



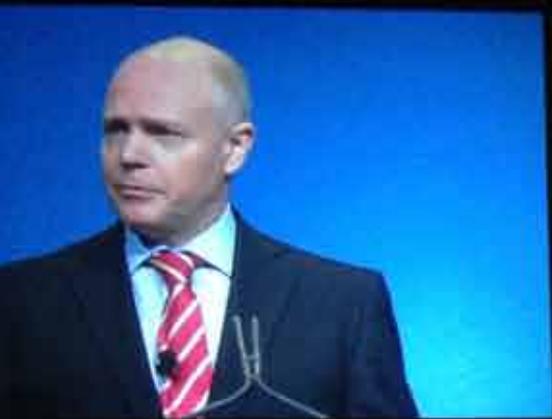


# A letter from America



**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.