

# The Back Nine

A column for writers and members to air and share their views on golf greenkeeping topics

Sean Sullivan's Scottish adventure continues as he finally joins up with The Open Support Team, spends a fortune on merchandise and embarks on an epic journey back to the States

**Once in Edinburgh, it was back on a bus headed for our accommodation at the city's University. Now the official Open experience had begun.**

Tuesday morning I was up at 3.30am, on the bus at 4am and ready to start preparing bunkers by 5am. It was wonderful to see all the operations going on at the same time we were raking – all manner of mowing, fine-tuning and security measures.

I was surprised how difficult it was to get the bunkers right - the sand was very different from the coal slag I have at my course. We all did the best we could, and were done by mid-morning. We were then able to walk around the course watching the practice rounds, head to the souvenir shop or watch the golf on TV. It was good to get the first day under my belt.

Second day was the same as the first, except for the Muirfield staff sweepers that followed us through the course. Once done, it was more golf and shopping for my members at Briarwood. I ended up purchasing roughly £900 of merchandise to take home. It was tough to find room for it all but I just managed to keep it under the weight limit for the flight home!

On Wednesday night the early morning prep team was informed that the Muirfield staff would take over from us as the dry conditions limited the amount of prep work required, which in turn freed up maintenance staff to do the bunker work.

We then got our match assignments for the first day of the tournament. There was a different air to The Open, this year. Not better, not worst, just different. Because of the restricted size of the first tee area, we did not have the same access to the players as we had last year but as I followed my first round match, I felt more at ease than I did last year as I knew what to expect. This allowed



Sean's home course The Briarwood in Billings, Montana

me to focus on how the players handled the hot, dry conditions. The players I followed were struggling to score well, and I ended up raking eight bunkers on the first day.

It's hard to describe how much of an honour it was to be on the Support Team. Having dinner and drinks with other BIGGA members and swapping stories of our work was brilliant! The second day was similar to the first, the young players I followed were struggling to score well as the conditions got drier and faster.

Of the six players I followed only one made the cut. I raked 12 bunkers the second day and once again it was one of those days that I'll remember for a long time. I didn't get a match on Saturday, so I was able to work the practice bunker and then watch the golf.

On Sunday I raked for the defending champion Ernie Els and Richard Sterne. Ernie eagled 17 which really energised the crowd and players – something I'll always remember. I then made it back to the marquee in time to see Mickelson win his first Open Championship.

That evening I was able to share a drink with new and old friends. I was

After 17 more hours of flying I got back home at 11.30pm - then I was up and out at 4.30am

## about the author



Sean Sullivan is Golf Course Superintendent at the Briarwood Golf Course in Montana in Western USA. It is an 18-hole Championship course with hills, creeks and open rangeland, and is particularly notable for its coal slag black bunkers.

Sean has added many personal touches such as painting the flags of the nations in the UK on the club's ball washers, and has now twice been a member of BIGGA's Open Support Team.

not leaving until Tuesday morning, so I saw the sights of Edinburgh with some of the guys, before heading to the airport. I ended up trying to grab some sleep there but it turned out I was awake for two days straight, thank God for Red Bull!

After 17 more hours of flying I got back home at 11.30 pm - then I was up and out at 4.30 am to prepare for my own tournament at Briarwood, which was followed by two 17-hour work days.

The Open experience is not just raking bunkers behind the world's best players. It is visiting new places, meeting old friends, making new friends and creating long lasting memories.

There is no other place in the world I would rather be than at the Open and on the Open Support Team and there will be a new tattoo to follow!

The views expressed within this column are not necessarily those of Greenkeeper International