

Quinn steers Scotland to gold medal

Brian Quinn had a vision and a clear target which he believed was achievable. It was simple. Create a team which would win gold for Scotland on home soil in the Home International bank fly fishing championship.

The event was established at the beginning of 2010 by the four national associations of Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland to provide a meaningful championship of international standard for the thousands of bank fishermen who take part in local, regional and national stillwater events.

Rules also had to comply to a recognisable world class standards and were based on those published by FIPS-Mouche for world and European championships.

Glasgow-based, self-employed landscape gardener drew up a master plan and was given the green light by bosses of the Kinross-based Scottish Anglers National Association. He was appointed team manager.

Then months of hard work began. Qualifying venues had to be sourced. They had to be capable of hosting a number of anglers and they also had to be in different areas of Scotland giving access to as many fishermen as possible.

Quinn desperately wanted a strong Tartan team. Would anglers

respond? Yes, they did. Heats were held in Wormit near Newport-on-Tay, Drumtassie near Blackridge, Loch Inch near Inverurie in Aberdeenshire, Allandale Tarn at West Calder, Burnhouse near Bonnybridge and Waterfront near Ayr.

The semi-finals were at Kingennie near Broughty Ferry and Kinross with the final at Newhaylie near Largs, the venue for the Home International, and where owner George Murray and his wife Senga had hosted four national finals, but never an international.

Sponsorship had to be achieved in tough economic times and testament to Quinn's hard work was the international programme which boasted adverts from all over Scotland.

The venue had to be dressed with advertising banners and the team kitted out with shirts, blazers etc, accommodation booked and menus for participant meals arranged as well as match officials in Gillies Breckenridge from the SANA Competitions Committee and Ron Chesney who assisted with the draw and also the scoring.

It's taken months. Centre stage, of course, were the anglers who emerged through the heats. Moulding men who did not know each other well into a team was Quinn's next task, along with appointing a captain.

Graeme Lynch was that man, the Beith-based fisherman being the most experienced at international level having four caps. The rest of the six-strong squad were debutants, but that did not halt the triumphant march to the top of the podium.

Step forward and take a bow Mark Hopkins (Hamilton), Kyle Courtney from Drongan in Ayrshire, Peter Cowie from Stuartfield in Aberdeenshire, Michael Ward (Johnstone) and David Harrington (Uphall Station).

Steven Craig from Strichen in Aberdeenshire worked as runner, walking miles around the 3.8 acre lake relaying

valuable information to the team on tactics and providing updates on what was happening bankside. Kevin Andrews was brought in as assistant manager. They gelled.

Practice sessions at the venue were held and the anglers fished the water for three days ahead of the competition last week.

Quinn from Glasgow was quietly confident as the event grew near, that's despite other teams fielding top anglers. Wales, for example, fielded Hywel Morgan, a world champion fly caster, consultant to Lanarkshire-based tackle manufacturer, Daiwa, and a man well-known on YouTube for his coaching and fly tying. He says he ties flies to catch fish, not anglers.

Also there representing Wales was Rhys Wadley, a man with 20,000 followers on YouTube, and an angler who fished the water regularly during a spell living in the West of Scotland. Their team manager was Matthew Pate, another man well-known on YouTube.

For them, the fish did not turn up in sufficient quantity, despite their efforts. Quinn watched intently throughout the competition day from a vantage point near the Newhaylie HQ. Scotland were ahead at lunch, he remained quietly confident, then the weather changed.

A snell wind blew up, forcing anglers to think again about tactics, but skipper Lynch, a regular angler at the venue which is around ten miles from his house, brought his team together in a huddle after lunch and urged they to stick to the game plan, and it paid off.

Scotland landed a total of 37 fish, the same as Ireland, but the Tartan team totalled 112 points. Ireland had 135, Wales had 170 points and England 176, but Ireland boasted the top angler in Sean Kirwan with 13 fish. Scotland's skipper had ten.

Other Scottish catches on their glory day were Harrington, a member of the Railway Inn Fishing Club based at the Juniper Green, near Edinburgh, with eight for fourth place overall, Hopkins (seventh), Courtney (ninth) and Ward (12th) with five trout each (places awarded for points) and Cowie (14th) with four fish. A total of 24 anglers took part.

Quinn, well-known north of the Border for his fund-raising efforts for youth fly fishing teams, smiled as the silverware was handed out during a dinner at a top hotel in Largs. The glow of satisfaction was there for all to see.

The team and staff celebrated. Quinn spent the following day removing the sponsors banners from around the water and clearing up as the team went their separate ways.

Scotland are not scheduled to host the Home International for three years. It's England next and they will no doubt be anxious to make a strong bid for silverware in 12 months time.

And there is no guarantee that any of the gold medal winning team will qualify for next time. Winning certainly whetted their appetite for more, but there is a long road back through the qualification process and, of course, others who have read about their exploits will be anxious to grab a slice of the action.

Quinn will take a rest from organising for a short spell and concentrate his attention on cheering Rangers to glory on the football pitch with Hearts due at Ibrox on Sunday and then the clubs meet again in the Scottish League Cup semi-final at Hampden early next month.

Meanwhile, the success of the bank fly fishing squad underlines what has been a good year for Scotland internationally. The boat fly fishers triumphed in the Autumn International at the Lake of Menteith, winning by the largest margin by numbers since 1938, the 14 Scotland anglers boating a total of 158 trout for 336lb 2.7oz, 54 trout

clear of second placed England.

In sea fishing, Scotland women had gold snatched away from them in the Home International by Ireland. They led throughout the event in Wales only to see an Irish angler hook into a fish in the dying minutes of the event to take gold.

Scotland's women also made their debut in the world carp championships and Port Seton-based angler, Barry McEwan, is currently with the Scotland men's sea fishing team in Sicily at the world championships. The result will be declared next week.

PICTURE: Scotland's gold winning squad: Kevin Andrews, Michael Ward, Graeme Lynch, Steven Craig, Mark Hopkins, Kyle Courtney, Brian Quinn, David Harrington, Peter Cowie.



The Newhaylie complex from the air. Contributed



Part of the lake at Newhaylie looking towards the dam wall.
Picture ***Nigel Duncan***



Kyle Courtney from Drongan in Ayrshire casting along the Dam Wall at Newhaylie. Picture **Nigel Duncan**



Peter Cowie from Stuarfield in Aberdeenshire at one of the

pegs at Newhaylie. Picture ***Nigel Duncan***



Mark Hopkins the national bank champion at Newhaylie. Picture ***Nigel Duncan***



David Harrington from Uphall Station changing patterns at Newhaylie. Picture **Nigel Duncan**



Kevin Andrews (left) and Kyle Courtney on practice day. Picture **Nigel Duncan**



Match captains: (l-r) Graeme Lynch (Scotland), Connor Cunningham (Ireland), Paul Runec (England) and Dai Jones (Wales). Picture ***Nigel Duncan***



Flat calm in the morning session at Newhaylie. Picture ***Nigel Duncan***



Brian Quinn, team manager Scotland, at work as a landscape gardener. Contributed