For a reason that I find difficult to understand, some chairmen of green and greenkeepers dislike the idea of a specialist coming to their course. They seem to think that if anyone has to give them advice, they have failed. Actually nothing is further from the truth. The world outside of Golf Clubs operates on that very basis. The larger the company the greater the number of specialists employed. They take the sensible view that no one person can keep up with all the latest developments and that if they are to maintain their own standing in the business environment they must employ specialists to keep them advised.

Briefly, the STRI was established in 1929 under the title of ‘The Board of Greenkeeping Research’ to provide a service to Golf Clubs. It was re-constituted in 1951 as the ‘Sports Turf Research Institute’ and its work expanded to cover all sports played on a grass surface. Most of the major sport-controlled bodies of the British Isles are members through nominated representatives. Its affairs are administered by a board of management which includes representatives from the Royal and Ancient Golf Club and the Golf Unions, together with those from Association Football; Rugby; Lawn Tennis; Bowling; Cricket; Hockey; The British Association of Golf Course Architects and of course your own Association, BIGGA.

Many Golf Clubs like my own have joined the Institute and receive an annual visit from one of their agronomists. His visit takes the form of a walk-about. We select a route which takes in locations on our course that have received his previously recommended treatment and also includes areas where we feel in need of advice. We are always pleasantly surprised at his detailed knowledge of our course, it being obvious that he does us the honour of preparing well for his visit.

After our course walk-about, we retire to the board room for a cup of tea and a chat. This is a most valuable part of the visit, affording the opportunity to both check our notes and confirm recommendations which can be put in hand prior to publication of the report.

Shortly after the visit we receive his report which usually includes these sections:

• Introductory remarks: A brief survey of the general condition of the course.
• Course Survey: A detailed survey of those parts of the course on which the agronomist wishes to make comment, together with those where he was asked for advice.
• Recommendations: Discussed recommendations for course maintenance together with detailed treatments, quantities and rates of application.
• Other points: Comments, suggestions and recommendations as a result of the visit. Our own reports have included details on the building of a bunker with a revetted face, arboreal work, the extension of a green and the emotive problem of trollie use in winter.

As a definite policy, my committee arrange for a copy of the report to be displayed for all to see in the clubhouse. Naturally, the greenkeeper also receives a copy which he displays on the notice board in the mess room. When the report arrives I have an immediate responsibility to evaluate the cost of the recommendations, together with the effect such changes may make on the regular maintenance programme.

To obtain an overall view of the recommendations I prepare a large sheet of paper with the operations along the top and the work locations – Green; Temporary Green; Collars; Aprons; Tees; Fairways and Rough – down the left hand side. By working through the report and noting the details in the appropriate section I can be sure of making a full evaluation.

This type of analysis allows me to see at a glance the requirements at each location. The greenkeeper also has a copy for his notice board and uses it as a reference. It removes the need for him or his staff to spend their valuable time sifting through paragraphs of the report.

While I am obviously advocating the use of the STRI and a visit by an agronomist I have made no mention of their research facilities, which are concerned not only with sports turf but with all amenity grass areas and artificial turf surfaces. Some of their research is funded by outside bodies, but we all benefit when results are published. Their activities also extend from feasibility studies on potential golf course sites to the ecological and conservations issues of established courses. We should all make use of their good offices.

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How the PGA provides a strong...
Bruce Jamieson, pictured, is a man who gets results. As Director of Agronomy for the PGA European Tour, that's one of many required skills. DAVID WHITE reports

The final shot on the first play-off hole at Wentworth, a stiff-to-the-flag five iron from Seve... he's home and dry, a worthy winner of the PGA Championship. Such is the stuff of which dreams are made and which makes golf such a perfect spectacle. But how are such courses prepared for a major championship?

To get the facts was not difficult, for the PGA European Tour boast as their Director of Agronomy Bruce Jamieson, a talented young Scot with a dead cert family background - his father and brother are both professionals - who has achieved his goal by working through the ranks as greenkeeper, head greenkeeper (at Powfoot and Royal Porthcawl) and who has never once dismissed the need to follow the learning curve. Learning was the very key to his present role and followed a familiar Scottish pattern of Elmwood College for City & Guilds in Greenkeeping, a positive and substantial portfolio of turf management and self-improvement courses at other colleges and finally graduation into 'fully trained management' - his ultimate aim - via examination and graduate membership of the Institute of Industrial Management. He is proof positive that greenkeeper education works!

At Porthcawl, where he masterminded the course for at least two National Championships, his skills were instantly recognised. In their wisdom the Club saw that he was outstripping his earning potential and planned for him to be released, as a designed campaign, to give advice to other Clubs in the area. In the event a different challenge presented itself and he joined the PGA European Tour as a Tour Administrator. Suddenly things were not the same. Opportunities abound for a man of knowledge and in offering advice to the green staff at a Tour venue in Italy and subsequently at other European venues, his skills of communication were observed and monitored to an extent that within a short space of time he was appointed to his present role by PGA European Tour Executive Director, Ken Schofield.

How did it happen? It seems simple enough, for he has a gentleness and calm that inspires confidence. He talks with people, not at them. He listens; he has sympathy; he understands. He's been there. Above all he doesn't tell people what to do, he merely suggests better or different ways of achieving a goal - the goal that both parties want. And he gets results.

I was interested to learn how he ensured reaching what is all-important to tournament players: that the quality of the course and the condition in which it is presented to them is as good as it possibly can be. How, for example, does the whole thing start?

A tour venue, once mooted, gets to first base only after several imponderables have been thoroughly examined and the site found to meet specific criteria. Location is, naturally enough, -
Methyl Bromide gassing

Attention to detail at Austria's Gut Altentann

One such criteria and access for traffic and spectator accommodation another. The course must have playability and this will be ascertained only after several rounds have been played by senior Tour officials.

Achieving playing conditions that challenge the world's best golfers may necessitate minor alterations and within reason some changes may need to be made to, say, the levelling of a tee or its enlargement. It is the Tour's role to give such advice, to work alongside golf course personnel, to help them achieve the standards of preparation that are required for tournament play. A venue is visited six months prior to an event and informed discussions will take place with the head greenkeeper about his planning for the event and the logical approach seen to be necessary leading up to the tournament. The head greenkeeper is free to talk to Bruce at any time if he has a query, or seeks confirmation of a planned course of action. Bruce has a lengthy check list which outlines a programme to be attained, but the impression I gained was always of joint consultation, advice, suggestion. Never insistence.

If, for example the Club is short on greenkeeping staff, and if the head greenkeeper is happy to accept help, the Tour can supply the Club with three qualified greenkeepers - Roger and Richard Stillwell and Mark Lewis - and they arrive a week prior to the event and stay on until the event is over. Roger Stillwell, who like Richard is an independent consultant greenkeeper, is seen as something of a 'fire-fighter' - a problem shooter if you like. He's around if needed and often attends three or four months in advance. Now they've added to the team, with BIGGA TORO Student Greenkeeper of The Year finalists attending during a tournament. This year two finalists attended St Mellion for two weeks and proved invaluable to the team, whilst gaining additional skills.

I touched on the grass species conundrum and asked about Poa annua. It was a subject that Bruce instantly warmed to and one on which he holds firm views. He believes that the Poa problem can be solved quite easily.

'We have this dogma in Britain about

Get rid of

'We've had a situation over the past 20 years where consultants like Jim Arthur and the STRI have given good solid advice for maintaining bent and fescue and achieving them back into the sward' he said. 'But it's a very slow process and I believe golfers today are too impatient and don't want to wait years for good surfaces. Anyone thinking they can revert 100% Poa to bent and fescue in under ten years by slow management methods is dreaming. They'll maybe knock it back to 30% in the first two years, but getting rid of that 30% is going to take another ten years. Then you have the problem of seed that's been laid down in the thatch layer still germinating maybe two years after. Therefore you can have an invasion of the sward any time opportunity presents itself to the Poa remaining.

'You've also got several different types of Poa in greens, not just one. There's a stoloniferous variety and one that grows by rhizomes as well, so all the slitting that we do to greens, although it encourages the bent grass to shoot stolons and rhizomes, actually encourages the Poa as well. It's easy to say you will get rid of Poa annua - meaning the seeded head producing variety - yes, you certainly will, but whether you get rid of the variety spreading by stolons, that's another matter, and I don't believe you will.

'At El Salar they have a Poa problem and every three years they take four greens, cover them with polythene after aerifying with a hollow tiner, and gas them with Methyl Bromide. It kills the greens stone dead to a depth of four inches. They clean up the thatch, leave it for two weeks, score new seed into the soil - in their case pure Penncross, which germinates in six days - and in six weeks they have a fine putting surface which lasts for three to five years, or even longer, depending on how they're managed. I believe that's a route we should consider in Britain. If you've got a Poa green and want to get rid of it, gas it! Get it cleaned out, sterilise the soil, re-seed it with what you want and manage it accordingly. I believe you can then retain it, but...
you've got to do something to kill all the seeds in the ground and sterilisation by the Methyl Bromide method is, in my opinion, as good as any.

"Why?, I asked 'is this not more widely known, why don't the STRI advocate such a programme?'. 'I don't know', he said. 'Maybe they have thought about it but think it's an unacceptable option. For those Clubs that come off their greens in October, and there are more and more enlightened ones that do - for protection, or to attempt to solve high percentage Poa problems, bad thatch layer or what have you - and when a sensible man - why not start again'.

If, as a sensible man, you've got to do something to kill all the seeds in the ground and sterilisation by the Methyl Bromide method is, in my opinion, as good as any, why not start again?

He grinned wryly, intimating that such a view might well be slammed by everyone that ever worked in the golfing world. 'But it works', he insisted, 'it's been proven and results cannot be doubted. Why should greenkeepers suffer, why should they have such doubts? Why not kill it and start again. We have this dogma in Britain about retaining what we have, no matter how bad it is - why not start again?'

Again Bruce stressed that the PGA European Tour is not in the business of changing golf courses. 'We're criticised enough for the height of cut used during tournaments, but before I came into this post there wasn't a Tour official who had ever worked on a golf course full time. No official ever advocated a specific height of cut. It was a greenkeeper that set the height at one-eighth, no one else. To scream blue murder because someone comes along and wants the greens quicker and the only way he knows is by cutting them lower - that has nothing to do with us'.

We returned to the subject of green speed, my suggestion that aiming for eight feet was too much for Club golf on a regular basis being dismissed. 'I think they should', he said, 'when the grass is growing healthily, though there may be exceptions when fertiliser has been applied and the grass is lush, then the surface speed will be slower, or when water has been applied heavily. But in general terms, cutting at three-sixteenths makes a speed of eight an achievable figure if all the correct management procedures are followed. On tournaments a speed of 9.5 to 10.6, consistent on all greens, is ideal, though on severe slope, a speed of eight is better and avoids the vexing problem of a ball scampering several feet past the cup and off the green. That's silly, it doesn't create good golf, rather it..."
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A Cornish jewel: the 5th at St. Mellion, a PGA Tour venue

destroys the ability of a good golfer to score'.

He talked of The Masters and how each green has a single greenkeeper, each responsible for a consistent speed, some may need one cut, others four or five, but each will be the same as the other. Greenkeepers in Britain and on the continent, however, are under resourced and have perhaps two or three triples for a whole course. No problem, in Bruce's view, providing each mower is set on the accubar gauge to the same tolerance. A good triple cut, cut at a 45 degree angle on the second cut can present the greens very nicely. The stimpmeter is also a useful tool, he says, giving the greenkeeper information that he should want to have.

Many Clubs do not get paid to stage a Tour event, yet there are more and more who are actively seeking to be on the rota. What do they get from it? Members can expect to gain from their hard work and sacrifice. Benefits are tangible and intangible. The clubhouse may receive a face-lift, the golf course will certainly benefit from the maintenance programme, from the picture it presents to the world, and the spirit that pervades throughout ensures that pride is increased. One positive bonus is the knowledge gleaned on how to manage a course through a stressful period, the increase in traffic and wear and tear. Greenkeepers are often pleasantly surprised at how much the course can take when preparation is programmed and the experience of managing turf 'at peak performance' for a week becomes a priceless bonus when preparing for future Club championships. The kudos to a greenkeeper in seeing a job well done is beyond measure. Taking a direct comparison between Wentworth, a world-renowned course designed by Harry Colt, and Coombe Hill, another Colt design and in many ways very similar in quality and playability, but little known outside of London, the Wentworth course has hosted tournaments for the past 30 years and is the one everyone wants to play. That international recognition continues to the benefit of members long into the future.
B.E.M. for former BIGGA Chairman

It is with great pleasure that the Association learnt of the award of the British Empire Medal to Walter Woods in the recent Queen’s Birthday Honours list.

The Award was made to recognise his services both as Links Supervisor at St Andrews and to the greenkeeping profession. Walter, pictured, played a leading part in the establishment of BIGGA in 1987 and indeed was the first Chairman of the Association. His has been a key role in the development and progress of the Association and rarely a week goes by without Walter contacting the office with a new idea or some relevant suggestion. Those who know him will vouch for his forthright views, warmth of personality and at all times his determination to enhance the greenkeeping profession and the well-being of greenkeepers.

I am sure that the Association will continue to enjoy his practical support and be able to call on his technical expertise for many years to come. Many congratulations Walter on this very much deserved recognition for all you have achieved for the greenkeeping profession.

NEIL THOMAS, Executive Director

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■ Colin Pryce, who has been operating a Terralift soil aeration service for the past four years, has formed a new company, C & P Soilcare Ltd. The new company will provide a complete soil care service and includes compressed air soil aeration, soil analysis and supply of conditioners which can be injected by Terralift or incorporated by convention means. They have the knowledge to sort out seemingly unsolvable soil problems, or know a man who can!

Pictured: The Terralift pneumatic Soil Conditioning Unit.

■ Ransomes have been chosen to supply a range of equipment to the Earls Colne Golf and Country Club, Colchester, built on the site of a World War II airfield, part of which is still used for flying. The full 18 hole course, together with 4 hole training academy and 20 bay floodlit range covers 300 acres and features 14 lakes and 25,000 trees. Praising Ransomes for their wide range, owner Mr Eric Hobbs said: 'I am a firm believer in buying British and Ransomes equipment really impresses me, it fits my bill perfectly.'

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Pictured: The Terralift pneumatic Soil Conditioning Unit.


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AD REF 61

GIREENKEEPER INTERNATIONAL July 1991 29
The good, the bad

This feature was to have focussed on Britain’s Local Authorities and their golfing activities. The many hours spent by your editor on asking questions – and receiving totally negative answers or being stone-walled – turned out to be the most unrewarding experience of all time. What have they to hide? Why are they so negative? Whose corner are they protecting? One highly capable head greenkeeper in charge of a local authority course in Kent summed it up rather succinctly by declaring that in his case the reason was one of ignorance: “None of the faceless ones from my authority know ‘beans’ about golf”, he said, “and they frankly couldn’t care less.”

Local Authority Golf – getting it right

GOLF AT THAMESDOWN – a dutiful local authority and its golf programme

Thamesdown – the borough centred around Swindon – is extremely conscious of its duties to its citizens and over the years has invested in many amenity facilities. Their golf includes an 18 hole and two 9 hole courses, three pitch & putt courses and a 34 bay driving range. The majority of these are centred around the Broome Manor Golf Complex, where Kelvin Dudley is the head greenkeeper with a staff of six. Also under the same management in the adjoining Coate Water Country Park are extensive pitch & putt, mini golf and putting green facilities. The complex, under the management of Tom Watt, has a pro shop and a restaurant and bar, these being available for private functions.

The driving range, which re-opened recently with an additional 14 bays, has been given a sand-filled synthetic surface to allow the majority of balls to roll towards the centre for mechanical retrieval. It was the need to mechanise the facility (six million balls a year) which led to the refurbishment. Kelvin said that in wet weather balls ‘plugged’ and had to be picked and washed by hand.

The new carpet was made specifically for Thamesdown and extends over six acres. In re-contouring the site a considerable tonnage of clay subsoil was removed and replaced with a stone sub-base over which 500 tonnes of sand was placed. New lighting was installed and the range is now open from 8am until 9pm, seven days a week.

In common with most local authorities, the advent of competitive tendering has placed restrictions on availability of facts or figures which could be used by a competitive tender. Tom said this was regrettable, as they (Thamesdown) liked to be helpful, but CCT was a fact of local authority life and you never knew if the next complex manager might not be from a Dutch or French firm. Thamesdown have tendered for their own contract, and while expecting to win they are nervously awaiting an answer on their future.

Tom claimed not to be political, and within the popular meaning he certainly is not, however he is proud and possessive of Thamesdown’s attainments and their ‘value for money’ services. In particular he is sincere in his belief of the

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