

Fril your boots!



The BIGGA National Championship sponsored by Charterhouse and Kubota is heading to Frilford Heath Golf Club. Steve Castle discovered why players can expect a treat in rural Oxfordshire





PROFILE

Name: Sidney Arrowsmith MG
Role: Course Manager
Born: Wigan, 22 October 1953
Handicap:9
Hobbies: Gardening, walking,
watching sport.....
Favourite sports team:
Manchester United



An increased prize fund...the chance to play on a course which hosts European Tour qualifying a week previously... picturesque heathland surrounded by rare flora, fauna and wildlife...what further incentives do you need to enter the 2013 BIGGA National Championship?

Most of the impressive 700-acre, 54-hole complex is a Site of Special Scientific Interest – so while you're hitting over the pond and dodging the greenside bunkers on the par three 9th, or attacking the long par five 10th, you may catch sight of a red kite, woodpecker or some of the rare orchids.

Frilford Heath was first awarded European Tour qualifying three years ago – a real feather in the club's cap. The qualifying – and the BIGGA National – take place on the Red Course with the Green and Blue courses remaining open throughout. Course Manager Sid Arrowsmith was quick to insist that nothing radically changes during that week although he acknowledged it is a big test for the team.

"Some may think it's daunting to host these events, but we run at a high standard all the time so for a European Tour event it's not as if we have to lift it up by, say, 25% - we're always at tournament

standard so it just requires a bit of fine tuning.

"This may mean double cutting on a morning with a double or single iron but nothing too major. The height of cut remains the same at around 2.5mm.

"October is a challenging time of year to host prestigious events, because of course the light is limited in the morning and in the evening.

"There are 240 players starting the qualifying at 7.45am, yet sunrise is at around 6.45am so we've only got an hour to work on the course, so we try and do as much work as possible the evening before.

"To help I direct most of our available resources to the Red Course.

"It's all about the team ethic. I've got some wonderful guys here who have never worked anywhere else and they deserve great credit. We have a Head Greenkeeper on each of the three courses, five assistant greenkeepers on each and two full-time mechanics."

So what else can BIGGA members bidding to win the first prize of £500 - and the BIGGA Challenge Trophy – expect?

"It is a very stern test of golf – a true heathland challenge. There are lots of obstacles such as gorse just off the fairways which can really hurt you. You've got to hit long and straight, it's a demanding 6,912



| Rank | Marker's Name | White Tees | Yellow Tees | Par | Score | Strokes | Handicap | Nett |
|-------|---------------|------------|-------------|------|-------|---------|----------|----------|
| 1 | | 384 | 369 | 4 | 9 | | | 462 5 5 |
| 2 | | 534 | 510 | 5 | 3 | | | 330 4 9 |
| 3 | | 416 | 373 | 4 | 13 | | | 131 3 17 |
| 4 | | 197 | 189 | 3 | 15 | | | 359 4 7 |
| 5 | | 425 | 414 | 4 | 3 | | | 421 5 15 |
| 6 | | 500 | 480 | 5 | 11 | | | 365 4 1 |
| 7 | | 119 | 106 | 3 | 7 | | | 427 5 11 |
| 8 | | 469 | 448 | 4 | 1 | | | 163 3 13 |
| 9 | | 186 | 173 | 3 | 17 | | | 3015 37 |
| OUT | | 3530 | 3476 | 3338 | 36 | | | |
| 10 | | 551 | 516 | 5 | 8 | | | 467 5 4 |
| 11 | | 183 | 133 | 3 | 18 | | | 122 3 18 |
| 12 | | 474 | 474 | 4 | 4 | | | 474 5 9 |
| 13 | | 192 | 155 | 3 | 10 | | | 289 4 10 |
| 14 | | 328 | 305 | 4 | 14 | | | 166 3 14 |
| 15 | | 421 | 400 | 4 | 2 | | | 370 4 2 |
| 16 | | 324 | 319 | 4 | 12 | | | 233 4 16 |
| 17 | | 105 | 106 | 3 | 8 | | | 338 4 6 |
| 18 | | 305 | 292 | 4 | 16 | | | 283 4 12 |
| IN | | 3343 | 3229 | 3148 | 36 | | | 2742 36 |
| OUT | | 3530 | 3476 | 3338 | 36 | | | 3013 37 |
| IDEAL | | 1913 | 1876 | 1772 | 72 | | | 5757 73 |
| | | 6778 | 6486 | | | | | |

yards. There's a lot of risk and reward golf – if you want to take the big stick out and try and get the distance there are birdie opportunities.

“But, if it doesn't quite come off you will be heavily penalised. It's a varied challenge from hole to hole.”

Sid explained the changes they've made in a bid to regain the Red Course's place in the Top 100 Courses in the UK list. They have built new tees, put in some new bunkers and replaced old sand with new in others, as well as putting drainage sumps in some of the sand traps.

He added: “The greens are a blend of Agrostis grasses and poa annua – and the vast majority are natural heathland greens. We've tried to produce better performing greens by reducing organic material – thatch – then diluting it with pure sand so the greens become firmer, faster and improved. The thatch coverage has never been bad but it's just been a little more than I would ideally like.

“We've also started using a Clegg Hammer as well as the stimpmeter and moisture meter to check the smoothness, trueness and firmness.

“The Clegg Hammer measures impacts on the surface which gives you a firmness reading. We got some readings of 120 which was too hard so we aim for 100 – really firm, fast greens.

Last year at the European Tour qualifying the greens were running at 11 and we were asked to slow them down – it made my day! So we missed the second cut out and we took the turf iron out to take them down to 10.5.”

The team follow identical aeration programmes on each course. They micro hollow tine twice a year – usually in March and then in July or August, and aerate deep with the aid of a machine they've recently purchased called GP Air. This is basically a spear which has compressed air pumped into it.

It's then plunged into the turf and shatters the soil underneath, allowing quick and easy drainage.

Sid explained that over time, the silt particles in the greens migrate and settle at various depths, so this

EQUIPMENT LIST

Some of the key machines in the team's fleet...

GREENS MOWING:

TORO 3150 x 12, TORO FLEX 21 x 3

SURROUND MOWERS

TORO 3100D x 4
FAIRWAY MOWERS, TORO 5510 x 3
SEMI ROUGH MOWERS, TORO 4500D x 2
JD OUT FRONT MOWERS x 2

AERATION

TERRA SPIKE x 1
TORO PRO CORE SR72
PLANET AIR x 1
GP AIR x 1
TORO HYDROJECT x 1
SHATTERMASTER
JD AERCORE

SPRAYERS

TORO MULTI PRO 5800 x 1
GAMBETI BAR x 3

BUNKER RAKERS

TORO 3400 x 3

BLOWERS

TORO PRO FORCE x 1
TORNADO BLOWERS x 2

TURF ROLLERS

TRU TURF x 2
VIBRATING ROLLERS x 1

CUT AND COLLECT/LEAF COLLECTION

AMAZONE GHS 180 x 2

UTILITY VEHICLES

TORO MDX WORKMAN x 6
JD GATORS x 4
TRACTORS x 13 ALL JOHN DEERE

BERNHARD GRINDING EQUIPMENT

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ANGLEMASTER 4000

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DAKOTA 410 TURF TENDER



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machine ‘blasts’ this layer to help the infiltration.

The site also features acid grassland and ancient fenland, and some of the older trees were felled recently to rehydrate the fenland. In turn, this encouraged natural flora and fauna to return, which allowed various species to flourish. Burrowing wasps, rare beetles, treecreepers, buzzards, red kites and kingfishers can be spotted by the more eagle-eyed golfer.

Lancastrian Sid worked at various courses in the UK before becoming part of the team constructing Golf D’Apremont, a course 40km north of Paris. He was then Head Greenkeeper at Royal Portrush in Northern Ireland before joining Frilford Heath in February 1994. He turns 60 this year – so what advice would he give young greenkeepers?

“It’s absolutely vital to keep abreast of all issues, developments and changes – whether they be environmental, technical or mechanical. I achieved my Master Greenkeeper Certificate in 1997. It’s not made me a better or a worse greenkeeper – I did it for my own personal CPD.

“The whole picture is important – the way you dress, portray yourself at meetings and social events, how you speak to the members...if you want respect you have to conduct yourself in the right manner.

“I never stop seeking ways to educate myself further and keep

improving. I remember going to BTME, sitting with the likes of Walter Woods, Jack McMillan and George Brown and just letting their knowledge rub off on me.”

Sid and I then headed up to the clubhouse balcony which overlooks the 18th green, and his thoughts returned to the BIGGA National.

BIGGA members hoping to follow in the footsteps of current champion Oly Browning can play two rounds of golf plus dinner on

the Monday evening for just £90. There are prizes for best gross and nett scores plus various prizes for nearest the pin and longest drive.

“I’m looking forward to hosting the guys even though I’m sure some of them will be picking holes in elements of the course!

“That’s natural for greenkeepers and I’m looking forward to meeting them all. I’m also playing in it so we’ll see what happens there!”

See you in October.

