



Chairman's Word

New BIGGA National Chairman, Chris Sealey, gives his thoughts for the month

From Florida to floods

Firstly, it's great for me to look back on a record breaking BTME with real pride. Very positive feedback has continued to come in from visitors and exhibitors alike and we can all now reflect on a hugely successful week for the Association.

It was the perfect way to start the year, and I look forward to catching up with more members and people within the industry over the next 12 months – you don't always get the time at BTME, particularly as it was so busy this year!

It's been a whirlwind start to my time as Chairman, and a real tale of weather contrasts as I enjoyed temperatures in the mid eighties at the Golf Industry Show in Orlando, then had to don the wellies and waterproofs on my return home.

The GIS was fantastic, and I sensed a similar buzz to that present at BTME. I think the turf industry worldwide has had enough of tales of economic depression and there's a real sense of positivity returning to the industry. Although it seemed a little smaller in scale than my last visit in 2008, it was an excellent show with the varied exhibitors looking very busy – similar to BTME in many ways, even down to the Halls being particularly packed on the Wednesday.

The BIGGA Delegation, sponsored by Bernhard & Co, were a credit to the Association. They were professional, switched on and got on very well together. They also represented a real cross-section of clubs from across the UK. In just one example of what a superb development opportunity being a member of the delegation is, Tom Brearley met greenkeepers from Hazeltine National, venue of the 2016 Ryder Cup, and may get the opportunity to volunteer during the tournament itself. What better advert could there be for getting involved?

I visited two golf courses in Orlando – Orange County National and Shingle Creek Golf Club. They were both pristine and Shingle Creek in particular was brilliantly presented. Mind you, it must be easier to present a golf course when you have beautiful weather, dozens of staff and all the machinery you could dream of! The customer service was something else, we were welcomed by Shingle Creek



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employees when we drove in, in the car park, walking the course – in fact I think I met more people in the first ten minutes there than we have total staff at Chippenham!

I also attended various meetings with the GCSAA, GEO and many of our sponsors amongst others. I have to say we were looked after superbly throughout the week by the GCSAA, they also genuinely valued our input and my personal thanks go to them for the hospitality and friendliness we all encountered. As always, my thanks also go to Bernhard & Co for their continued support.

At Chippenham, we've been closed on and off for the last few weeks and it's currently a case of damage limitation. I'd like to get out and give everything a spike but it's just been too wet. The main tasks have been pushing water off our temporary greens to try and ensure some play is possible, and rodding drains – not exciting but essential. It's vital for us to remain open when we possibly can, as well as everything else we really value the money the new clubhouse generates here and obviously takings are severely hit when the course is closed.

The course is greener than I've ever seen it at this time of year, everything is still growing as we've not had the temperatures to chill the roots. I'm praying for a dry, cold snap with a north easterly wind and I hope that everyone across the country experiences much better, drier weather as spring approaches.

I did manage to get to watch my team Bristol Rovers after I returned from the States – and normal service was resumed when we conceded a goal within ten minutes! The real star of the show though was the groundsman in getting the game played at all after the weeks of relentless rain. I think at times we can get wrapped up in just thinking about golf, but it's been so tough recently for all turf managers whether they're looking after a golf course, rugby pitch, bowling green or football ground. At the very top level it's not too bad as the resources are there but further down the line when you have smaller budgets, fewer staff and less machinery it's a hard job, so everyone needs to pull together.

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