

THE WAY FORWARD

Fred Hawtree comments on the discussion document from the R & A's Greenkeeping Panel

THE Panel was formed in 1986 to advise the R. & A. External Funds Committee. It has done an excellent job, securing generous aid for BIGGA and greenkeeping research at the STRI. Now it is advising other golfing bodies, first analysing their shortcomings, then showing how they can do better. One by one, the R. & A. National and county unions, STRI, golf clubs, greenkeeping, designers, professionals, trade and the media are reproached for the condition of Britain's golf courses.

The introduction stipulates two main aims - identifying influences on golf course management and suggesting ways to improve them; "the problems facing our courses today are more serious than at any stage in the game's history . . . Increased play, faulty construction, unsound agronomic management (too much water and fertiliser; too little aeration), everchanging Committees, insufficient budgets . . .". The Panel wants a plan and thinks it should come from the R. & A.

In the carnage which follows, the championship courses are mown down first: "unacceptable levels of *Poa annua* in their greens . . . a mixture of historically unsound greenkeeping (too much fertiliser/water, too little aeration), . . . etc., etc." Perhaps even by returning to these venues, the R. & A. is tacitly condoning - and publicising - *Poa annua* as an acceptable golfing grass." This seems harsh when there are a few other considerations like location, date, hotels, access, parking space, exhibition area, crowd movement, and tradition. But the argument continues: "in golfing terms a test of golf is produced which is less thorough than it should be, and certainly nothing like a genuine Links Test."

Poa annua also "contributes to a lessening of golfing skills which in turn reduces the possibility of more successes in international matches." Again, this is an unkind thrust when the Walker Cup (1989, in the USA!), the Ryder Cup (1987 and 1989), the Eisenhower Trophy (1988), the Masters (1989), the World Matchplay Championship (1987/88/89), the Curtis Cup (1986-1988), and the Vagliano Cup (1989) all suggest another view. Surely, David Leadbetter need not include hollow-time fork practice in future clinics?

Make no mistake about it, there is a lot of good stuff to be found if you can penetrate the heavy disguise of inverted commas, capital letters and trendy, business-seminar vocabulary.

The title on the cover comes complete with quotation marks. These suggest that it has either been said before (which need



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not surprise us) or is a joke (which is doubtful). Fortunately they are dropped in the text, but there is a denser forest of capital letters, not always consistent. One reads.

Choose Courses, types of Courses, financing of the Course, golf Course, a good Course, and British Golf Courses. 'Course Management' is doubly upgraded though 'greenkeeping' is not. (The two terms are not defined or contrasted but 'Course Management' seems to have higher authorities in charge while 'greenkeeping' is the job. On the other hand, the authors are described as the 'Greenkeeping Panel' although there appears to be only one member who has ever turned a hole-cutter in earnest). Likewise, every golf club is a 'Golf Club' or a 'Club', used, of course, by Club golfers'. If the Prince of Wales is unhappy with recent editions of the Bible, he would despair over this one. 'Problems' and 'areas' abound, backed up by 'disparate'; 'viable'; 'realistically viable'; 'parameters'; 'profile'; 'scenario'; 'meaningful contribution'; and, of course, 'the bottom line'. This terminology tends to make an honest message appear pretentious and leads to indigestion.

Panel-talk

'The area of the Rules'
'Add to the overall picture'
'On an annual basis'
'On a nationwide basis'
'An improved funding situation'
'Alistair Mackenzie'

Green-speak

The Rules
Play a part
Yearly
Nationally
More money
Alister MacKenzie

The reader is advised to ignore these superficialities and remember the noble, pithy, punchy aspiration on the last page, "Year-round courses with firm, fast, true

greens and firm, mud-free fairways". Hear! Hear!

The way to this goal is seen as:-

1. Defining standards
2. Money
3. Education.

One can foresee difficulties over standards. The SSS scheme used to define five groups of golf courses, according to the run of the ball after a drive of stipulated length. CONGU gave that up and nobody was bothered. But there are other approaches.

Funding must surely be easier now than it was in the early days when loud protest met the English Golf Union's "bob-a-nob" scheme. If the Panel pushes greenkeeping well into the forefront of the supplicants, that will be another feather in its cap.

Education is proposed on all fronts. After reorganising committee structure with the Green Committee consisting of Chairman, Greenkeeper and Secretary, the members must be enlightened. In Sweden, no Green Chairman can be elected until he has been on a week's course. Then he can organise education of the rest. "A complete standard *armamentarium* of audio-visual presentation needs to be developed" (Now we can see why the Lady Members are excluded. The word 'armamentarium' has so far escaped me but I have heard about those Swedish videos).

Greenkeepers have already started the educational process; the Greenkeeper Training Committee must help; professionals and media need advice; architects must learn to "take direction". Or else?

There are other hints of the iron hand. We should therefore be clear that we need another tier of authority above the golf clubs, STRI and BIGGA. These will be able to provide golf courses with their firm, fast, true conditions once the research, money and education are backing them. Indeed the Panel does envisage its own demise once its job is done.

It wisely points out meanwhile, the need to respect the environmental aspects of building and maintaining courses. "Courses will be less green and soft whether golfers like it or not . . . the influence of the Augusta dream could easily lead golf courses into conflict with the community." Well said!

Can we throw in any suggestions? The Panel wants a training manual/text-book. The Course Notes issued to those attending the STRI instructional courses would provide an excellent basis (I still have mine from 1939 but one got far less in those days.) The Panel is also worried about the quality of new golf courses. The STRI, the British Associations of Golf Course Architects and of Golf Course Contractors could sit down and thresh out a standard specification up to the point where local factors take charge. Even some special cases might be included as options. Any other ideas? The Panel has purged the Politouro. Now it's up to us to help rewrite the Constitution.