

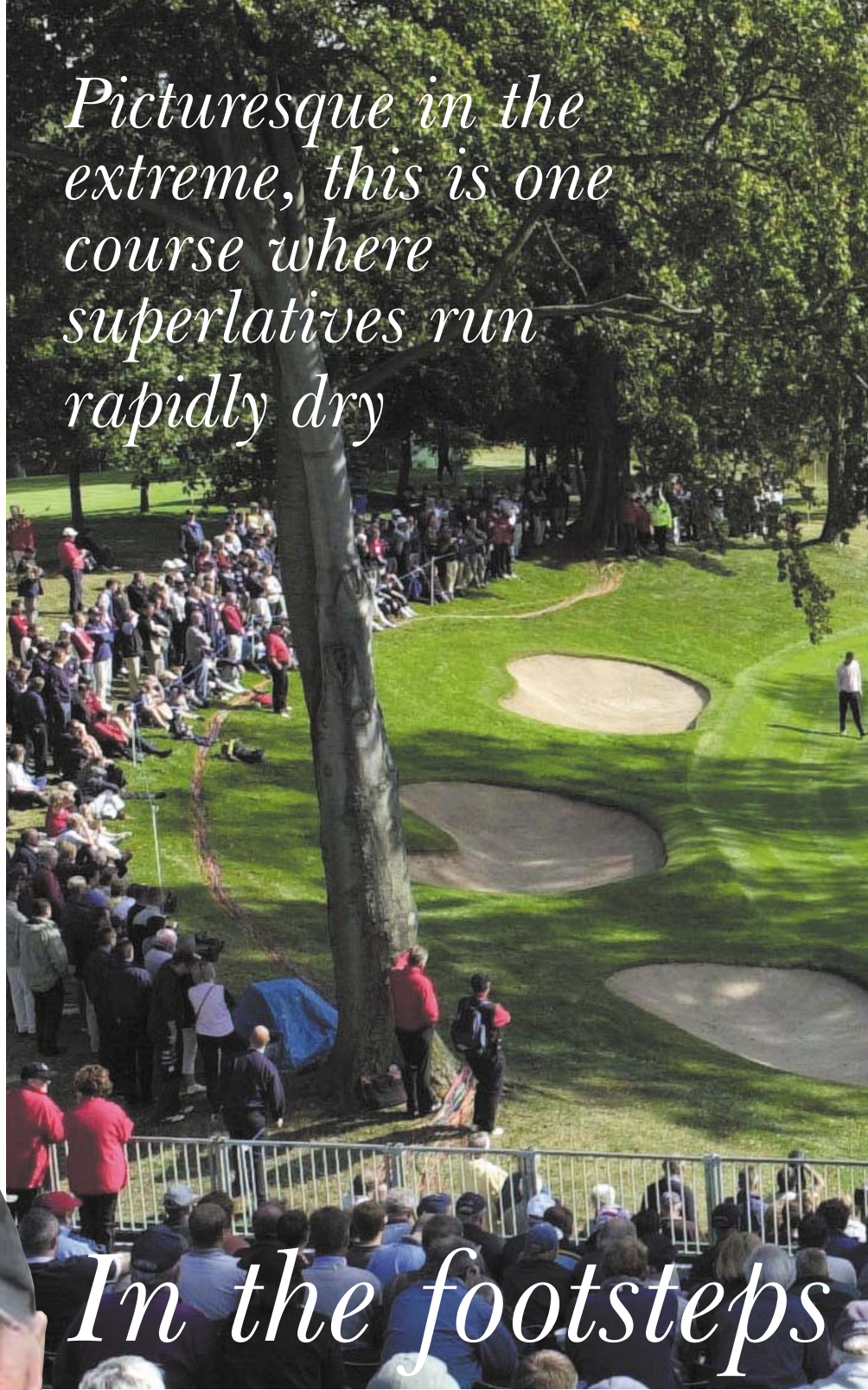
**It is a late September morning as I cross the car park towards the main reception at the Belfry. I have an important appointment to keep with a very busy man indeed, and I am aware of how lucky I am to get it!**

**JOHN REYNOLDS meets the Belfry Director of Golf Courses, Kenny Mackay**

The last bundles of scaffolding, which supported seats, scoreboards and other paraphernalia necessary for the Quinn-Direct British Masters, are being quickly loaded on to trucks by sweating attendant workmen. Two days ago this world famous venue was a hive of activity and excitement as Lee Westwood sealed his second 2007 victory following his earlier win at the Andalucia Open in May.

Waiting to welcome me is Gary Parkinson, Golf Marketing Manager, who, within minutes, is joined by the man himself, Kenny Mackay.

Kenny obviously handles the joint pressures of being BIGGA Vice Chairman for 2007, and overseeing three eighteen hole golf courses, extremely well. He looks both relaxed and



*Picturesque in the extreme, this is one course where superlatives run rapidly dry*

*In the footsteps*

confident. He joined the Belfry as Director of Golf Courses and Grounds in November 2005. Before that, he was responsible for the management of sixteen Marriot Group golf courses for five years. A four year stint at

Hanbury Manor between 1996-2000 was preceded by another four years at The London Golf Club.

The Belfry is synonymous with golf and the greenkeeping staff, which number over thirty, are very passionate about maintaining the high quality facilities. Consisting of three 18 hole courses, a driving range and 18 hole putting course, the Belfry caters for all standards of play. The Derby, a par 69 course designed by Peter Allis and David Thomas is suitable for golfers of all levels. Also built to a design by David Thomas, is the par 72, PGA National course, one of only three PGA branded courses in the British Isles. The world famous Brabazon (par 72) course was jointly



# OF GIANTS

designed in 1977 by Peter Allis and David Thomas.

The Brabazon course, whose 6th hole has been the subject of a major upgrade in preparation for the British Masters, has hosted no less than four Ryder Cup matches (1985, 1989, 1993 and 2002). A dedicated team of Brabazon greenkeeping staff are supervised by American Head Greenkeeper Eric Olson under the overall control of Kenny Mackay.

## **The Brabazon Course**

The Brabazon officially opened in June 1977 with a challenge match between Seve Ballesteros and Johnny Miller against Tony Jacklin and Brian Barnes.

Nobody, back then, could have predicted the incredible success that the next thirty years would witness. Picturesque in the extreme, maintained to impeccable standards and played by all the 'superstars' of golf, this is one course where superlatives run rapidly dry.

## **Greens**

The greens, which total 1.3 hectares, are of original 1977 70/30 rootzone construction over a herringbone drainage system. Kenny has maintained this specification whenever modifications or reconstruction has taken place, to retain consistency of performance throughout the course. Grass species on the greens consists of 85% Poa Annua

and 15% Creeping/Browntop Bent Grass. Cutting Height in summer is 3.5mm, rising to 4.5 mm in winter. Overseeding with pure Bent is only undertaken when the species count dictates rather than annually. Thatch levels have been reduced to 24mm from 40mm in recent years, with an optimum goal of under 20mm aimed for.

An intensive aeration programme and regular topdressing is a major priority. Hollow coring with 12mm tines to 75mm depth in October and March is followed by topdressing with Chelford 28 grade sand. The Belfry owns two of the latest Graden Contour Sand Injectors. These are used to apply approximately 3 tonnes of kiln dried sand per 500 square metres



**The 6th hole had a major upgrade in preparation for the British Masters**

to a depth of 20mm. In addition, the greens are lightly topped once a month.

Fertiliser applications are tailored to suit conditions using a mixture of conventional and slow release granular and liquid formulations. These are backed up with applications of iron and seaweed when necessary. Wetting agents are used monthly from April-September and insurance applications of contact/systemic fungicides are made during June/July/August and as required thereafter.

### **Tees and fairways**

Constructed with 50/50 rootzone blend, the tees are sown with a mixture of dwarf Ryegrass/Fescue for durability. They are overseeded with straight Perennial Ryegrass once or twice a year. Fertiliser applications are similar to the greens - conventional/slow release/liquid combination. Topdressing four to five times a year and hollow coring are combined with sand applications using the Graden. The fairways are sown with Perennial Ryegrass/Fescue and maintained to a very high standard. Hollow coring and top dressing take place on a regular basis. Fertiliser applications consist of straight Nitrogen plus liquid 18.9.9 and Turf Tonic.

### **Machinery**

The Belfry possesses a bewildering array of machinery, with a 50/50 mix of John Deere and Toro predominating for mowing equipment. In addition they

have a wide range of specialist equipment such as a Blec Sandmaster, two Graden Contour Sand Injectors, Ty-Crop Top Dressers plus construction machinery etc. All the tractors are John Deere. During the last two years alone, the Belfry has invested over £500,000 in new machinery.

Kenny Mackay is very proud of what has been achieved since his arrival two years ago. A great deal of work has been done to improve drainage on fairways as well as remodeling and resanding of every bunker on all three courses. Altogether in excess of one million pounds has been spent on improvements and equipment.

Over one hundred mature trees have been planted as part of the conservation initiative, which the Belfry fully supports. He is very quick to point out however, that full credit should be paid to his fantastic staff, without whom he says, "This place would be nothing at all." He is particularly complimentary towards his two Head Greenkeepers - Eric Olson (Brabazon Course) and Neil Smith (PGA and Derby courses). "They are both brilliant guys and I can absolutely rely on them. I trust their judgment and integrity as senior managers totally."

Playing the Brabazon course is an experience no serious golfer should miss. It is a wonderful testament to the superb design skills of its creators thirty years ago and the millions of pounds invested



**The approach to the 18th**

in further development. Each and every hole has a magnificent history to recall - The 5th hole where Paul Azinger sank a 50 foot chip-and-run in the 2002 Ryder Cup. The 9th hole where Barry Lane set a course record in The Benson and Hedges International Tournament with a 164 yard eagle two. The 10th - here it was that Seve Ballesteros famously drove onto the green, from the back tee in the 1978 Hennessy Cup. These are just a few of the key Brabazon moments that have made the Belfry the legendary world class venue it is today.

My grateful thanks to Gary Parkinson and Kenny Mackay for their warm welcome at the Belfry and also, for interrupting their busy schedule to accommodate me.

*“Mistakes are going to happen. The Belfry is one of those courses where danger is always lurking”*

**PAUL CASEY**