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Editorial Comment

Garbage of the so-called 'expert'

Nothing is more likely to cause an editorial apoplexy attack than the appearance in print of garbage camouflaged as expert opinion. Thus, along with countless others, I took exception to comments appearing in a turf magazine recently, made by a supposedly learned man – an 'agricultural consultant' no less – who took it upon himself to declare that "the art seems to have gone out of greenkeeping" and that, "at the heart of the matter, even 'basic' knowledge is lacking in greenkeepers". This vitriolic offensive continued with his questioning whether the 'right' training courses exist, and ended with his 'original-and-oh-so-clever' idea that he sees a need for a recognised British national qualification and a co-ordinated group of advisers to organise greenkeeper training.

Where has this man been living? Has he never heard of 'The Way Forward'? Is he really blind to the multitudes of specialised colleges throughout the British Isles, busily and effectively training young greenkeepers in the art and craft of an honourable profession?

Is he, I wonder, even remotely conscious that hundreds of students pass into their chosen career each year with City and Guilds, Scotvec, B.Tech N.D.'s or even higher qualifications in Sports Turf Management or Turf Science, their training placing emphasis on understanding soil characteristics, drainage, irrigation and construction, the building and maintenance of greens, tees and bunkers, the control and care of a wide variety of sophisticated machinery, the skills and technical knowledge necessary to ensure that pesticides and fertilisers are safely and accurately applied?

As if his assault on British greenkeeping isn't enough, this ardent four times a week golfer thinks it would be a good idea to have golfers subscribe to a "good greenkeepers' society". Step forward for National Health eye test Mister know-it-all, your reading is clearly not what it might be. Far from being incensed, perhaps we should pity one so completely untouched by the publicity machine, and so blind to the realities of maintaining standards in the game he purports to care so passionately about.

I'm prepared to bet our radical anti-hero has never heard of the R&A's Joint Golf Course Committee, which brings together the very best minds, the policy shapers, bent on ensuring a sound future for all our golf courses. The Home Unions, the Sports Turf Research Institute and our own British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association are, I'll lay money on it, total mysteries to our critic. Taken a step further, I'll wager he's oblivious to the huge problems caused by cantering herds of society golfers and probably thinks over-play is a kinky form of bedroom game. Compaction? Ah, yes, you can almost hear him say, isn't that some sort of new record disc?

If there is one faint glimmer of hope, it is that he 'suspects' (only suspects, mind you) training courses are there, but that Club committees fail to recognise the benefits good training can have. Yes sir, fine training courses are there in great profusion and yes, the committee think-tanks do very often fail to see how training will benefit their course. The sadness is that it is often left to greenkeepers themselves – by any standard not over-paid – to finance their own academic advancement. It is to their great credit that so many of them do.

This man's real worry, however, is that at all levels – players, officials and greenkeepers – he thinks there's a lot of rubbish talked about how to improve golf courses. If we accept the premise that two out of three isn't bad, and thus delete the greenkeeper from his 'rubbish' list, we can nevertheless see still more toro manure added to the pile, this time from one 'expert' who ought to know better.

DAVID WHITE