

# BLUE BRIGADE BATTLES THE BUNKERS



The 2003 Australian Open Moonah Links crew

**Ninety-one CQOs made the trek to do battle with the bunkers and undulating fairways of Peter Thomson's much publicised Moonah Links which hosted its first Australian Open in December.**

Resplendent in bright blue, the CQOs were among a plethora of volunteers to make sure the Open went off without a hitch.

Despite plenty of hype generated prior to the tournament over the course's length and layout, the Leviathan proved to be rather tame as Peter Lonard clinched the tournament with a nine-under total of 279.

While the tournament went down to the wire – Stephen Leaney missing a six footer on the 18th to force a playoff – the Moonah groundstaff provided a bit of drama and tension of their own on the final day.

Up until then, the tournament had run without a hitch and according to Open course assistant superintendent Scott Calder had been by far the smoothest running tournament he had been involved in. Tempting fate, the inevitable happened.

What transpired was that one of the four mowers used to shave the monster's huge hectareage of Legend couch fairways was still in backlap mode when the team cut them before sunrise on Sunday.

The mistake wasn't picked up until first light forcing the team back out to re-mow three of the fairways, including the mammoth 582m 18th.

To complicate matters, the first group off on Sunday morning containing Queensland

professional Tony Carolan and American Ryan Palmer, flew around the course and after an hour had devoured seven holes. The problem was that the fairway gang were still mowing the 13th which runs adjacent to the 9th.

Despite a few tense moments and plenty of terse banter over the radiowaves, the mowing was completed in the nick of time.

Although not quite living up to its fearsome reputation, the course received the ultimate of accolades from David Harrison, the newly appointed general committee chairman of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club.

Harrison commented that Moonah Links was "an absolute classic", the equal of any British Open course, and that if Open courses such as St Andrews were built in today's golfing climate they would be based more on the style of the Mornington Peninsula beast.

In accepting the trophy, Peter Lonard too praised the course and summed it up nicely when he said it was the first course that had "made me think" in a long time.

Aside from Lonard's popular victory, there were plenty of other highlights from the tournament. Here are just a few of them.

\* The 'Johnny on the Spot' award goes to two CQOs, Angus McCulloch and Peter Ali. McCulloch was fortunate to witness at rake's-

length the major dummy spit of the tournament between Marcus Cain and his caddy Mick Mato.

After 11 holes of continuous rumblings between the two, the bag man dumped the blades and walked off the course, taking the crucial yardage book with him. A rather shell-shocked Cain was forced to lug his clubs for a couple of holes until a benevolent Moonah Links pro shop employee spotted the despondent golfer and offered his services.

One the flip side, Ali got an expert lesson in how to play the game when Craig Spence fired a record seven-under 65 during the final round.

\* More of a lowlight, the award for tournament clown is shared by the Seven Network camera crew who thought it a good idea to drag rather than lift a 100kg-plus camera and tripod across the 18th green for the presentation ceremony, leaving an ugly gouge mark for Yanner and his crew to repair.

Coming a close second was the official who called Yanner the 'head gardener' during the ceremony.

\* NMIT's Phil Ford swapped the lectern for a rake and saw plenty of action during Paul Gow's eventful final round. On one of the par fours, the Queensland professional needed three shots to climb his way out of one bunker and almost lost the plot when he was penalised for grounding his club. A fair bit of elbow work was required by Ford to repair the trap. Gow finished with 81.

\* Quote of the tournament goes to CQO Sam Templeton after completing his tour of duty with a group of lesser-knowns. When asked how his round went, Templeton quipped, "Well, I learned how not to play golf".



On the 18th green prior to the final round of the Open are, from left, Steven Poits (AGCSA chief executive), John Neylan (AGCSATech manager), Peter Spence (AGU president), Colin Phillips (AGU chief executive), Leigh Yanner (Moonah Links superintendent), Dominic Wall (AGU development manager) and Scott Calder (Open course assistant superintendent)



Rob Savedra cleans up after Stephen Leaney's (right) bunker excursion

\* The AGCSA's own business development manager Scott Petersen got a quick introduction to the art of being a CQO when he followed Tony Carolan's group during the second round. After the first two holes, Petersen – the current Australian open men's biathlon champ – was feeling the heat having already raked five bunkers.

Come the end of 18 holes, Petersen had clocked up 27 visits and pushed enough sand to construct a third Moonah course. Considering there are 77 bunkers on the course, that's not a bad ratio, and a workout the finely tuned athlete will well remember.

\* Speaking of a brisk workout, spare a thought for Nhill Golf Club superintendent Ian Lawson who was the poor CQO paired with fast-finishers Carolan and Palmer in the first group on the final day.

The two pros blazed around the course, completing their round in an amazing two hours 45 minutes, a feat aided by neither of them getting snared in any bunker.

\* Last and by no means least we have what must be one of the more unusual yet touching stories to emerge from the Open. It involves devout Victorian professional Euan Walters and Yarra Valley Country Club superintendent Dean Johnson.

During the round, one of the officials in Johnson's group whispered to him, "Just watch, Walters will give you a bible at the end of the round".

Not surprisingly, a perplexed Johnson thought the aging official might have had a few too many whiskies the night before, but true to form at the end of his round, Walters made his move.



Dean Johnson with the autographed bible

Johnson was presented with pocket-sized Gideons bible bearing the autographed inscription 'Dean, thanks for your help today. Good golfing. Signed, Euan Walters, 2003 Australian Open.

According to the groundstaff at Yarra Valley, Johnson now begins his early morning shed meetings with a snappy sermon or two!

#### Acknowledgements

*The AGCSA thanks all those who volunteered as a CQO and congratulates Moonah Links superintendent Leigh Yanner and his talented crew for presenting the course in world class standard.*

*The AGCSA will again run the CQO program for the 2004 Australian Open at The Australian Golf Club in Sydney (superintendent Rob Ashes), while AGCSATech manager John Neylan will again play an integral role as part of the AGU's course preparation committee. 🏌️*