Gaining Control

Duncan McIlvain's article in last month's magazine under the heading "Should we lead or should we be led" has already produced exactly the type of response he requested.

He ended the piece by urging you to respond and to show the "powers that be" within the golfing world that we are ready and willing to take on the responsibility necessary to ensure not only the efficient management of our golf courses but our own futures.

As I write, the November issue has only been with you a few days but we have seen, by our standards, a huge post bag. You can read some of the responses on the Letters page.

All agree that the job would be far easier if qualified professional Course Managers had the autonomy to make decisions on the well being of the golf course without having to consider the opinions of a group of lay people in the shape of a Green Committee.

However, Duncan's point was also about how to get to that ideal state of affairs and how do qualified professionals persuade golf clubs that they should be given a freer rein to get on and do the job.

As one of the correspondents says, "we wouldn't tell an electrician how to wire a house or a mechanic how to fit a new engine."

The difference in golf, however, is that while an electrician and mechanic have one right way to do a job and many wrong ways, in greenkeeping there is a perception, rightly or wrongly, that you can choose from a range of approaches. That brings "opinion" to the table and, let's face it, everybody has one.

The Course Manager has, therefore, to persuade the Green Committee that his opinion carries more weight than that of the collective group of club members who make up that Committee.

Put it another way. The Committee can feel that, unlike on issues such as wiring houses or fitting engines to cars, its opinion on matters agronomic is worth hearing. Of course that, in the vast majority of cases, is nonsense and a typical case of little knowledge being a dangerous thing. However, subjects on which a Committee can, and does, have valid comments to make are the obvious matters of course cleanliness and fault finding.

If the Committee can tell a Course Manager about a broken sprinkler head, or a litter bin which hasn't been emptied for weeks, it can then make the jump which a Committee can, and does, have valid comments to make are the obvious matters of course cleanliness and fault finding.

However, the survey shows that a market slow-down was being anticipated by members with sowings planned for this autumn leaning towards prudence. According to TGA spokesman, Graeme Forbes, events occurring in the USA and Middle East since the survey was completed have heightened concerns also of a global slowdown and even a recession.

"Any fall in consumer confidence is likely to have a knock-on effect on the house building market, which is a key outlet for cultivated turf," he commented.

"Clearly, turf growers will be watching home and world events closely as they go through the winter and approach the spring sowing period."
Donald Steel reiterated his call for regulation of clubs and balls at the sixth American Society of Golf Course Architects International Golf Conference held in St Andrews recently.

During the same conference in 1997 he had urged the lawmakers to exert tighter control on the manufacture of clubs and balls, and suggested that the lawmakers consult with architects on the subject. At St Andrews this year, he reminded Society members, who include 150 leading North American golf course architects, of his earlier statement and what has happened in the interim.

"In those four years, the advance in the realms of the manufacture of clubs and balls has perhaps been more dramatic than in any other four year period in the entire history of the game. There is no wish to be over dramatic, but there is a definite fear that the situation is going out of control," he said.

After its latest St Andrews meeting the Society declared that there should be a "line drawn in the sand soon" to the game. There is no wish to be over dramatic, but there is a definite fear that the situation is riding out of control," he said.

In his talk Donald pointed out that five players on the European Tour were averaging 300 yards on their drives.

He noted that Donald Ross had said, "the most dramatic shot in the game is the well-struck long iron" and added that modern equipment has made that shot almost extinct.

Donald stressed that the American Tour players all have averages well above Ben Hogan, Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus when they were in their prime.

"Taking Jack's driver distance as 260-265 yards, and bearing in mind that he was regarded as blisteringly long off the tee throughout his distinguished career, it is a sobering thought that the first 140 on the current European Tour are longer than Jack was in 1970," he explained.

"If a course could be created that demanded that Tiger Woods had to hit long irons for his second shots to the par 4s, mid-irons to the par 3s and the par 5s all three-shotters you would need a course of at least 8,200 yards, and even then I doubt you would contain him," said Donald.

"Golf course architects are not magicians. Not so long ago, we positioned the fairways and ball off the back tees, then 260, and I recently watch on television while two young professionals gave not a second thought about carrying two bunkers at 280 yards. My own personal feeling is that golf and the length of courses were at their best when Tom Watson was at the height of his powers, a time when he needed a perfect drive and 2-iron on the final hole - 473 yards - at Birkdale to win the 1983 Open. Perhaps that can be kept in mind as a model, but a question nobody has answered is why it has always been the courses and clubs, at great expense, that have had to adjust to cater to new equipment when a far easier solution has been at hand. Control the ball," he concluded.

The ASGCA called for the USGA and R&A to develop reasonable parameters for both clubs and balls.
Allen Power open day

Allen played host to nearly 200 dealers and their salesmen in a recent series of demonstration days in Scotland, the north and south of England. The first day at Murrayshall Hotel and Golf complex near Perth was well attended by dealership representatives from all over Scotland and the far north of England.

The entire range of Allen equipment was at the disposal of dealer sales personnel to test and try the machines in a variety of demanding situations.

Also in attendance from the suppliers was Mark Barnett from Honda who went through the new engines and Tim Mitchell from Friendly Robotics who manufacture the Robomow robotic mower recently taken on by Allen.

The culmination of the road shows came at Blenheim Palace, near Oxford. Over the two days 100 dealers and their staff had the Allen range presented to them against the stunning background of Blenheim.

Try the Samuel Ryder Cocktail!

Celtic Manor has developed a cocktail in honour of the club's successful bid to host the Ryder Cup in 2010. The 2010 might well have appealed to seed merchant, Samuel Ryder, as it is produced with ingredients which are based on grasses and herbs.

They include Zubrowka vodka, each bottle of which contains a blade of BISON Grass; Pikesville Rye Whiskey, and Galliano, the famous Italian herbal liqueur in a distinctive bottle.

Preparation
25ml Galliano
25ml Zubrowka Bison vodka
25ml Pikesville Straight Rye Whiskey

Preliminaries
Stirred not shaken over ice. Chill the glasses and shaker with ice and drain when ready for use. Add ingredients to shaker and stir vigorously for 30 seconds then strain into glass.

Presentation
Garnish with the tip only of a sprig of fresh mint and a 1cm twist of lemon, preferably organic.

Support boost for Hydroscape

Simon Squires has joined the Hydroscape Group as the company’s UK Technical Support Manager.

Simon’s brief covers all technical aspects of the Hydroscape Group’s distribution interests, ranging from Toro golf irrigation products, Otterbine Barebo (water) aerators, Global Atmospherics electrical storm warning systems to Sweetwater International sulphur burning units.

Simon recently worked closely with St Andrews Links Trust officials as Contracts Manager responsible for the second phase of the £940,000 irrigation update of the Old, New and Jubilee courses, completed in May of this year.

Prior to that, he managed phase one of the St Andrews project, involving irrigation for approaches, greens, tees and fairways on the Eden, Balgove and Strathlyrum courses which was completed within budget and ahead of schedule, in 1999.

“We are delighted that Simon has become part of our team. He will fulfil a key role in providing technical support for the complete product range which we, a national distributor specializing in the use of water resources and its management - primarily in UK sports turf markets - view as extremely important,” said Graeme Francis, Hydroscape’s Marketing Manager.

Leading the way

I read Duncan McGilvary's article in November’s Greenkeeper magazine with interest and found myself agreeing with much that he said, as well as being very concerned. It seems strange that as a profession we have progressed so far in developing ourselves in the last 10 or so years, yet many greenkeepers are respected less now than their predecessors of 30 years ago. Then the greenkeeper’s words were law. As you talk to many greenkeepers the recurring statements seem to be “It’s what our members want.” “We can’t do that as it upsets our members” or “I want to keep my job”.

There are far too many people writing about, and teaching, greenkeeping principles with those statements in mind. I can’t think of many other industries that employ professional, well-trained managers to manage their major asset, and then expect them to be told by committees and members how to manage this asset and, of course, if this asset is in poor shape then it’s the manager’s fault.

In answer to Duncan’s question we should, of course, lead. We are well-trained professionals who have been trained to understand how our courses should be managed. But we need strong-minded greenkeepers who have a sense of tradition and of what is right, who want to lead and if they are not out there already then managers from other professions will eventually end up managing many golf courses with dangerous implications. These managers will have no sense of tradition and will undoubtedly change the face of British golf. As greenkeepers we need good training and first-rate leadership to help us in these difficult times. Where this comes from is the real question.

Golf clubs also need to look at themselves very closely too, as their aspirations for their golf course are far too often wide of the mark and against what is traditionally right. We live in an “environmentally friendly” world yet many clubs want to produce a totally artificial environment instead of a natural course that enhances it.

First and foremost we, as greenkeepers, need to come to the front and lead the way. We then need our members, committees and professionals to leave us to do what we do best, without having to panic to them and work our management around them.

They are the ones who need educating. Who does that is the next question...

Alex McCombie
Deputy Course Manager
Parkstone Golf Club