

# EDUCATION - WHO NEEDS IT?

A personal view by Eddie Park

WE HAVE listened for years to people talking about the need for better greenkeeper training and patently it is a disgrace that golf has done so little to provide the training for those to whom clubs entrust their most valuable asset. The usual woolly belief that somehow individual clubs should manage training themselves has made it possible for national bodies to evade their responsibilities for far too long.

Of late, we have seen the Greenkeeper Training Committee grappling with this thorny problem and slowly producing a scheme that must, at least, have a fair trial. If I do not sound altogether convinced, it is because I have my doubts as to whether it all goes far enough.

Better training for today's greenkeepers has a strong appeal for those directly involved, as they feel that their status will thereby be enhanced, but we should recognise that it also has a strong appeal for those in authority. They reason that it would get them off the hook of being held partly responsible for the poor state of so many courses!

In recent years, greenkeeping has been seen by an ever-increasing number of perceptive young men as a desirable career and many of them are now coming through into positions of responsibility. They have found their own ways of improving promotion chances. I sat at table recently with three young course managers and was impressed with their knowledge and commitment, but even they had worries.

So, I come to the crux of this article. If I am right in my belief that the problems of maintaining golf courses are really very complex (in human terms, as well as technical), are there not other people who need education, not just the greenkeeper? And if we confine education to the greenkeeper, will the situation on our golf courses ever improve?

Now that I have time to travel, I see more golf courses and the message that comes back loud

and clear, certainly from those at the sharp end, is that the major problems arise from the ignorance of the customers! I deliberately use that word because I believe that all those who work in a service industry (with greater job security than in manufacturing) must recognise that, in today's consumer orientated society, the customer really must come first, which is not to say that he can have his own way, however daft his demands!

We have to educate him and channel his golfing desires so that he wants, and is willing to pay for, the best possible golf course that is viable on his particular site. And to stop him interfering with the implementation of sound long-term policy.

This process of educating the consumer is, I believe, the factor that is too often neglected in golf course maintenance. I will not pretend that it is easy - for too long the British golfer has been fed with the belief that he can have whatever he demands. If he likes the look of Augusta on TV, then he should ask for it on his own course - be it on London clay or on a Scottish moor or on a potato field in the Midlands.

Always, too, there is somebody with a chemical or a machine or a construction outfit who says he can make these dreams come true. No wonder the green committee and the head greenkeeper are under almost constant pressure.

Now, I know that the natural reaction to all this pressure is to play the game with the cards held closely against the chest - in a word, secrecy - but I am for the promotion of education, for the very good reason that it is much more likely to work.

The recent regrettable happenings at St Pierre, when one of the world's great golfers, Seve Ballesteros, let off steam about slow greens, lends point to my case. The subsequent behaviour of most (but not all) of the golfing Press was unthinking, ignorant and uncaring. It was just another story.

As on similar occasions in the past, the PGA European Tour does not seem to be geared up to dealing adequately with this kind of situation. It was left to David Jones to tell the story (*Greenkeeper*, June) and tell it very well, but I am afraid he was preaching to the converted, many of whom have suffered in the same way.

I think many people would benefit from some basic education in the maintenance of golf courses. The term 'golfer' actually covers them all and, generalising further, it is those who are, or have been, good golfers who most need to be disabused of the idea that playing skills equate to expertise on courses.

Club golfers and committees are the first target - it is a fallacy for greenkeepers to want to be rid of committees, although I can understand why. But just reason it out. If you buy an electrical appliance and it proves to be faulty, you expect the firm to have a customer relations department to deal with your complaints. The golf customer expects no less and that is, or should be, the function of golf committees. Both customers and committeemen need education in what they are talking about.

I can best illustrate my thinking from personal experience. The idea that you can explain golf courses to golfers in half an hour over a drink dies hard. It is just not that simple. It means demonstrations on the course and it is too time consuming to hit enough people to have any significant effect. I am quite frequently asked by individuals to "see what you think of our course, old boy," which is even less productive.

In the past, we have recommended the concept of a club meeting where all the silly ideas can be aired and answered. It will sound a risky scheme to many but, properly organised, it can be very effective and the course manager can find himself working in a much improved climate with golfers actually encouraging him to get on with, hitherto, unpopular measures such as a regular programme of aeration.

Some years ago, I realised the value of colour slides, especially of close-ups of turf and, for my own interest, I developed the necessary expertise and a large collection, some of which have appeared in *Greenkeeper*. An invaluable aid!

It probably is not enough for the green committee and greenkeeper to try to do this on their own, simply because of the universal adage that 'no man is a prophet in his own country.' (Or, as it is usually expressed, 'well he would say that wouldn't he').

In fact, if I am right and there is a need for this service, it is too big for individuals to run. However, it could be just one of the items we could expect to be organised by the national and county unions.

Perhaps the first stage would be to put the unions themselves on the list for this particular type of education. It must be at least ten years since Peter Thomson remarked that the essence of good golf is ball control and that you can't learn that on soft,



Augusta - often desired by UK golfers.

holding greens. Yet, these national and county bodies persist in selecting as venues so many courses providing such greens.

The modern greenkeeper has developed a streak of independence and that must be for the good. It should not, however, lead him into the mistaken belief that he should do everything for himself. The Public Relations work that is so clearly needed (another name for the education of others!) could well be organised, when it can draw breath, by BIGGA, but it may not be possible for greenkeepers themselves to do the speaking-out. There are times when hard things need to be said!

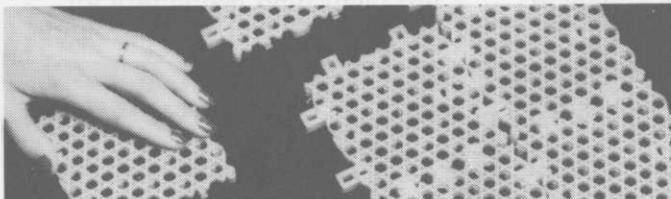
Maybe under its new name, the *Golf Course*, this publication can reach a wider golfing readership to pass on the message.

Most improvements in golf course maintenance have originated from the greenkeeper and now is the time to do something about these 'human' situations, which are at the root of many of today's problems.

**BLACK FEN  
TOPSOIL**  
Tel: G. J. Moyses  
(0733) 69447

**BLACK FENSOIL,  
SCREENED SEDGE PEAT  
TOP DRESSINGS  
SILICA SANDS,**

**BANKS HORTICULTURAL  
PRODUCTS LTD. 0858 64346**



**NO DIVOT FILLING  
INSTALLATION ON TURF OR SEED  
ALL YEAR PLAYING  
LESS MAINTENANCE  
LIGHTWEIGHT AND TOUGH  
CAN BE ROLLED UP  
PROTECTS GRASS ROOTS  
NO MUDDY PATCHES  
EXCELLENT GRIP FOR PLAYERS**

**TECNOTILE 64 OAKHURST GROVE LONDON SE22 9AQ 01-693 6287**



**Right Farm Equipment**

New and Second-hand Tractors and Grass Cutting Machinery

**FOR SALE**

FORD 1210 4WD S/H	COMPACT ROTORVATOR S/H
LEYLAND 154 2WD 2/H	RANSOMES 180 S/H
ISEKI TS3500F 4WD S/H	TORO 70
ISEKI 2160 4WD S/H	GANG MOWERS HYDROLIC
KUBOTA L245 2WD S/H	GANG MOWERS TRAILED SETS 3 & 5

New equipment available  
we are only a phone call away on  
042 878 532