



A letter from America



BERNHARD
grinders

Every February the BIGGA Delegation, sponsored by Bernhard and Co, head to the Golf Industry Show in America for a life-changing professional and personal experience. This year Tom Brearley, Assistant Greenkeeper at Sunningdale, was one of the ten Delegates to Orlando and compiled a fascinating diary. Here's his review of the show, a visit to TPC Sawgrass and how the week led to a dream Ryder Cup opportunity



**Saturday 1 February
Marriot's Cypress Harbour,
Orlando**

The day had finally come, the first day of what turned out to be one of the best experiences I have had. The selected ten from all over the UK were greeted by the ever helpful Kim Furnell from Bernhard and Co who had planned and organised the trip. The long flight enabled us to get to know each other and our varied backgrounds. On arrival in Orlando we were transferred to the fantastic Cypress Harbour Hotel, and were bowled over at both the level of hospitality that we were shown and our fantastic apartments. It was a quick turnaround, then out for some food and drink.

**Sunday 2 February
Golf at the Orange County
National Golf Center**

Following a great first night in Orlando we enjoyed breakfast whilst watching the greenkeepers at work on the hotel's fantastic golf course. We were then transported to the 36-hole Orange County National. After collecting our complimentary clubs and buggies we headed to the 42 acre circular driv-

ing range. We split into fourballs and enjoyed Panther Lake's 18 holes of huge creeping bentgrass greens, littered with water hazards, well positioned bunkers and the occasional alligator!

John Entwistle from The Roehampton Club took the money beating Jim Croxton by a point. The day provided a further opportunity to get to know each other and swap trade stories and experiences from the UK – this continued throughout the week. The evening was spent watching the Superbowl in Orlando which gave us a great taste of the American culture.

**Monday 3 February
Orange County Convention
Center. Seminars on Greens
Aerification and Water
Management by Numbers**

The first of our two days of educational seminars was held at the Orange County Convention Centre. There was just time to grab a coffee and dodge the occasional segway used by staff to get from one end of the huge complex to the other. The seminar was delivered by Erik Ervin of Virginia Tech, Troy Fink, Superintendent at The Country Club of Virginia and Nelson Caron,

Superintendent at the Ford Plantation.

Erik began by discussing the importance of organic matter management, covering the science and facts and how we must provide the best soil conditions for our grass species to thrive.

As the morning session continued Troy and Nelson took the lead discussing their organic matter management styles, processes and the results they've achieved. It was really interesting to see two young Superintendents who vary traditional and new methods to achieve the same goal, with Troy managing A4 Creeping Bentgrass greens and Nelson on Tif-Eagle Bermuda grass greens.

In the afternoon Erik led the seminar on the importance of effective water management and its effect on both warm and cool season grass species. Troy and Nelson then discussed their methods of water management. Troy explained how he relies on technology, using soil moisture and firmness meters alongside a simple flagging system and the logging of data allowing him to stay on top of the moisture levels and health of his greens.

In contrast, Nelson explained how he manages his moisture





levels by training his staff to use their eyes and feel with the use of a pocket knife to provide a ranking of a green for firmness and moisture. This is a simple system which relies on the skill of his staff and their interpretation of the results which I could really relate to.

I think we all took a huge amount from the day and there was a real buzz in the group with discussions continuing throughout the week on the topic.

The evening was spent having some downtime at a local restaurant followed by drinks with the Bernhards crew at the hotel bar.

Tuesday 4 February Shingle Creek Golf Club, Gadgets and Gizmos Seminar

Day two of our education programme was based at Shingle Creek Golf Club where we split the day between the conference room and the course turf nursery.

The seminar was focused on current and new technology becoming available to the greenkeeping industry. Soil moisture and light sensors were the main topic of discussion in the morning.

We were introduced to the products and discussed how they

can be incorporated into course management. I particularly related to the light level sensors as they can be used to illustrate data on the adverse impacts of trees and levels of shade on a green.

We were then let loose with the gadgets which had been discussed and put them to the test. The afternoon session focused on green speed and firmness, data logging and mobile apps.

I think we all picked out something that we could implement into course management in the UK, from providing firmness readings enabling us to manage our surfaces to improve the consistency of our greens, to light level sensors providing data to convince a committee to agree to tree removal.

The evening was a busy one spending time at the UKTI sponsored British reception hosted by BIGGA which provided a great opportunity to meet up with friends and colleagues.

This was followed by a GCSAA Celebration held at the Rosen Centre, we then headed to a Jacobsen Reception held at Disney's Epcot Park which was fantastic, the highlight of which was the famous Disney firework display.



ABOVE: The delegates at Shingle Creek Golf Club

Wednesday 5 & Thursday 6 February
The Golf Industry Show, Orange County Convention Centre

The next two days were spent at the GIS and attending educational sessions. The show was vast covering 184,500 square feet with 561

exhibitors differing in size and products from the likes of John Deere, Jacobsen and Toro to small family run businesses showcasing their products.

We spent our time exploring the show floor for new products and ideas that we could incorporate back in the UK.

There were many interesting concepts which provided a real insight into the American market and where it is heading. Time was also spent manning the BIGGA stand with the BIGGA team. The stand attracted international interest and gave us further opportunity to chat with greenkeepers from all over the globe.

I spent some of my time exploring the American education programmes as it is something that really interests me in furthering my career. There were at least 15 stands representing the various university and college programmes allowing me to engage with current and past students providing me with a students' perspective.

Rutgers at the State University of New Jersey provide an intense three week course which I am keen to follow up, as well as the possibility of some tournament experience.

Wednesday evening was spent at the Bernhard and Co after show Reception. This was a great opportunity to meet greenkeepers from all over the world, hearing stories and industry experiences from people at the top of the game really motivated me.

I was lucky enough to be introduced to Chris Tritabaugh, Golf Course Superintendent at Hazeltine National, host of the 2016 Ryder Cup.

This half hour chat with Chris provided an insight into his career path and the challenge he has at Hazeltine in the next two years.

He showed a real interest in my background, aspirations and our work at Sunningdale, resulting in him offering me the chance to join his team for the Ryder Cup in 2016.

This is an example of what the trip can open up for you if you are willing to put yourself out there and will definitely result in one of the highlights of my career.

Friday 7 February
Course Visit, TPC Sawgrass

On arriving at the impressive maintenance facility at Sawgrass we were met by Joe Curran and Justin Lowery, both Assistant Superintendents on the stadium course.

On walking into the management offices and crew room we knew we were somewhere special with the electronic assignment board illustrating an ongoing trend of efficiency throughout the complex. In the workshop we were confronted with a sea of perfectly presented machinery and hand tools all ready to go for the next day.

We continued to the newly renovated self contained chemical building with a 300 gallon



“I couldn't have wished for a better group of guys to have travelled with, we worked hard all week but had some good laughs along the way and I'm pretty sure I've made nine new lifelong friends”

Andrew Laing, Course Manager, Gaudet Luce GC



containment tank, two mixers, a bulk transfer system and induction bowls to ease the mix of chemicals. This was obviously a frequently used facility as they discussed their intense spraying programme.

We questioned Joe and Justin about all aspects of their facility and techniques including their 20 Precision Aire units and the recent renovation of 17 fairways and 9 nine tee boxes in just 17 days on the stadium course.

After our tour of the maintenance facility we took a short buggy ride to one of the most famous holes in golf – the island green 17th.

We were then invited to the stunning clubhouse and the home of the PGA Tour for an unbelievable lunch, then met by the club’s General Manager Bill Hughes.

He gave us a guided tour of the clubhouse including the

champion’s locker room and the vast collection of memorabilia. His huge personality and the stories he shared were fascinating.

The evening was spent celebrating a great week with visits to a few of our favourite places from our time in Orlando.

**Saturday 8 February
Flights home**

We had the final morning free before heading to the airport. I think we had all hit a wall by this stage and there were some tired bodies on the plane home. But what a week we had all enjoyed and it was truly a real career highlight for each member of the delegation.

On reflection, the trip has provided me with a real boost to continue my progression through the industry. It was inspirational



ABOVE: The delegates at TPC Sawgrass

MIDDLE: On the BIGGA Stand at the GIS

BOTTOM: The maintenance facility at TPC Sawgrass

and I have come away with some new and heightened career goals. It highlighted the fantastic global network we have in our industry, the power of education and the levels that can be achieved if you apply yourself. I would recommend it to anyone within the industry - long may it continue.



**BERNHARD
grinders**

THANK YOU

I would like to thank Stephen Bernhard and his incredible team for providing an unforgettable opportunity and experience.

The company is a credit to the industry and its forward thinking to provide an opportunity like this must be recognised. A huge thank you must go to Kim Furnell for her impeccable organisation and dedication to the continuous development of the trip.

To Jim Croxton and the team at BIGGA, thank you for your guidance, hospitality and for sharing this great experience with us.



“One of my favourite sayings is ‘many hands make light work’. This is certainly true here. We’ve got the members helping out, and the greenkeeping team working together”

PROFILE

Name: Allan Donlevy

Role: Acting Head
Greenkeeper

Born: Liverpool, 22
August 1970

**Favourite sports
team:** Everton

Hobbies: Rugby
player and coach

In it together

Steve Castle heads to the north west and discovers a busy, traditional club where everyone is prepared to muck in – including the members



Ashton-in-Makerfield Golf Club is an undulating parkland course situated in Garswood Park between Wigan and St Helens, close to the M6. On a glorious sunny day, Acting Head Greenkeeper Allan Donlevy was soon into his stride as he explained how his interesting greenkeeping career led him to Ashton, which has been on its current site since 1965.

"I started at West Derby Golf Club in 1986 as one of Maggie Thatcher's apprentices! I then moved to Gerrards Cross, then I was at Walton Heath for 11 years working under Clive Osgood.

"We held a couple of European Opens there, County events plus some Amateur Championships. It was a fantastic time, great fun as well as a great place to work, and the pinnacle was the European Open in 1991.

"Then I came back up north to take the Deputy Course Man-

ager's role at Stockport, but I got made redundant so came here in 2001."

Ashton recently acquired the services of Gordon Irvine MG as a consultant, and last year they invested in a Toro ProCore 648 which the entire team have been very pleased with.

"It's easy to use, excellent maneuverability, it's brilliant. It does use a lot of petrol – but ultimately I can start tining the greens at 6am and do all the greens in six hours.

"Even the members noticed a difference as we were using smaller tines. It gives flexibility and access to greens all the time as opposed to the tractor mounted alternative which could leave tyre marks.

"We do weekly sarel rolling in conjunction with the 8mm tines with the ProCore, which is every two weeks from March until the end of May. Regarding cutting we work between 5mm and 6mm until more growth is achieved."

In 2009, it was announced that

The team of Phil Roberts, Mike McGrail, Carl Roscoe, Allan Donlevy, Richard Orrick

a £120m water pipeline linking Liverpool and Bury was to be routed straight through Ashton-in-Makerfield and five other golf courses. At Ashton, the pipe's route took it through the 17th hole and 18th tee.

So, United Utilities agreed to fund the purchase and construction of 14 spare acres of land adjacent to the course for two new holes, then reinstated the original 17th.

Allan added: "The greens are meadowgrass bent, we've recently started an overseeding programme to get more bent in. It's great to have Gordon Irvine on board, we get on well and he's always at the end of a phone if I need him. The course is really coming on, we've had good feedback this year.

"Thanks to Gordon's advice we are now majoring on aeration, it's all about getting the right playing surface for the members.

"We don't have a full irrigation system – albeit we have irrigation points to all our greens and some tees.



“The course has a clay base. Nine holes are reclaimed land and you wouldn’t describe it as good growing soil, but we’ve made a good golf course out of it and our members are really proud of what they’ve got.”

This is clearly illustrated by the so-called ‘Wednesday working party’ at the club. It began around a decade ago when a couple of helpful members offered to tidy some borders surrounding the clubhouse, and has grown to a larger group who now perform some key tasks.

They work generally from 8am – 12 on Wednesdays. The club held a training day to show them various tasks, so they’re all fully up to speed with health and safety issues. Two of them wanted to get even more involved so they are fully trained to use the five ton dumper. This was all paid for by the club who recognise how important their input is.

Allan added: “I’m very appreciative of that group, they take on all sorts of tasks from small things like pruning copses to full-scale projects like building pathways. They save the greenkeeping team a lot of time and ensure we can concentrate on the course.

“My ultimate aim here is that as soon as every golfer leaves, they’re on the phone wanting to come back and play again.”

Ashton-in-Makerfield is a very

busy golf course. As I’ve travelled the country speaking to BIGGA members, one of the constant themes raised is the fact that golf courses are much more heavily used than 20 or even ten years ago – and Ashton is no exception.

Allan confirmed: “We start at 7am in the winter and there are always golfers here ready to go out at 7.30. This is also something we have to really think about in the summer when we have people finishing their night shift wanting to have nine holes at 5am. We have 500 members, and Saturdays here are absolutely manic.

“In the summer we can have more than 180 golfers here on Saturdays playing all the way through from 7am, and in the winter a similar number on a two tee start on a shortened course.

“Of course we need the money from people playing here, but naturally, and I’m sure many greenkeepers would agree with this, the sheer volume of golf played causes us problems. When I started greenkeeping in 1986 it would literally be one man and his dog playing on a winter morning. But as time’s gone on, people are retiring younger, they’re watching more golf on TV and they want to play all year round.

“You can set your watch by some of our members. In fact it gets to

the point if they don’t turn up on a morning, you start to worry about what’s happened to them!

“In the winter we put a lot of ropes up to keep golfers away from the finer stuff. Parts of the course do end up looking like a maze but it protects key areas of the course.

“One of my favourite sayings is ‘many hands make light work’. This is certainly true here. We’ve got the members helping out, and the greenkeeping team working together (we have five in total) is the most important thing.”

As I left, the team were summoned to an apparent emergency. What could have happened? Allan’s colleague Mike McGrail explained: “One of our members has got a bit of a temper, and he’s just duffed a shot and hurled his fairway wood into a tree. It’s stuck in a branch 15 feet up and he wants us to get it down.”

All in a day’s work for the team at Ashton-in-Makerfield.



MACHINERY LIST

- 1 John Deere 4520 tractor
- 1 John Deere 3720 tractor
- Lewis drainage trencher
- Wiedenmann XP 160 Terra Spike
- 1 3 ton gravel bander
- 1 5 ton dumper
- 1 Toro 648 ProCore
- 2 John Deere 2500 greens mowers
- 1 John Deere 3245C rough mower
- 1 John Deere 3235C fairway mower
- 2 Toro 3250s
- Various hand machines
- 1 Greentek thatchaway system
- 1 Pro Pass topdresser
- 2 John Deere 2653 Semi Rough Mowers
- 1 John Deere 2500 Hybrid Greens Machine (due in April)
- 1 Industrial Wood chipper



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Onwards and upwards



Andy Pullen was recently promoted from Deputy to Course Manager. Laurence Pithie met Andy to find out more about his experience, the challenges that lie ahead at North Wilts Golf Club, and his advice for Deputies looking to make the next step