



Chairman's Word

National Chairman, Tony Smith, gives his thoughts for the month

And it's goodbye from me

All too soon it's time for me to write my final column as Chairman. Previous Chairmen have told me that 12 months in the role flies past. Well, I can tell you that 18 months flies past too.

I've met so many friendly, knowledgeable and enthusiastic greenkeepers, members of the trade and various companies and exhibitors during my tenure, it's been an absolute pleasure speaking to you all and hearing about your trials and tribulations as well as your successes. I've thoroughly enjoyed it, although it really has opened my eyes to the pressures and demands which come with the position.

I began my Chairmanship at The Open at Royal Lytham & St Annes in July 2012, taking over from Andrew Mellon. It was a whirlwind few days but a super start – watching the work of our Open Support Team truly is one of the highlights of the year. Muirfield 2013 was another tremendous occasion, some quite phenomenal summer weather contributed to a really memorable few days. The same goes for our members who support the BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth, and our members who support many other events – just one example being the greenkeepers who assisted the team at Rockliffe Hall for the recent PGA English Seniors Open. The experience that our members gain from assisting the home greenkeeping team during these major events is priceless.

I can honestly say that things look much brighter than when I became Chairman in the BIGGA marquee at The 2012 Open. I remember on that day just yards away the home greenkeeping team were mopping up after an overnight deluge, and that summed up the general state of play at that time. It was a truly appalling summer of weather with

floods hitting many parts of the country, leading to golf courses being closed for longer than I can ever remember. This was certainly the case at Teesside.

The weather even tried its best to affect BTME 2013 with several inches of snow falling in the run-up to the show. But it was a terrific week and really set the scene for a much improved 2013. After an extremely cold spring, the clouds finally lifted for a glorious summer, which was topped off by four days of almost tropical weather for The Open at Muirfield which I've already mentioned. Courses which had been under water flourished under the expert guidance of the

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country's greenkeepers, golfers flocked back to play and for the first time in several years we enjoyed a summer worthy of the name.

I know many BIGGA members spend hours of their own time organising golf days and competitions, so it was great to see them well-attended and actually going ahead successfully after so many were called off due to 2012's weather.

If I was pushed to name my highlight, it would be cutting the



ribbon at BTME 2013, I can genuinely say it was one of the proudest moments of my life. It was a very successful exhibition which reinforced the influence and strength of the Association – and all the signs are pointing to an even bigger and better BTME 2014.

The last few months have been a little strange as I left Teesside Golf Club after so many years in the industry. I miss the day to day running of a golf course – it's in my blood and I know the same is true with many of you. However, I'm looking forward to getting back involved with the Cleveland Section and the Northern Region and the close knit nature of this industry means I will be bothering you all for some time to come I'm sure.

One key point I must make is my optimism for the future of the industry having met so many enthusiastic and talented young greenkeepers. I have been very impressed by the standard of candidates at the last two Toro Student of the Year awards and I know that some of the finalists have already progressed in their careers since their nominations. The Future Turf Managers' Initiative is a more recent development and I'm convinced that over time this will become another very significant event in the greenkeeping calendar.

Another highlight of my chairmanship was my visit to the Golf Industry Show in America last year, allowing me to experience their educational offering first-hand. I firmly believe that although at one time we were playing catch-up with

education in America, we are now on a par with them and this is something to be proud of. In my opinion the revamped CPD scheme and the consistently superb educational offerings at BTME offer the sort of opportunities that were simply not available to me at the start of my career so it's up to you to seize these chances.

Congratulations to our new Chairman Chris Sealey, who will officially be taking over at BTME 2014, and also to our new Vice Chairman Les Howkins MG. Both Chris and Les are hugely knowledgeable, enthusiastic and approachable.

Alongside the existing Board of Management, I've every confidence the Association will continue to go from strength to strength with them on board.

I couldn't have fulfilled the role of Chairman without the backing of all the team at BIGGA House, the Regional Administrators and the Board of Management. I don't think the team at BIGGA House get enough praise for all the work they do, and I've always enjoyed heading to Aldwark. I know that anyone who visits BIGGA House for the first time mentions the friendly welcome they receive.

All that remains is for me to thank each and every member of this Association – it's been a true pleasure to act as Chairman. Without you BIGGA would cease to exist and that should never be forgotten.

*See you in Harrogate.
Cheers
Tony*



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