

"G.C.S.A.A. Finishes Third at International Greenskeepers and Superintendents Golf Tournament

Anytime that a golf tournament is held at the Old Course in St. Andrews, Scotland it becomes a very special event. The Ransomes Fifth International Tournament was surely no exception to the mystique of St. Andrews. With the shadows of the Royal and Ancient building filtering just near the first tee and the Swilcan Burr just a few hundred yards ahead, you know that the great challenge of golf in its purest form, lies directly in front of you.

On October 9th the G.C.S.A.A. sent its team of Dave Powell (North Carolina), Dick Stuntz (Kansas), Gene Baston (Texas) and Kevin Downing (Florida) against twelve other teams representing countries throughout the world. The Stableford competition was the format of the day with the best score of three players used to accumulate points. Captain Gene Baston elected to assist the team by providing moral and strategic advice for the first of two eighteen hole rounds that were to be held on the same day. The temperature was a cool fifty-five and coupled with overcast and windy conditions it looked like another fiesty round in Scottish conditions. The defending champions from Canada had assembled another strong group and they looked like the team to beat with stiff competition from Scotland and possibly the U.S.A.

Dave Powell and Dick Stuntz were both solid two and four handicappers respectively and Kevin Downing was playing to a nine handicap coming into the tournament. Being a "links" type of course it lends itself to a different type of strategy when positioning your tee ball and definitely the alignment of your approach shots is a critical feature when trying to score well on the Old Course. The summer rains in Scotland were abundant and the turf conditions were very lush for Scottish standards. Because of the softness in the soil and turf, the course played a little longer than usual but the expertise needed to execute the "bump and run" shot was not as critical. Because of the unusual size of the seven double greens coupled with the unique contours, it is so important to be on the proper side of the pin position when your approach shot comes to rest. When the flag of the U.S.A. was raised and the team was introduced, you started to feel as if you were in attendance at a mini-Olympics and the nerves and adrenalin began to shake and flow simultaneously. Downing floated a gentle hook that ended up closer to eighteen fairway than number one, but the other two members drove right down the middle. The thrill of playing in front of a crowd and utilizing caddies while walking the course adds so much to the intrigue of competition. The team basically got off to a shaky start but remained close by saving a few pars and remaining composed through a few sudden rain-showers. A team birdie on the eighteenth hole gave a boost to the moral even though the team was in sixth place after the morning round.

All three team members were extremely determined to regroup and mount a little charge in the afternoon. The skys cleared at noon and the temperature warmed up a

little even though the ski caps and rainsuits still remained standard equipment. Shot making was superb on the front nine and Kevin was able to salvage a critical par on number nine from deep in the heather and gorse. Stuntz rammed in a four footer for birdie three on the tenth and the charge was on. The inability to make any mid range putts had plagued the group throughout the tournament but Dave Powell made a twisting five footer on the eleventh to save par. The Canadian team was looking over from the adjoining seventh and responded with a birdie three which left the U.S.A. behind by at least three points. A natural birdie was recorded at the par five fourteenth after Downing and Stuntz both made four utilizing the new strategy of letting Kevin make the two footer before Dick drained the twelve foot putt. As in most events at the Old Course the seventeenth hole (Road Hole) always takes on special significance in the outcome. The tee shot over the "Old Course Hotel" is probably one of the most unique shots in golf when you must decide which letter in the sign you must aim over. Dick Stuntz rifled a three iron at the pin position which was snuggled directly behind a deep, deep trap. To everybody's disbelief the ball ran through the trap and on to the green setting up a possible net eagle which would be a big swing in the standings. Once again the ball ran over the lip and the U.S.A. settled for three.

Standing on the eighteenth tee while capturing the view of the R&A Building and the town of St. Andrews is quite a sight. Golf is a part of everyday life in Scotland and the townspeople take evening walks on the course or just assemble near the eighteenth green to watch players finish. In front of the green is the famed "Valley of Sin" and an access road cuts across the fairway, which you must decide whether or not you want to drive the ball over the road. All three players drove the ball very long and set up the approach wedge shots to the green. The team from West Germany was finishing out on the green when Dave's wife Sharon Powell came over to give the final pep talk of the day by giving the team a short rendition of Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." Apparently the added incentive paid some dividends since Downing's approach shot almost flew in the cup and came to rest a foot away after hitting the flag-stack. The eagle instead of the birdie would have given the U.S.A. a share of the lead but Canada (90 pts.) and Scotland (89 pts.) topped the birdie three with two putts that gave them first and second place with the G.C.S.A.A. bunch a close third with 88 points.

The event was organized very professionally all the way from assigned scorekeepers, marshalls and the playing of the bagpipes at the closing ceremony. With the participation at the SIGGA Conference on the day before and the closing banquet there was a great deal of comradery between superintendents from all over the world. The atmosphere and tradition at St. Andrews is difficult to describe, but anyone that feels a great deal of respect for the game and its history would not have been disappointed. ■