

# YOBS AND YUPPIES

By J. H. Arthur Bsc (Agric.)

This article, which I am well aware will not be universally popular, is written from the heart because of the urgent need, as I and many others see it, for those who **care** to stand up and be counted in defence of the old standards appertaining to the Royal & Ancient version of the game. This is now under serious and continuous attack from many sources, including certain 'trade' interests and especially from less able golfers.

Had those with the necessary authority in professional football used it a score of years ago to stamp out hooliganism, perhaps we would have seen less of the mindless violence that tarnishes the image of football today. Yet, are the scenes that we are beginning to see and hear increasingly on television, (namely, excessive partisan barracking of the 'opposition'; cheating by players and even more so by their supporters kicking unplayable balls back into contention), any different, except in degree, from the endless bad manners experienced by all those who spend their working lives on golf courses?

One of the most significant remarks in recent months was that made by a member of one of our more famous links who said "I am pleased to say that I am a member of a club where the aim of the members is still to try to **reduce** their handicaps".

In no other sport does one find the contradiction that the worse the players' ability at the game the more they regard themselves as experts on how to prepare the playing conditions. Nowhere else do we find inexperienced players demanding that the rules of the game be bent and the conditions of playing surfaces amended to suit their inability to understand

the physics of the game, let alone put those principles into practice.

## LATEST SPRING

The first half of 1986 gave such critics a field day. In forty years of advisory work I can, I think, claim that this was the latest spring on record — and this contention is supported by preliminary meteorological records. How many greenkeepers — or beleaguered Chairmen or Conveners of Green Committees — were attacked this year with strident criticisms that the greens had been in better order in March than they were in early June. **Of course** they were! In March they had benefited from an earlier enforced rest with frost, if not snow, cover limiting play. There was little or no growth — and certainly not enough to encourage recovery from the effects of wear — until well into June. Thus all courses had to withstand at least another two, sometimes nearly three, months of extra play with absolutely no chance of any recovery and yet suffered from incessant play, since while the temperatures may have been low the weather was often dry! Without sustained growth there can be no recovery from the wear and tear of play and just how much that wear is, can be easily seen by roping off a vulnerable area and watching the grass grow inside it.

Greenkeeping today — and with it the very game itself — is at the crossroads. Those of us — and hopefully including the majority of good greenkeepers — who uphold the standards of 'traditional' course conditions, viz. firm, fast greens and tight lies on fine, wiry fairways — only from which can control on the ball be imparted by the player — find themselves constantly on the

defensive.

Those greenkeepers, and members, who are so lucky as to enjoy our old unspoilt courses — often tucked away in fairly inaccessible areas or, alternatively, jealously guarded by their custodians who regard themselves as holding their courses, and their Clubs, in trust for future generations — may well wonder what I am talking about — lucky them! Others will know only too well — being subjected to continuous attacks from ill-mannered, discontented members those grasp of ethics stop short of the rule that complaints should go through the correct channels and should not be directed at loyal servants of their Club, who cannot reply in like form.

## YOBS

In my view, and I have considered the implications very carefully — the real enemies of golf and greenkeeping are the two extremes of yobs and yuppies. Constant bad manners are all too characteristic of the former. No one else has any right on the course. They take it out on the green with their putter if they miss an easy putt and complain that the greenkeeper does not know how to cut a hole. They never mend a pitch mark — well neither do many non-yobs, but the yobs then say it is the greenkeepers' job! They climb up the face of bunkers; they never replace a divot; they scream and shout (and golf, as Henry Longhurst used to say, is a silent game — a point which a few more commentators of lesser ability could take to heart) and they never let anyone through, whilst taking hours to play a round.

Then they have the gall to complain about the state of the

course — after having missed a putt on which there is a side bet equal to the greenkeeper's weekly wage — and accuse those in charge of incompetence and laziness. Let me say at this point that I have met far, far fewer yobs at artisan clubs than at some of our more famous Home Counties clubs and snobbery has nothing to do with my contentions.

### YUPPIES

Yuppies are much more polite, but much more dangerous. They have one saving grace — by definition they are not mindless morons and, like farmers, are capable of being educated, but until then they are a menace, as (equally by definition) they are ambitious climbers. They take up golf — too late to be indoctrinated the hard way — as a social cachet and are determined to succeed. Since they often have little inherent ability and less time or humility to learn it, they either demand that the course be altered to suit their play, or go flat out for Captaincy via the Green Committee as the best way to achieve their ends.

How many times have I heard them declaiming that as the members have paid for the pop-ups they, and not the greenkeeper or that adjectival agronomist, should decide when and how much water to apply. "Hasn't rained for weeks and that idiot still will not put the water on". "Greens like rock — no-one can stay on!" "Get the water on and make them more holding" — and all this in mid-April with perishingly cold east winds or severe night frosts!

Head greenkeepers and course managers have had my heart-felt sympathy this year — since I suffered as they did. I have been informed that "The Captain has decided that no visit is required this year as progress this spring was disappointing" — and then the Club is displeased when I inform them that their file has been sent to Bingley as the alternative to the dust bin! Experienced head men have been given written warnings about poor course condition in May — yet

six weeks later their Captain comes running over to them with public congratulations — "the greens have never been better in the history of the Club"!

I could go on with chapter and verse examples for pages, but it would not make humorous reading. Where do we go from here? It is no good complaining without making constructive suggestions.

The answer is, of course, education — and Britain's record in training in industry let alone in greenkeeping is at the bottom of the league. If the yuppies see no value in educating production managers in industry, no wonder they take the same view when they get hold of the reins in their golf clubs:-

*"No point in sending the chaps away — they will only want more money".*

*"The best training these lads can get is under old Joe — been here nearly 40 years and knows his course backwards".*

*"they will only come back with their heads stuffed full of scientific nonsense".*

*"Unwise to give them the opportunity to compare notes — they may get ideas above their station".*

These are all genuine remarks overheard or directed at me in recent months — in the face of total apathy by the English Golf Union and especially in getting their County Secretaries to tentatively put one toe in the water of the last half of the twentieth century and then wondering why the members of a third of all inland courses spend their winters on temporaries.

Education must also extend to club members. So few attend seminars — we are always preaching to the same converted — and yet there must be a scope for club evenings when members can come and air their view and criticisms. In no way do we want to belittle them — but to explain why. But when such meetings are arranged the loudest critics **never** turn up, thereby presenting the defence with the excuse to rule them out of order in any future witch hunts if they so wished,

but sadly few do so wish!

### EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

With the exception of this magazine and Golf Monthly, there is no attempt to talk about course condition. Reading most golf writers' comments, there is never a word about course condition — except as at Turnberry (where we had no rough six weeks before the Open) when the pampered professionals moaned about the course when they should have complained about our weather, or accepted it with better grace.

When disasters do occur, no-one ventures opinions (right or wrong) as to why. When greens flood, do you ever see comments to the effect that lack of mid-seasonal aeration (with all its built-in potential for complaints — "can't you leave the greens alone for five minutes?") is responsible.

Luckily, the greenkeeping advisory world is getting its act together and there has never been so great a unanimity in the basic advice given on course management — perhaps less so on course construction where one notes with more than concern that some golf architects are still using perennial ryegrass in fairways mixtures, thus ensuring that they get football pitches. Some of the madder ideas by unqualified advisers have predictably failed to produce results — unless you call disaster a result — and are being abandoned. But not before such heresies served to confuse younger greenkeepers. In passing, why should the basics of management alter? The same grasses (bent and féscues) are still the most desirable and their basic needs have not altered in half a million years. What has altered, of course, is the amount of traffic, resulting in considerable changes in technique and intensities of treatment to counteract the effects of such wear, in detail, that is, but never in principle.

Progress is being made — with



some temporary lapses and recoveries — in the general education of younger greenkeepers. One would like to see this extended in a **different** form perhaps to those in charge of administration of courses — Green Committee or Management Committee members, and an extension of existing "post graduate" schemes for senior greenkeepers, as well as much more feed back from the field to both advisers and commercial organisations.

One would hope to see less irresponsible forays in search of non-existent markets by some fertiliser companies and acceptance by them that we do not need phosphate and potash in fertiliser form in general greenkeeping. If published data will not convince them, then perhaps the results, when published, of current research at Bingley may do so eventually.

But in all this we are attracting perhaps 10% of all who should be interested and less than 1% of those who live by or off the game, or those who enjoy it.

Apathy is the true enemy. The old defenders of the faith lose patience with the vociferous incomers who advocate opposite standards and instead of fighting back go off to enjoy their golf untrammelled by distractions about ways of solving greenkeeping problems — and then if the yuppies take over they move to another club where there is better understanding of what golf is all about. Emphatically, that is **not** playing for money — and indeed I fear that we may see a divide between those who value the old traditions of the Royal & Ancient version of this centuries' old game and those who want to play an entirely different version, variously described as cart-ball, target golf or the green is great school.

Then we shall see perhaps the emergence of two different types of club, playing on two different types of courses, with plastic turf replacing grass when the heavy feeding and watering technique to produce their type of target green in summer produces thatched bogs for winter —

and winter in Britain, I need not remind those who have to work outside in all weathers, lasts from November to May, and often extends at both ends to cover eight months of the year.

There is hope — there is untapped enthusiasm and a wider understanding of basics, but only by the minority — and unhappily we (advisers and greenkeepers) have to try to convert the majority (players) since we must resolutely refuse to give them what they want, because this is ultimately in their best interests.

### BIGGA

Above all, many many more greenkeepers — and their Clubs — must support the new combined Greenkeeper Association and not just the present minority. That Association must be regarded as having primarily an educational aim and must not revert to a mere golfing society.

Equally, all Clubs and greenkeepers must give full support to

the new centralised specialist educational system, so that all who can and want to learn are given full opportunity to do so in the Club's time and not their own. Until we can find a side which is technically competent to at once detect and dismiss spurious claims and heretical advice, and practised in the arts of communication, then greenkeeping will always be at the mercy of those selling wonder cures, or exploiting the greenkeeping market, aiming at false standards or propagating stupid advice which a little experience could prevent being implemented, to avoid the old costly method of learning from one's own as opposed to the experience of others.

I would hate to see the day when true golf became as rare as real (or Royal) tennis, just because we defendants chucked in the towel in the face of a very well organised and broad opposition.

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