

GREENSIDE COMMENT

The Way Forward

The R & A document, "The Way Forward", is currently under discussion among the various bodies in Britain, who administer and contribute to the Amateur Game of Golf.

Some of these organisations are involved in golf for commercial gain, but that is no detriment to the input that they can make to the game. Such Associations were formed to ensure that approved standards were set and their members conformed to those standards.

The Administrators, apart from salaried secretariat, such as the Golf Unions, the Golf Club Secretaries Association and for that matter the Greenkeeper's Association, are run by volunteers, and here lies the fundamental problem in golf. This is the reason why the R & A have felt it was necessary to break with tradition and offer direct advice from the top. Some may say they should have grasped the nettle earlier, as it is to the R & A that every club and golfer looks for guidance.

Somewhat a misconception as the R & A is primarily a private club, a Rules, Balls and Implements Body and the organisers of the Open Championship. They also participate in running the links at St. Andrews through representation on the Links Committee.

However, no one else has attempted to drag the reluctant amateur clubs into the 21st century, so the R & A through their greenkeeping panel have bravely stepped outside their constitution with pertinent comments and a generous "dollop" of criticism, some quite justly deserved.

The Way Forward will eventually be issued to all clubs, whether direct, or through the Unions is not yet clear, but it will certainly rock the foundations of many a club committee, when they see that their management structure is described as "Old Style Established (vintage 1982)."

It is in the area of creating a more positive, effective and efficient management structure within member clubs that The Way Forward could have the greatest success. There are some very hard words for both

General and Green Committees, suggesting election to the golf club hierarchy is seen as a step on the social ladder, rather than a desire to make a constructive contribution.

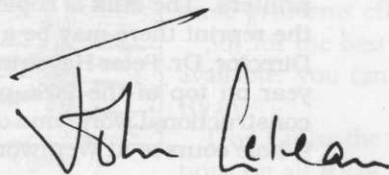
This malaise, according to the document, is also continued through to the Green Committee, where an interest in agriculture or gardening, particularly if combined with an ability to play golf to single figures, is regarded as sufficient qualification to over-ride the advice of the green staff or make alterations to the course.

Comment on the present state of our golf industry is not all destructive, there are guidelines for improving committee structures as well as suggestions to the Unions on methods for improving input to member clubs, by means of educational weekends and seminars.

They also recognise the need for more golf courses in Britain and the role the English Golf Union is playing to bring this about. What also must be grasped is the desperate necessity for clubs to have sufficient income to pay greenkeepers a wage level to equate with their skills.

Meagre annual subscriptions, which not only keep staff salaries on the bottom line, but allow nothing for equipment investment, could eventually grind the member clubs to a halt.

When built, the proposed 500 new golf courses in Britain will be mainly commercial, quite prepared to pay the proven manager the rate for the job. If the private clubs are not prepared to match these figures, the members will be cutting their own greens on Saturday mornings.



EDITOR