



**How the PGA provides a**

# STRENGTH



# Tour of

# THE

## UNDER SCRUTINY: CHAMPIONSHIP COURSES



### Number 2: PGA EUROPEAN TOUR

Bruce Jamieson, pictured, is a man who gets results. As Director of Agronomy for the PGA European Tour, that's one of many required skills. DAVID WHITE reports



**T**he final shot on the first play-off hole at Wentworth, a stiff-to-the-flag five iron from Seve... he's home and dry, a worthy winner of the PGA Championship.' Such is the stuff of which dreams are made and which makes golf such a perfect spectacle. But how are such courses prepared for a major championship?

To get the facts was not difficult, for the PGA European Tour boast as their Director of Agronomy Bruce Jamieson, a talented young Scot with a dead cert family background – his father and brother are both professionals – who has achieved his goal by working through the ranks as greenkeeper, head greenkeeper (at Powfoot and Royal Porthcawl) and who has never once dismissed the need to follow the learning curve. Learning was the very key to his present role and followed a familiar Scottish pattern of Elmwood College for City & Guilds in Greenkeeping, a positive and substantial portfolio of turf management and self-improvement courses at other colleges and finally graduation into 'fully trained management' – his ultimate aim – via examination and graduate membership of the Institute of Industrial Management. He is proof positive that greenkeeper education works!

At Porthcawl, where he masterminded the course for at least two National Championships, his skills were instantly recognised. In their wisdom the Club saw that he was outstripping his earning potential and planned for him to be released, as a designed campaign, to give advice to other Clubs in the area. In the event a different challenge presented itself and he joined the PGA European Tour as a Tour Administrator. Suddenly things were not the same. Opportunities abound for a man of knowledge and in offering advice to the green staff at a Tour venue in Italy and subsequently at other European venues, his skills of communication were observed and monitored to an extent that within a short space of time he was appointed to his present role by PGA European Tour Executive Director, Ken Schofield.

How did it happen? It seems simple enough, for he has a gentleness and calm that inspires confidence. He talks with people, not at them. He listens; he has sympathy; he understands. He's been there. Above all he doesn't tell people what to do, he merely suggests better or different ways of achieving a goal – the goal that both parties want. And he gets results.

I was interested to learn how he ensured reaching what is all-important to tournament players: that the quality of the course and the condition in which it is presented to them is as good as it possibly can be. How, for example, does the whole thing start?

A tour venue, once mooted, gets to first base only after several imponderables have been thoroughly examined and the site found to meet specific criteria. Location is, naturally enough, ➤



**Methyl Bromide gassing**

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→ one such criteria and access for traffic and spectator accommodation another. The course must have playability and this will be ascertained only after several rounds have been played by senior Tour officials.

Achieving playing conditions that challenge the world's best golfers may necessitate minor alterations and within reason some changes may need to be made to, say, the levelling of a tee or its enlargement. It is the Tour's role to give such advice, to work alongside golf course personnel, to help them achieve the standards of preparation that are required for tournament play. A venue is visited six months prior to an event and informed discussions will take place with the head greenkeeper about his planning for the event and the logical approach seen to be necessary leading up to the tournament. The head greenkeeper is free to talk to Bruce at any time if he has a query,

or seeks confirmation of a planned course of action. Bruce has a lengthy check list which outlines a programme to be attained, but the impression I gained was always of joint consultation, advice, suggestion. Never insistence.

If, for example the Club is short on greenkeeping staff, and if the head greenkeeper is happy to accept help, the Tour can supply the Club with three qualified greenkeepers – Roger and Richard Stillwell and Mark Lewis – and they arrive a week prior to the event and stay on until the event is over. Roger Stillwell, who like Richard is an independent consultant greenkeeper, is seen as something of a 'fire-fighter' – a problem shooter if you like. He's around if needed and often attends three or four months in advance. Now they've added to the team, with BIGGA TORO Student Greenkeeper of The Year finalists attending during a tournament. This year two finalists attended St Mellion for two weeks and proved invaluable to the team, whilst gaining additional skills.

I touched on the grass species conundrum and asked about Poa annua. It was a subject that Bruce instantly warmed to and one on which he holds firm views. He believes that the Poa problem can be solved quite easily.

**'We have this dogma in Britain about**

# Get rid of

'We've had a situation over the past 20 years where consultants like Jim Arthur and the STRI have given good solid advice for maintaining bents and fescues and achieving them back into the sward' he said. 'But it's a very slow process and I believe golfers today are too impatient and don't want to wait years for good surfaces. Anyone thinking they can revert 100% Poa to bent and fescue in under ten years by slow management methods is dreaming. They'll maybe knock it back to 30% in the first two years, but getting rid of that 30% is going to take another ten years. Then you have the problem of seed that's been laid down in the thatch layer still germinating maybe two years after. Therefore you can have an invasion of the sward any time opportunity presents itself to the Poa remaining.

'You've also got several different types of Poa in greens, not just one. There's a stoloniferous variety and one that grows by rhizomes as well, so all the slitting that we do to greens, although it encourages the bent grass to shoot stolons and rhizomes, actually encourages the Poa as well. It's easy to say you will get rid of Poa annua – meaning the seeded head producing variety – yes, you certainly will, but whether you get rid of the variety spreading by stolons, that's another matter, and I don't believe you will.

'At El Salar they have a Poa problem and every three years they take four greens, cover them with polythene after aerifying with a hollow tiner, and gas them with Methyl Bromide. It kills the greens stone dead to a depth of four inches. They clean up the thatch, leave it for two weeks, score new seed into the soil – in their case pure Pennncross, which germinates in six days – and in six weeks they have a fine putting surface which lasts for three to five years, or even longer, depending on how they're managed. I believe that's a route we should consider in Britain. If you've got a Poa green and want to get rid of it, gas it! Get it cleaned out, sterilise the soil, re-seed it with what you want and manage it accordingly. I believe you can then retain it, but

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→ destroys the ability of a good golfer to score'.

He talked of The Masters and how each green has a single greenkeeper, each responsible for a consistent speed, some may need one cut, others four or five, but each will be the same as the other. Greenkeepers in Britain and on the continent, however, are under resourced and have perhaps two or three triples for a whole course. No problem, in Bruce's view, providing each mower is set on the accubar gauge to the same tolerance. A good triple cut, cut at a 45 degree angle on the second cut can present the greens very nicely. The stimpmeter is also a useful tool, he says, giving the greenkeeper information that he should want to have.

Many Clubs do not get paid to stage a Tour event, yet there are more and more who are actively seeking to be on the rota. What do they get from it? Members can expect to gain from their hard work and sacrifice. Benefits are tangible and intangible. The clubhouse may receive a face-lift, the golf course will certainly benefit from the maintenance programme, from the picture it presents to the world, and the spirit that pervades throughout ensures that pride is increased. One positive bonus is the knowledge gleaned on how to manage a course through a stressful period, the increase in traffic and wear and tear. Greenkeepers are often pleasantly surprised at how much the course can take when preparation is programmed and the experience of managing turf 'at peak performance' for a week becomes a priceless bonus when preparing for future Club championships. The kudos to a greenkeeper in seeing a job well done is beyond measure. Taking a direct comparison between Wentworth, a world-renowned course designed by Harry Colt, and Coombe Hill, another Colt design and in many ways very similar in quality and playability, but little known outside of London, the Wentworth course has hosted tournaments for the past 30 years and is the one everyone wants to play. That international recognition continues to the benefit of members long into the future.



A Cornish jewel: the 5th at St. Mellion, a PGA Tour venue

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