

GOLF COURSE CONSTRUCTION

by Brian Pierson

THE golf course construction industry is enjoying a boom at the present time, unlike anything that has happened since about 1973. The influence of television and increasing leisure hours, together with the interest for outdoor activities, has sparked a revolution in the requirement for new courses. The industry now has to adjust itself from the doldrums to a very buoyant market; this is affecting not only agronomists and architects but more particularly contractors. The British Association of Golf Course Constructors which was formed some six or seven years ago, has been striving for improved construction techniques and quality of work and, whilst we have lived through a very competitive period, we now find ourselves in a situation where there are more projects than the industry has suitable construction managers, the very back-bone of our industry, to cope with the work. This increase in demand is very likely to cause considerable problems. It is difficult to bring on and train construction managers when the industry is in low spirits. My company, however, has been particularly fortunate in that we have had a very strong presence in the golf world and have had the good fortune, because we have had contracts, to train young men.

a limit

There is, however, a limit to the number of suitable people to be allowed to be put in charge of a golf course. Whilst looking at the industry with considerable interest and enthusiasm, my feelings are tempered with fears of concern with, what I am quite confident will be poor golf course construction at certain levels. The NTC under the very capable

chairmanship of Howard Swan, recently held a seminar to put over the message to the farming community (which would appear to be the biggest potential customer) the importance of using not only professionals but of taking professional advice and of tackling the entire concept of a new golf course, in a thoroughly professional manner.

successful

The conference itself was a great success; the only regret, I think shared by most delegates, was that we had so few farmers in attendance. However, hopefully the farming press together with our own magazine outlets will spread the word over the next few weeks. We now have the situation where golf courses are to be built and the ever recurring question is raised of what material do we use to build the greens? It would be so simple for all of us in the industry if there were a simple answer. The make up of green construction has been discussed repeatedly year upon year. The tendency to follow the Americans in all aspects of golf is on the one hand a natural progression, but one should remember and if I may quote Jim Arthur on this "they have a climate, we have weather". The STRI are currently undertaking trials on sand green bases funded by the R & A and this is obviously a very important step forward. Whether it proves once and for all that sand greens are not the answer to UK golf or conversely that with careful management, the correct materials, greenkeepers trained in the methods of amelioration and fertilization, that there is a place for sand greens, only time will tell. My involvement in golf spans some

22 years, a very short time in the fullness of the scheme of things, but sufficient time to reflect on past failures and successes. I have been involved in the construction or alteration of over 100 golf courses during that period and, without exception, the only problems that have been experienced have fallen into the following categories: the use of local soil rather than specialist imported material; failure to incorporate stone drainage carpets under greens, essential in all but the very freest of draining sites; the use of turf grown on impervious soil and the failure to recognise the importance of irrigation when constructing free-draining golf greens.

backing off!

It is quite obvious to the reader that at this point I am backing off the contentious subject of sand greens! Very simply, it is because I do not feel I have enough experience or am technically qualified to pass judgement. During my construction career we have consistently used a sand/soil/peat mix based on deposits of soil from the Norfolk area mixed with local sharp sand. In the early 70's we were thinking in terms of a 50/50 mix and over the last decade have in fact increased the proportion of sand to 70/30. We constructed over 100 golf greens last year using this method and are confident that we will enjoy the same success as we have achieved over many years using this type of construction.

It is, however, time the industry generally, looked at possible alternatives and it is only by experimentation that a clear view of the way forward can be accessed.