

# 'Main man' Roy makes his mark



**E**ven before he began his term as national chairman we were calling Roy Kates the 'main man' – for having been schooled by the ebullient George Malcolm during his run-up to office it was abundantly clear that this 'main man' was stuffed full of bright ideas – like an exceptional club captain, we knew he was going to leave his mark.

Twelve months of exposure at the sharp end has done nothing to dampen his enthusiasm, and many of his personal aspirations, voiced in an interview conducted in early '92, have indeed become reality. Yes, it can be said that Roy Kates has left a very firm footprint in the cement of BIGGA's short but illustrious history!

Remembering his comments at that time – to follow the well-worn path of promoting further education for his fellow greenkeepers and to cultivate Golden Key participation – I prompted Roy to talk me through his year. He began in reverse time order by commenting on the up-to-the-minute revelations concerning the formation of a new industry-led GTC education committee.

"Recent developments have seen education pushed well to the fore, the career video being one such positive advance which is now far beyond the embryo stage and in the throes of becoming reality – and the initiative from the Greenkeepers Training Committee is something really quite exceptional. The board of management don't necessarily feel that we're getting everything we ever wanted, but see we must 'go with the flow' for the greater good. It is not as if we can expect to hold onto our baby forever, even though we gave it life and brought it through to young adulthood, so to speak. An organisation of our size cannot realistically hope to stand against the establishment and my personal view was always to 'go for it' anyway. Naturally there was some opposition, but I saw it as unfounded – you can't expect to start something and hold on to it for ever and ever – we had to see the wider aspects of the initiative and the decisions that have been made are widely viewed as being good for BIGGA and for the greenkeeper – the new GTC concept is very good news indeed in that it will allow the Association

to devote its time whole-heartedly to promoting other educational initiatives, and as you know we've certainly got a lot going on that score, all of them equally important."

Setting out into the relative unknown 12 months ago, Roy freely acknowledges the support given to him by his fellow board members, support that enabled him to spread himself around and be recognised – he grinned as he told me how his plan became something of an 'in' joke with friends: "It was to be one of exposure, of being recognised within the Association – I wasn't going to end up being Roy Who, I wanted to be remembered. I got a great buzz out of attending major functions, like BTME and regional seminars, and having people I'd never met grasp me by the hand and say 'Roy Kates, glad to know you, you're doing a good job.' Obviously they had seen my face in the magazine – almost every issue it seemed – and the plan worked. I think it something the job requires, I wanted people to relate to me and I feel that they have."

"The highlight of my year had to be Harrogate, the meeting with Prince Andrew. All the organisation behind the scenes to make this such a success needs to be shouted from the roof tops – these things don't just happen. I think the day before BTME my emotions went full circle – I had the build up, the elation of knowing I would be meeting Prince Andrew for maybe an hour or so, the sudden let-down when I discovered that Viscount Whitelaw was to be his official escort, and the joy again when Viscount Whitelaw almost casually passed the mantle back with his classic understatement – "Well Roy, I'll just leave Prince Andrew with you, you can do what you want now". "And that's exactly what I did, I spent nearly three hours with him – it was pure magic."

And what, I asked Roy, did Prince Andrew have to say? "All he wanted to talk about was his lawn." And how were you able to help him? A huge grin now, a joke: "Well, I gave him my business card! He was so genuine and sincere and demonstrated such real interest in everything he was shown – boy, it's something to be in the deep end like that with the national press, radio, television, all bustling for coverage – granted, it wasn't me they were focusing on but I was there in the limelight and it felt wonderful."

Roy has Gordon Hepson, his boss at Wexham Park, to thank for being supportive during this busy year. In truth Gordon Hepson was not simply supportive, he was downright encouraging in what was for Roy a very busy engagement, and it was perhaps fitting that 'the boss' shared in Roy's moment of glory at Harrogate, revelling equally in sharing personal moments with Viscount Whitelaw and our royal visitor. "Without him my year in office would not have been possible," Roy declared, "he has been my stoutest supporter, a very generous man." Praise indeed for a munificent character.

Everyone who knows Roy will tell you that he is great 'persuader' – he can sell ideas. Thus to round off this whistlestop tour of one man's year as national chairman, let me touch on his Golden Key connection. Roy was perhaps being modest in not mentioning the part he played in raising this initiative to even greater heights – suffice to say he lived up to his 1992 aspirations – to raise the profile still higher. As a result, BIGGA can count on two more Golden Key members – Risboro' Turf and Jacobsen's – both with us for altruistic reasons, thanks to the persuasive tongue of Roy Kates. There's no doubt about it, he's the main man!

DAVID WHITE