

The Association's finest golfers converged on the superb Somerset links of Burnham & Berrow for the BIGGA National Championship, sponsored by Kubota and Charterhouse.

The field was easily the strongest in the history of the event with a host of plus and scratch handicappers but they all found the course, which had recently hosted The Tillman Trophy, a tough nut to crack, even in the relatively benign conditions.

Winner of the prestigious Challenge Trophy, and BIGGA's Champion Golfer of the year, was scratch handicapper, Derek McJannet, of Matlock GC, who posted a two round total of 148 comprising equal rounds of 74.

The win was all the more meritorious as the 50 year-old Scot, who has been a scratch or better player for 22 years and a +2 player at his peak, had opened up with a double bogey six on the relatively tame par-4 opener.

Indeed, he also tripled bogeyed the 6th on the opening day so his

74 was a very good effort. He also bogeyed the opening two holes on the second day and by his own estimation was five shots off the lead after seven holes. Birdies at the 8th, 10th and 11th brought him back into it and he even had the luxury of a dropped shot at the 36th hole and still won by a single shot.

"I had a 15 footer for par at the last and charged it four feet by, but holed the return," said Derek, who has been Nottinghamshire County Champion twice and Nottinghamshire Open winner once. He is still a county player having represented Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire as well as Ayrshire in his youth where he played at Turnberry and Ballochmyle. He also represented BIGGA and the Rest of the World in the Hayter International in the mid '90s.

"This is a national competition, and there were some excellent players in the field so I'm absolutely delighted. This win is right up there with my best, if not the very best," said Derek, who

was playing in the event for the first time, but he has already set the time aside for his defence next year.

The Challenge Cup for the Best Nett saw a remarkable charge up the field by 19 handicapper, Gavin Robson, whose own club of Burton on Trent had hosted the National Championships four years ago.

Gavin, who was sharing a caravan during the Championship with fellow competitor and BIGGA Board of Management Member Tony Smith, recovered from a middle of the pack nett 79 on the opening round to shoot an astonishing nett 65 on the second day to claim the biggest prize of his golfing career. The round was all the surprising as he had been kept up by his colleague's snoring all night!

To illustrate just how much of a golfing day of a lifetime it was Gavin also nipped in with the Nearest the Pin prize on the 5th hole, getting inside 1 handicapper Oliver Browning's quality effort which had stood for most of the day. Oliver's pain will not be



ABOVE: Myles Wood with his trusty 3-wood

BELOW: Ed Ainsworth tees off on the 17th





reduced when he learns that Gavin's tee shot was topped and bounced along the path before finding its own unorthodox route to the pin. He was shamefaced enough to miss the putt.

His domestic partner didn't fare quite so well being the first man to lose a ball down the opening hole despite the attentions of the ball spotters who were stationed on high mounds on the left of the hole. John Pemberton actually tracked the ball down 24 hours later!

Other highlights on the second day were a holed 3-wood for an eagle 2 on the 11th from fully 197 yards into the wind by the appropriately named Myles Wood, of Berkhamstead GC, and a holed 8-iron on the 3rd by Ian Robins, on his way to winning the Stableford Challenge Plate, from 150 yards.

Among the non-playing visitors to the Championship was Past BIGGA Chairman, Kerran Daily, who was one of the aforementioned ball spotters and Billy Mitchell and Chris Sealey, of the SW&SW Region, who came along to support the event, and in particular, Course Manager, Richard Whyman, who together with his team, had done a superb job in preparing the course for the arrival of their peers. Richard, another Past BIGGA Chairman was in

his element and must have been delighted with the feedback he received from all corners.

Support from the sponsors was excellent. Both Kubota and Charterhouse ensured that no-one could approach the 1st tee without having the opportunity first to admire some of the finest examples of machinery in their respective fields. Colin Hennah, Kubota's Zone Sales Manager South, gave an excellent and lighthearted speech at the dinner having stood in as a last minute replacement for Dave Roberts, who had been taken ill, while Nick Darkin and Richard Charlton, of Charterhouse, were on hand to ensure everything went smoothly. Nick did remarkably well having taken part in a charity 37 mile walk the day before and his feet were a tad delicate during his time at the Championship. Tee sponsors, Ruffords and Groundsman, are also to be thanked for making the event possible.

The club looked after everyone superbly. Club Captain, Stuart Cook, got everyone on side at the dinner by empathising with the assembled gathering with his thoughts on CPD, and how both his profession – Medicine – and the greenkeeping profession were heavily involved with it.



ABOVE: BIGGA Chief Executive, John Pemberton, finds what could have been Tony Smith's molitor



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South Africa at the Summit

Golf in South Africa is going through some turbulent times; this latest recession hitting them much earlier and harder than here in Europe. Following the 2009 South African Golf Summit at Fancourt back in April, Kevin Marks visited the Pezula Golf Estate to speak with Course Superintendent Danny Maritz.



Pezula Championship Golf Course covers some 254 hectares of pristine Southern Cape landscape on the cliff-tops at Knysna, overlooking the Knysna Lagoon and the Indian Ocean. The award-winning 18-hole, par 72 course was designed by David Dale and Ronald Fream of GolfPlan USA, and rates amongst the best and the most scenic golf courses in the world. In 2001, just a few months after it opened, the Course was awarded Best New Golf Course in South Africa and in February 2005 Complete Golfer rated it a Five Star Golf Experience.

The clubhouse facilities are in keeping with the overall five star experience and includes an elevated terrace with views to the Indian Ocean, restaurant and golf shop, while adjacent is a short game practice area, driving range and putting green.

The club has close to 500 members of whom 400 are non-resident with many from Britain, Germany and the US, who live in the region for 2-3 months a year. In total around 25,000 rounds are played a year, but

it's the Christmas and New Year holidays that are by far and away the busiest with 80% of the total rounds played during this period.

Danny Maritz is the managing director of TurfWorks, the turf maintenance contracting company responsible for the course at Pezula, a contract which the company has had for the past two years. Previous to this, he was director of golf course maintenance for 10 years at Turftech, a grounds care company based in Johannesburg.

His team, which by European standards is still large, at 30 strong, has been reduced by 14 from a year ago; a reflection of the economic situation. Rory Hopper is his first assistant and he has a head mechanic with two assistants, working from a 1,800 m² workshop, where all servicing and repair work is undertaken.

"We were the first tee to green cool season grass course in the country," he said, "when the course was constructed 11 years ago. The tees and greens are bents and the fairways are a rye/fescue mix. I know I'm biased, but the

views here are awesome; you've got ocean, mountains and the fynbos (the natural shrubland or heathland vegetation of the region); it's one of those courses where to play it once is not enough.

"From an environmental standpoint we are very limited in how we can manage the fynbos. One of the conditions of the planning consent is that we are prevented from cutting it unless it is encroaching onto the course. We are obliged to remove any invasive species, but are extremely limited when it comes to making changes to the course.

"Because of all this natural vegetation we also have plenty of wildlife and some quite large game including Grey Buck, Bush Buck, baboons and Caracal, a large wild cat. We also have one of the deadliest snakes in South Africa, the Puff Adder, so that tends to stop golfers charging into the fynbos to retrieve balls!

"We've just experienced the driest summer ever; from January to March we had just 102mm of rain compared to an average of 260mm. The Knysna river hasn't dried up for 81 years, but it did this year.

"You would expect that this would give us huge problems, especially as we don't have access to any municipal water supply. However, we've overcome this by building our own water recycling plant at the civic council's sewage farm down in Knysna and pump 1.2 million litres of water a day to irrigate the course."

When you look in the sheds at the greenkeeping facility, you immediately see an eclectic mix of equipment, but the mowing equipment is mainly orange in colour. Danny has a long association with Jacobsen equipment and the South African distributor, CSE.

"We run two LF3400 fairway mowers and they have been a revelation," he said, "they've been totally reliable and we've had no issues in the two years we've been using them. The quality of cut is excellent and no downtime.

"We hand cut the greens whenever possible and use Eclipse 122s; I've got eight of them and they were the very first off the Jacobsen production line. They feature electric reel drive and, now that we're over the teething issues, they are performing really well.

"Our trim and tees mowers are Tri-Kings. At TurfTech I used run 12 of them and they are very good machines, especially for banks as

they have three-wheel drive; the cut is excellent and I love them.

Danny has some interesting views on golf in general and in South Africa in particular. Sitting in his office, chatting over a cup of coffee after we'd toured the course he said,

"The credit crunch, recession or however you want to describe it is having a real impact here in South Africa. We simply have to continue to do a good job with less money and that has meant less staff. We've also cut back on fertilizers and chemicals and any other non-essential expenses. Being a resort course we have exceptionally high standards and have always cut our fairways every day. However, now economic circumstances dictate, and we are mowing every second day, with no discernable difference. 75% of excellence is now acceptable. And we haven't seen any appreciable difference to the quality of the course as yet, but it's going to be a real challenge.

"Maintaining the presentation standards is our major issue. I think it all started with the US Masters, many years ago. Today, when the golfer goes to a course he expects to play Augusta, or something close to it. They expect the greens to be striped and running at 12.5 on the stimp meter and the fairways at 8 or 9.

"And that presents a major problem. Your average golfer might expect this level of presentation, but he won't actually be able to cope with the greens, so he probably won't have an enjoyable experience. It's a real dilemma."

This was one of the themes raised at the Fancourt Golf Summit by Frank Thomas, a former technical director of the USGA and inventor of the graphite shaft. From his research, which included a 53-question survey returned by 18,400 golfers, it concluded that courses are too long and too difficult for the average golfer. Another interesting statistic was that 95% of all courses are designed for just 0.55% of the golfing population, i.e. the 'Scratch' golfer. In other words, over 99% of all golfers across the globe will probably have an unenjoyable round of golf because courses are designed for a massive minority!

An example of this occurred, surprisingly, at the Fancourt Summit where delegates had the opportunity to play the Links course at the resort. Over 30 competitors went round and a few thought it was awesome, but the rest wouldn't play it again. Some



people lost 12 golf balls!

In contrast, The River Club at Sandton, Johannesburg, is mowed wall to wall, under trees, the rough is short, you can always find your ball and the members there enjoy their golf.

Danny is not at all enamored with the ranking of golf courses and feels that there are some gaping holes in the system.

"One of the major issues we have here in South Africa, and especially down here on the Garden Route, is that everyone wants to be ranked No 1. You can ask any greenkeeper or superintendent and they'll all say the same. However, the whole ranking system is a total bluff, unless every adjudicator plays every course, and that doesn't happen.

"I'm a member at a local club, which is a lovely course, but it's definitely not up to the standard of Pezula. It's ranked 15th and we're ranked at 24. They are consistently ranked in the top 30 when it comes to conditioning and we're not even in the top 50.

"What worries me is how many superintendents have lost their

jobs because of the rankings; it's playing with people's jobs. The problem is it's all subjective and there appears to be no criteria for the judging.

"What we need down here is a joined up marketing campaign to encourage the world's golfers to come. Pinnacle Point, Oubaai, Simola and Mossel Bay are all trying to get their act together and provide a 'Pay & Play' network. With the Soccer World Cup here in 2010 we have a great opportunity to showcase our facilities and it's an opportunity that we mustn't miss."

Having toured the course, with its views of mountains and ocean, it's not surprising that this is a popular and successful golf resort. The course is the centerpiece and even at '75% of excellence' it was in magnificent condition. The challenge now for Pezula and for golf in South Africa is to draw golfers in from Europe and further afield. With the Soccer World Cup in 2010 they have the perfect opportunity to showcase their product; like Danny says it's an opportunity they cannot afford to miss.



Course Superintendent,
Danny Maritz

The BIGGA Golf Course Fund

Scott MacCallum chats with Cecil George, whose dream is for BIGGA to have its own golf course

The BIGGA Golf Course Fund, launched in Harrogate at the AGM nearly two years ago, is the vision of a man who has identified a BIGGA built and owned golf course as a means of securing the Association's long term future.

Cecil George retired from Lenzie Golf Club in the mid-90s but, at 82, his commitment and drive on behalf of BIGGA is as strong now as it ever was when he was a key figure in the development of the Scottish greenkeeping education programme, or sitting on the interview panel for the Association's first Executive Director, Neil Thomas.

Cecil is a man of strong conviction and ever since SIGGA investigated the possibility of building its own golf course in the '70s, long before that Association became one of three which joined to form the new BIGGA, he has carried the torch for the idea.

"We have over 6000 members, yet we don't have a golf course of our own. Don't you think that's peculiar – an Association of greenkeepers without a course?" said Cecil, speaking a short time after returning from playing in a West of Scotland Section event.

Those Scottish SIGGA members obviously thought so, and they even got so far as discussions with Ayrshire County Council on the matter.

"We intended to build a golf course. The late Harry Diamond, Head Greenkeeper at Ayr Belleisle, was very much involved and personally negotiated with Ayrshire Council, who actually said that if we were to build a course they would be willing to give us the land for a penny a year.

"It didn't get any further than that. I'm not sure what held us back, probably money like everything else."

But the idea has stayed with Cecil to this day and after raising the matter at a number of AGMs he finally got approval for the setting up of the BIGGA Golf Course Fund at the 2008 AGM and he proudly

handed over a cheque as the first contribution.

He is under no illusion of the sums required to make it work but is adamant that the money would have to be raised through donation before starting any work.

"We would have to have the money in place before we started and I certainly wouldn't want to get in debt to the banks. Look at what has happened at other clubs where the banks have called in their loans. I wouldn't want to risk the future of the Association."

In fact, Cecil sees the project as offering security rather than the reverse.

"It doesn't take any great intellect to realise that BTME can't go on forever and BIGGA must find other ways to fund its operations."

Cecil has gone as far as earmarking a part of the country where he believes the new course could be built.

"I've been looking at a map of the country and believe that we could find extensive land – preferably links – between Scarborough and Bridlington, where there are currently only around seven existing courses. Both towns are reasonably sized holiday destinations to bring in visitors and I believe there would be a good membership catchment area."

Once the finance has been raised, and Cecil believes that greenkeepers would make a million pounds go a long way, a committee of "sensible thinking people" would be formed to ensure that all interested parties are involved.

"I would see greenkeepers volunteering to work on the building of the course – a working holiday along the lines of the Support Team at The Open. I don't know a greenkeeper who can't do construction work. We have all the expertise it's just a case of tapping into it while I'm sure we could rely on our friends within the industry to lend us the necessary machinery."

Once completed Cecil would see the BIGGA Headquarters

relocating to the new site and a small accommodation block and greenkeeping teaching academy being built.

"We could accommodate those people who have travelled to the course for training courses while I'm sure we would get regular visitors coming to see the course from all over the country and it would be great for them to be able to stay," said Cecil, who would expect the course to have a full time Course Manager and team but offering opportunities for others to learn and train on the new facility.

The new course would be built to the very best specifications and taking account of the modern day professional golfer in terms of length and difficulty with around 125 acres required – although 300 acres would make so much more possible.

"If we were to build a links, and knowing that the likes of Lytham St Annes can't go on hosting The Open forever, I'd love to think that BIGGA's course would host the Championship one day. You never know..."

If successful Cecil doesn't see it stopping at one course and can one day envisage a group of around four or five BIGGA courses spread around the country.

"When we are clear of the current financial difficulties I'd love to see this project move forward. We'd need to be aware of all the stumbling blocks but only through the eyes of an optimist can the difficulties be overcome. You never get anywhere if you're a pessimist,

"I know that some people think that the idea of a golf course is just a pipe dream but if we don't look to our own future with an optimistic point of view there will be no future," said Cecil, sounding as eloquent as ever.

Anyone wishing to support the BIGGA Golf Course Fund should send donations to BIGGA Golf Course Fund, BIGGA HOUSE, Aldwark, Alne, York YO61 1UF.



Cecil George makes the first contribution to the fund at the 2008 AGM



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Tuesday 19 January

9.30am – 10.00am

Enhancing the Biodiversity of the Golf Course

Presented by Will Bowden, Programme Manager Sports Turf, Bridgwater College

10.15am – 10.45am

European Greenkeeping Passport – Your Future?

Presented by members of the European Greenkeeping Education Unit Management Team

10.30am – 11.00am

How do I Choose my Wetting Agent Programme?

Presented by David Goldstone, Managing Director, Tower Sport (Europe) Ltd

11.00am – 12 noon

An Introduction to the CMAE and the Certified Golf Club Manager Programme

Presented by Jerry Kilby, Chief Executive Officer, Club Managers' Association of Europe

11.15am – 11.45am

Sustainable Aeration and Drainage for Golf Courses, Trees and Winter Sports Pitches

Presented by David Green, Managing Director, Terrain Aeration

1.15pm – 1.45pm

Sustainable Turf Management – Utilising Soil Potential with Organic Matter

Presented by Ton Terlouw, Melspring Business Development Manager - Green Division, Sherriff Amenity

2.00pm – 2.30pm

Nematode Management – A Developing Story

Presented by Mark Hunt, Technical Director, Headland Amenity Limited

2.30pm – 3.00pm

Greens Construction

Presented by Lee Strutt MG, AGS, Golf Course Manager, Ochil Developments

2.45pm – 3.15pm

Nutrition for Early Spring Growth

Presented by Graham O'Connor, Symbio

3.15pm – 3.45pm

Performance, Profile and Profit - Real Benefits from Environmental and Social Action

Presented by Jonathan Smith, Chief Executive, Golf Environment Organisation

4.15pm – 4.45pm

RESCUE: Using a Selective Ryegrass Killer on Golf Courses

Presented by Dr Simon Watson, Turf and Amenity Technical Manager, Syngenta

Wednesday 20 January

8.20am – 10.30am

The 2mm (or above) Debate - Greens Sward Composition and Management

1.45pm – 2.30pm

Irrigation Planning and Installation - Behind the Scenes

Presented by Chris Lomas MG, Golf Course Manager, The Berkshire Golf Club

4.00pm – 4.30pm

Smart Watering for a Healthier Environment

Presented by Adrian Hanbury, Sportsturf Manager, Hunter Industries and Revaho UK Ltd

Thursday 21 January

9.45am – 10.00am

False Economy in Grounds Management

Presented by Richard Brown, Amenity Field Sales Manager, British Seed Houses Ltd

10.30am – 11.00am

A Tree for all Reasons

Presented by Andrea Grey, Sales Manager, Bellwood Trees

11.00am – 11.30am

Growing Turf for the West Course at Wentworth

Presented by Tim Fell, Managing Director, Tillers Turf

11.15am – 11.45am

The Case for Higher Education in Golf Greenkeeping

Presented by Dr Andy Owen and Stewart Brown, Myerscough College

11.45am – 12.15am

Integrated Vegetation Management

Presented by Ian Graham, Managing Director, Complete Weed Control

12 noon – 12.30pm

Sustainable Turf Management – Understanding the Benefits of Cold Process Seaweed Extract

Presented by Franck Hennequart, OGT Project Manager and Scientific Officer, Limagrain

More seminars will be added.

For full details of all the seminars go to the Harrogate Week website: www.harrogateweek.org.uk.

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Harrogate week

Lateral thinking key to saving money



James de Havilland looks at ways in which you can ensure your facility is being cost effective and environmentally responsible at the same time

As many golf clubs around the World are now finding, the global recession and its impact upon revenues and profitability has not followed a fixed trend.

One point that is clear, however, is that those clubs that have made the most of what they have to offer have seen a less dramatic impact upon their 'bottom line'. But there are other things you can do to help trim your costs.

Don't worry. This is not going to be a patronising list of 'ideas' to help bring in revenue. There are enough marketing experts who can tell a club how to try and drum up extra business when money is tight. That said most clubs are doing a pretty good job by themselves. You only have to telephone a few courses to see that there are some interesting incentives on offer that have helped keep green fees coming in and club revenues ticking over.

In fact the best 'scheme' remains the same as it does in the good times; ensure both members and visitors are kept happy by offering a good overall package. A decent round of golf and a friendly club atmosphere offer the lasting value that keeps people coming back. Great golf, fair pricing, decent catering and friendly staff will never go out of fashion and are the keys to success in tough times.

So if your marketing and 'customer care' is in good shape but you

still need more, what else can you do? The key can sometimes be to think laterally.

Energy saving is a good example. Just stop and think how much it costs to keep various chillers running in a club bar. If the answer to that is you have no idea on this sort of detail cost, you would not be alone. If you also think this level of detail understanding is not relevant you may also be missing the point.

So make the same question more global. By how much have your electricity costs increased over the past five years? You should have an answer. The next question is obvious. Have you done anything to try and reduce these energy costs?

In fact you can give yourself a nasty shock by looking at all utility bills. Water and sewerage costs have all increased. Oil and gas costs have fluctuated, a fall in price from the peaks we have experienced over the Winter of 2008 proving so welcome that it is easy to overlook the overall trend; all forms of energy are getting more expensive. Even business rates have rocketed in some parts of the UK. All this is before you take in the costs of looking after the course and general club infrastructure.

So what can you do? With regard to electricity, modern control systems should mean it is easier to manage certain details such as lighting. It is pretty obvious that there is no point in having a light on if there is

no one around to benefit from it. It is also a waste to artificially light areas bathed in natural light. And why allow a chiller to run when there are no bottles to be chilled within it?

Although the savings that can be made by careful electricity management may seem small, it is surprising how they can help trim your bills. It is well worth contacting your electricity supplier and having them carry out an energy audit to see if they can help.

Water consumption is another hot topic. A big roof is a huge resource when it comes to collecting rainwater, so this is well worth looking into. Company's like Evesham-based Even Products (www.evenproducts.com) can supply self-build water tanks that will hold around 100,000 litres of water for under £3,000. A simple rain water harvest system can be set-up for around £5,000, a sum that will look pretty reasonable against most mains water bills.

A roof can also be used to trap the sun. Although photovoltaic tiles allow roofs to be converted into mini generators, the installation costs are still extremely high. So although these systems may be great for your environmental PR, covering a roof with these electricity generating units should not be considered for their value in saving money. The story can be different on a new build, however, particularly if you can get a

Solar hot water heating systems have been in use in the UK for many years. Designed to help reduce reliance of fossil fuels, many systems are installed simply because they can help reduce CO2 emissions. The ability of these solar collectors to save money has been questioned, critics suggesting it can take a 25 years or more to 'earn back' the installation cost. The recent hikes in energy costs have, however, helped change many a sceptics mind, solar hot water heating now having a much reduced pay-back period.