

ON THE COURSE

CHRIS KENNEDY - ON COURSE FOR WENTWORTH

TOP JOB FOR TOP MAN

NEXT time you curse when you come across a green which has just been turned into a giant sieve by the holocoring antics of the greens staff, think of an egg. So says Chris Kennedy of Haggs Castle, who has just been successfully head-hunted for the top greenkeeper's job at Wentworth. His philosophy might be called *The Omelette Syndrome*.

Another success for a 'BIGGA' and better man

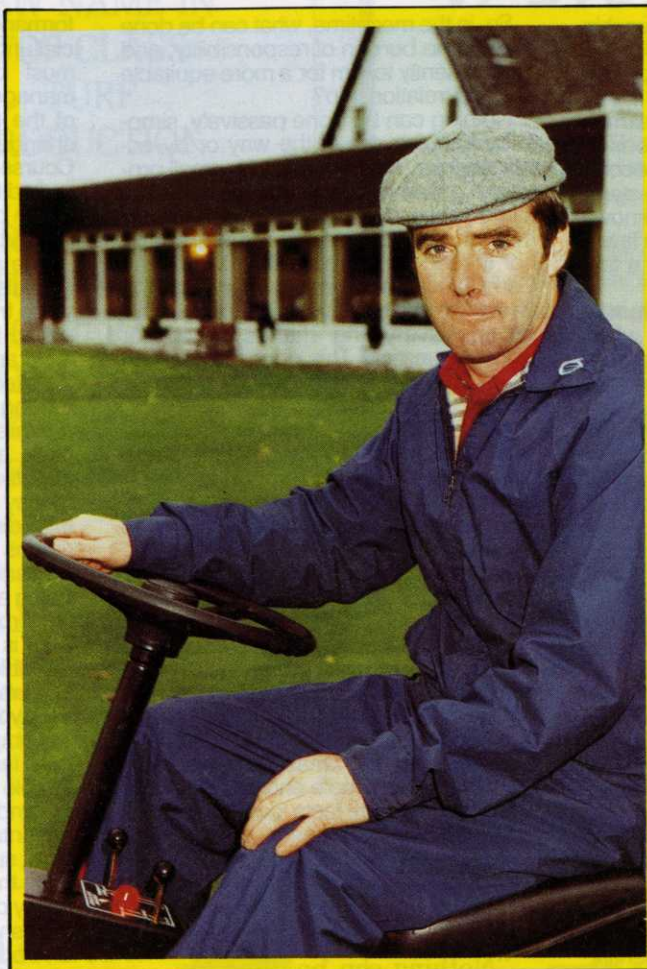
Kennedy, 42, a pioneer of an enlightened era of course management, was one of Scotland's first batch of fully qualified greens staff. "The job is a science, an art, and a way of life - you have to enjoy it or you would never work the ungodly hours." Cookery doesn't come into it, but the analogy is worth examining.

"It is impossible to make an omelette without cracking eggs," he explained. "Maintaining golf courses is like that. Sometimes you almost have to destroy an area to put it right. Golfers do not always understand that, especially when they are entertaining guests. They do not enjoy greens which have been subject to holocoring, top dressing, or slit tining, but they are necessary evils, believe me."

While a few eggs still need cracked from time to time at Haggs, members there more often have a cordon bleu course on a plate. In comparison, a big basket awaits him at Wentworth, where a plan had been drawn up to restore the complex to its revered condition of eminence.

He will set up home there with his wife Joan and seven-year-old daughter Suzanne, and begins in February after 20 years' work at Haggs, starting under the guidance of Tom Wemyss, and previously at Cowglen, where his mentor was Jack Murray.

Kennedy's views are particularly valuable as his move comes when a discussion document, *The Way Forward*, heavily criticising standards of British greenkeeping, has just been released by the Royal



Chris Kennedy - on course for Wentworth

and Ancient Golf Club to help fund improvements.

One point made is a need for further education of greenkeepers - a subject close to the heart of Kennedy, who, in addition to his duties as course manager at Haggs, is Scottish Region Administrator of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers' Association, a position he also will vacate. "We are leading from the front, but it will take time and we need cash assistance. In this respect we are delighted that the R & A are giving us financial support and guidance."

He believes Scotland is a decade ahead of England in educating greens staff, qualifications having been introduced in 1966. Students receive tuition in horticulture, mechanics, biology, chemistry and mathematics.

Courses for greens staff are now in place at five Scottish colleges - Elmwood (Cupar), Langside (Glasgow), Ayr Technical, Dundee Technical

and Oatridge (Edinburgh). His association, along with delegates from colleges and the Scottish Golf Union, forms the Scottish Greenkeepers' Training Committee, who draw up curricula.

One worry for him is salary levels for greens staff, which he feels must be improved to attract and keep the right people: "The rewards on the Continent are far greater," he points out. The R & A document also urges firmer, faster, and truer greens, and mud-free fairways, aspects he regards as sound but difficult to put into practice because of individuality of courses and budget limitations.

However, further education of greens conveners is a recommendation with which he disagrees, and he is concerned also about the lack of continuity for "well-meaning amateurs put in a terrible position for a period of one to three years." Frequently volunteers, they are not spared - even by their friends - if the course is in poor condition, and he adds:

"Then, by the time a good working relationship is established with the greens staff, their period of office is over and it is someone else's turn."

"Private clubs are not businesses, they are run for members, which is good in some ways but the management committee does change. I would rather see the role of greens conveners become one of liaison between the permanent greens staff, responsible for the condition of the course, and the committee."

Kennedy's experience in the 1972 reconstruction of the Haggs course under the direction of Dave Thomas and Peter Alliss was important in his being chosen by Wentworth, where a new South course is being constructed, the architecture being done by John Jacobs, Gary Player, and Bernard Gallacher.

He explained: "The new course is a super layout in beautiful golfing country which has been cut out of trees, and there is much overseeding and renovation work to be done. The other two 18-hole courses have suffered because of dry weather and are in a rundown condition. And with two big televised tournaments, the pressure on the course of the crowds from feet alone is great."

"Mr Willy Bauer, the chief executive, has very positive ideas about what is going to happen to put it back at the No. 1 inland complex in Britain."

Kennedy will be in charge of a greens staff of more than 30, similar to Augusta National, but with three and a half courses to attend to. It is still much bigger than at Haggs, where he has a staff of six, plus two YTS employees.

He said: "One of the nice things that has happened in my time at Haggs is the number of young men I have trained who have gone on to become head greenkeepers themselves and who have called me to say thanks - and that they are now passing on the same lessons to their own staff." Among his proteges are the top greens men at Bothwell Castle, Renfrew, Dumfries & County, and others in England and Ireland - eggs which have hatched as he moves on to a new and bigger nest.

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