

Luke who's talking



TORO

Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Luke Turner, from Willingdon Golf Club, won a trip to America

when he triumphed in the annual competition last October. Here he recounts a fantastic seven weeks of dodging polar vortexes, intense studying and gaining an appreciation of American sport

As the plane taxied from the terminal early on another rainy January morning being the 25th winner of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year award finally felt like it had become a reality.

The day before I left the UK, the weather forecasters described north eastern USA as being gripped by a 'polar vortex'! I thought this may have been American over dramatisation of a slight cold snap.

But after being stuck at Detroit airport and having my connecting flight massively delayed because my luggage was stuck as the luggage hold door was frozen shut it was clear that they were serious!

Finally after a second flight, a bus journey, a walk through the snow and the coldest temperatures I have ever experienced, I was at the Comfort Inn, my home for the next seven weeks.

The following morning I was up and about at normal work time as

over breakfast I was keen to meet some of the other guys on the course. I got chatting with a few of them and was soon offered a lift to school by Pat Simmons, a greenkeeper from Salem Country Club. Pat and I became good friends over the length of my trip and he, along with two other greenkeepers called Nate Rand and Willem Geldenhuys showed me around, introduced me to American sports, and guided me through my winter stay in New England.

Following the eventual journey it was fairly easy to settle into a routine. Our days at UMASS were split into four two hour classes covering a range of topics specific to golf course turf management.

Plant physiology, weed science, soil science, entomology and pathology formed the backbone of the course. As well as our core subject professors we had a number of additional lecturers. Current and retired course superintendents,



a golf course architect, an arbor consultant and a USGA agronomist lectured regularly about their speciality areas.

Exams and tests were daily features and evening revision sessions in the hotel were commonplace. As the course progressed the revision sessions became more intense as did the friendly rivalry over exam results between the group of us which now included Australian greenkeeper Luke Jorgensen. This playful rivalry really pushed us all to get the most out of the course, while our friendships were also being cemented on evenings out, day trips and weekends away.

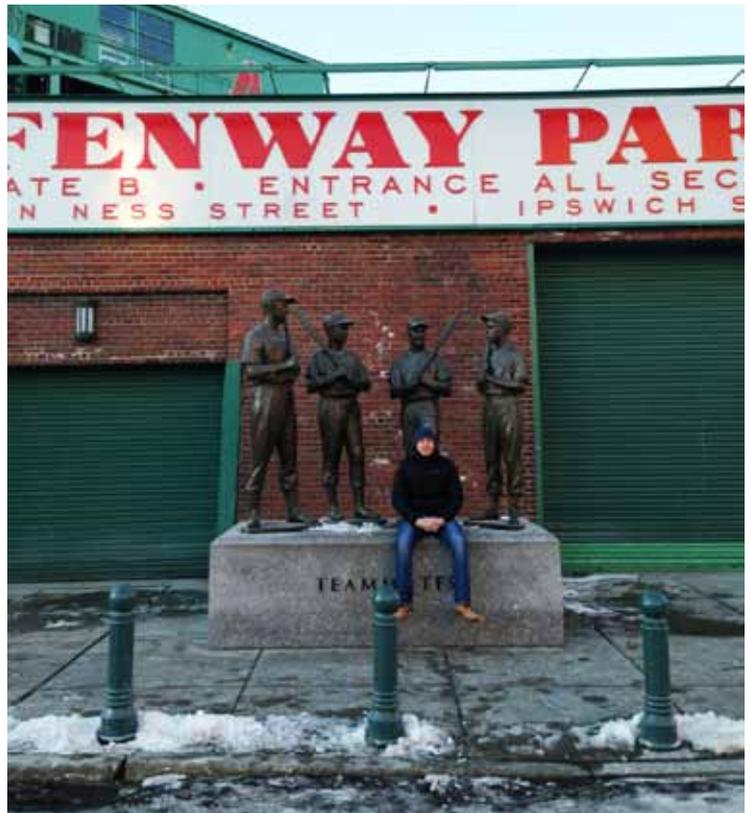
At the beginning of February I was scheduled to attend the GCSAA show in Orlando but the weather had other ideas. I arrived at the airport in Connecticut in plenty of time aware that a winter storm was expected the following day, but it arrived early and ruined any chances I had of making it down to the show and warmer weather for a few days.

I was sat in airport departures as around two feet of snow fell in as many hours. It continued to snow for the following two days and school was cancelled - even the awesome New England winter weather infrastructure couldn't safely cope with the storm. I was truly disappointed to miss the show but I'm confident I'll make it to one in future.

Although not able to make Florida a group of us did spend a day in Boston and a weekend in Rhode Island. We watched a Boston Celtics basketball match, visited Fenway Park and then spent a day exploring coastal Rhode Island.

The weeks passed by fairly quickly in a blur of revision, exams and evenings out watching college sport. We became regulars at the university basketball and ice hockey games where with Pat's guidance I learned that hockey culture and rugby culture are not too dissimilar.

Graduation day was upon us



before we knew it, bags were packed and goodbyes said after what was the most incredible seven weeks of my life. Winter School 2014 will certainly stick in my memory for a very long time and the skills and information learnt will remain useful and with me throughout my career.

The final days of my trip were spent in Minneapolis visiting Toro's headquarters and factory facilities. The tours were outstanding and it was such an eye opening experience to see behind the scenes of the machinery we all use everyday.

Every person we spoke with in and around the facilities had such pride in the jobs they do and the equipment they produce for us, the end user. I only had four days in Minneapolis and it was soon time to pack up and return home. My time in the city had flown by and my whole trip was coming to an end.

I really would like to thank Toro,

Lely and BIGGA for organising the award and the trip. Academically it was fantastic and I made some life-long friends and excellent contacts along the way.

I cannot emphasise enough how much I recommend any greenkeeping students to apply for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year award and experience the trip I've just returned from. If you do go just remember, when you think you have packed enough jumpers, pack more!



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Remember the closing date for 2014 nominations is Friday 23 May. See the BIGGA website for more details.