped with my college work, preparing for this competition and has always been there for me. He's very realistic and knows what we have to do to make the absolute most of the budget we have at the club. I wouldn't be the greenkeeper I am now without him."



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The official monthly magazine of the British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association Limited.