

Behind the scenes at The Open 2013

The BIGGA Open Support Team tell the inside story of a red-hot Open Championship with their own words and photos from a scorching Muirfield





The 142nd Open Championship proved to be a real scorcher with the downpours of last year replaced by bright sunshine, at times intense heat and a true links look to the course. This all added up to a tough but fair challenge for the world's best golfers, and Phil Mickelson's 66 on the final day to secure the Claret Jug has already passed into the annals of golf history. Of course, the Support Team will be able to say "I was there".

As well as the BIGGA Support Team, the home team headed by Course Manager Colin Irvine were assisted by a team of local greenkeepers from neighbouring courses at Gullane, Archerfield, Luffness and the Renaissance Club, plus a greenkeeper from each of the other Open venues and some on R&A scholarships.

On the very first morning Gary Salisbury from Burghley Park Golf Club went out with KJ Choi, Miguel Angel Jimenez and the American Jimmy Walker. Gary said: "Jimmy seemed fascinated by my rake and asked how heavy it was and whether he could hold it. I replied that he could if he let me hold his driver to see how heavy it was!"

Gary Cunningham joined Justin Rose and saw a highly frustrating incident for the US Open winner: "He went to use the players' toilet near the 6th only to find it was locked. He knocked on the door and a female spectator eventually emerged – she'd been getting changed in it. Rose's face was a picture."

John Keenaghan from Chipping Sodbury Golf Club saw an outrageous shot on the 9th during the Second Round:

"Stephen Gallacher played his ball deliberately off a wall, on to the green, putted and made an eagle."

The start of the Third Round saw two players struggle to make their 8.20am tee time. Michael Joyce from Moortown Golf Club witnessed the mayhem:

"Carl Petterson and Jonas Blixt were late and had to sprint to the tee chased by marshalls. The lack of preparation clearly didn't affect Petterson because he holed an iron shot from the fairway to eagle the 6th."

As the crowds increased over the weekend, the team heard the occasional boisterous and bizarre shout from the public galleries. Adam Scott's round on Saturday was followed by Richard Holmes from Crosland Heath Golf Club,

and Richard said: "Scott was struggling on one hole and a fan shouted to his caddy Steve Williams 'do something'. Williams replied 'what more do you want me to do? He's just won the Masters'."

The final morning saw a relaxed Peter Senior chat to Stuart Ferguson from Dundas Park Golf Club. Stuart said: "At the start of the round Senior apologised to me for the amount of bunkers he was about to go in! In the end he hit six."

The final day also saw drama at the 9th hole – but not the sort Jason Day was looking for. Gary Cunningham said: "Day hacked a shot into one of the stands and someone shouted 'six'...but it was 'caught out' by a fan!"

The random draw to see who would accompany which player rewarded Jaey Goodchild from Bowood Golf & Country Club with the once-in-a-lifetime chance to follow fellow Aussie Adam Scott around the links as he made his bid for the Claret Jug on the penultimate round of the week.

Of course, there was to be no Aussie celebration, but Jaey summed the experience up by saying: "It was an awesome week and I was privileged to be part of it. I love the atmosphere at big events and when you get a bunch of guys together who are all there for the same reason, with the same mindset, and the team spirit is brilliant. I hope I get a chance to do it again one day."

Michael Llong from Littlestone Golf Club said: "I had a fantastic time working with superbly professional greenkeepers from around the country. I made a few good friends, and it's great to spend time

Sam Bethell got the final match on Saturday



Billy Merritt with Justin Rose (photo by Richard Jenkinson)



Part-time photographer, Richard Jenkinson



Stefan Carter with Lee Westwood (photo by Richard Jenkinson)



TECH CORNER

The Muirfield team presented a true links course, aided by fabulous weather leading up to the tournament and during The Championship itself.

Indeed, Support Team members who departed on the Monday after the tournament discovered that the weather had reverted to type with a steady drizzle accompanied by a cool breeze and mist, making the blazing sunshine and heat during the tournament all the more miraculous.

The fairways were cut at 10mm and the semi rough, which was around 3m wide, was cut at 50mm but not daily. The second cut of rough was cut in early June at 150mm and allowed to go to seed. Before play the greens were double cut at 4mm. Officially, the greens were at 11 feet first thing on Thursday, then 10.5 for the rest of the week.

Before the final round the greens were hand watered, as they were throughout. Before Friday and Sunday, some selected greens were hand rolled to bring them up to speed with others.

at such a highly prestigious golf club. Strangely great weather for Scotland as well which was a real bonus!”

Stefan Carter from Forest Hill Golf & Country Club added: “It’s been an amazing week with superb weather which has been a massive factor for us. It’s my first time doing anything like this and I can’t wait to do it again. I raked for Lee Westwood which was a privilege – the only disappointment for me was he didn’t win it so I can’t say I was with the winner!”

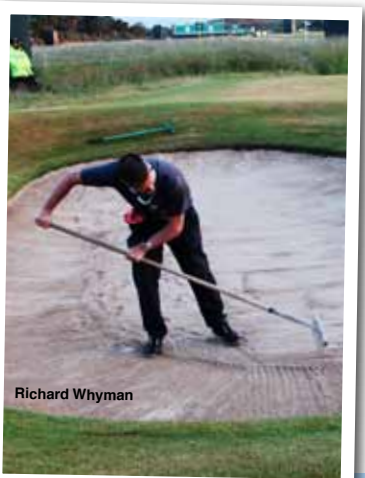
Andy Slingsby from Halifax West End Golf Club said: “The organisation has been superb, everything about it has been first-class and it’s been a pleasure to be here. The weather’s been magnificent which has topped it off.”

Jamie Finch from Sheringham Golf Club said: “Where else do you get the chance to follow the world’s greatest players up the fairways? I’ve found all the players to have been friendly and a lot of us have got signed golf balls and gloves. It gives you a real buzz especially when the crowds are big.”

A shot of the fescue, by Michael Joyce



The early morning prep team



Richard Whyman

The early morning prep team on the 18th



BUNKER STATS

Before the tournament began we asked all members of the Support Team to guess how many bunkers would be hit on each day, and the closest guesses win vouchers for each day and overall. Here are the results:

Thursday – 453

Closest Guess 444 John Keenaghan

Friday – 577

Closest Guess 472 Jamie Reeves

Saturday – 262

Closest Guesses 260 Steven Lloyd & Gary Cunningham

Sunday – 279

Closest Guess 261 Adam Matthews

TOTAL – 1,571 Closest Guess 1,531 Jamie Reeves



Phillip Snellin (photo by Richard Jenkinson)

DIARY FROM THE OPEN – PHILLIP SNELLIN

I'm a greenkeeper at Donaghadee Golf Club where I have also been a member for 20 years. When I got into greenkeeping I never dreamed I would have the best week of my life doing something I love. I applied back in January to work at The Open and when I was accepted I was so excited, I'd heard my Course Manager Aaron Small tell many stories about his time on the Support Team at Turnberry in 2009.

I flew to Edinburgh and as soon as I arrived was made to feel so welcome. It was great to talk to so many other professionals in the same field as myself.

Before I knew it, Thursday morning had arrived and I was on the tee with my rake at 8am with Jason Day, Martin Kaymer and Garrick Porteous – what a fantastic experience. When I returned to the BIGGA cabin close to the first tee I shared my story with other greenkeepers who had got back and also chatted with those who were excitedly waiting to go out.

On the Friday I got what I thought was the dream draw – Tom Watson, Fred Couples and Sir Nick Faldo! Just watching them hit shots is something I will remember forever. I didn't think it could get any better than that until I was drawn to accompany game number 41 for the Saturday. The cut was at +7 for ages which would have meant I wouldn't have had a game, but when it went to +8 I ended up with Tiger Woods and Lee Westwood. They are two of my favourite golfers of the modern era so being inside the ropes walking behind them is the greatest moment of my golfing life bar none. What a day it was watching them play and I only had seven bunkers to rake behind them.

On the Sunday I was with Boo Weekly and Thongchai Jaidee who were really nice guys and chatted to us walking up the fairways. After the game was over I retired to the BIGGA marquee to watch the last few holes on TV before heading out for photos on the 18th fairway.

I have met so many greenkeepers who have become great friends, just chatting to them all and asking them about their courses and how they do things has been brilliant and I urge any greenkeeper to apply to work on a support team at a major championship and they will feel the same.

Lastly I want to say a massive thank you to Donaghadee Golf Club and all the BIGGA staff for their help and support in what has been the best week of my life and I will definitely be doing it again in the future.



Thank You from BIGGA

Once again, thank you to Sherriff Amenity for kindly sponsoring the internet in the BIGGA marquee keeping the Support Team connected. During the prolonged dry spell, several of the team used this facility to monitor their course irrigation so it proved to be an invaluable resource.

We are also very grateful to Ransomes Jacobsen for providing the rucksacks used by the team – this year they were mostly used to carry water and suncream rather than rain jackets! Also, many thanks to the R&A for working with us to support the entire team before, during and after the event.

Sandra Raper in the cabin near the first tee fully stocked with sun cream!





STANDING FROM LEFT: Rob Hogarth, Adam Matthews, Jack Sims, Sam Horner, Stuart Ferguson, Martin Woods, Darren Moxham, John Ryan, Bruce Watson, Ronan McKeown, Richard Saunders, Ash Marshall, Richard Jenkinson, David Cooper, Neil Ivamy, Ben Bouchier, George Pitts, Matthew Holden, Jim Croxton, Dan McGuckin, Michael Joyce, Stefan Carter, Phillip Snellin, Paul Jenkins, Gary Salisbury, Jamie Reeves, Kevan Glass, Tony Smith, John Keenaghan, Tony Gooch, Chris Sealey, Michael Llong, Sean Sullivan, Jez Hughes, Steve Mason.

SEATED FROM LEFT: Andy Unwin, Richard Holmes, Jason Brooks, Myles Wood, Jaey Goodchild, David Wilkinson, Stephen Dale, Andy Slingsby, Jamie Finch, Daniel Woodcraft, Paul Armour, Gary Cunningham, Tracey Maddison, Rachael Duffy, Sandra Raper, John Young, Tom Brearley, Bruce Hicks, Billy Merritt, Mark Tucker, Steve Hemsley, Michael Gunn.

** Some of the team left early for transport reasons so are not pictured*

(photo by Arnold Phipps-Jones)



Inside and outside the BIGGA Marquee, with Jez Hughes and Steve Mason above right, outside the BIGGA cabin on the first tee

