

Tireless efforts are finally bearing fruit

The issues contained within the Neil Thomas interview (Pages 21/22) throw up a question as to the future role of the Joint Golf Course Committee, as we observe that the GTC will raise its finances through the four Home Unions and the Royal & Ancient, the latter having agreed to match the 6.25p golfer contributions in 1993/94. Will the JGCC, I wonder, remain in being purely to oversee the financing of recommendations that may emanate from the technical panel?

Hearing how BIGGA were frustrated in their attempts (from July '92 onwards) to orchestrate a meeting with the JGCC, and that communication from that body appears to have been notably lacking, I am left to conclude that had such dialogue taken place the issues might have been resolved earlier and in all probability there would have been a better understanding of BIGGA's unique position. It seems to me that BIGGA, having taken the initiative over the past five years, should have been given greater acknowledgment of its views, for at all times BIGGA has sought to communicate and advance greenkeeper education and training. That stated, at this late stage we should be grateful that the employers have at last accepted their responsibilities.

Looking forward to the future, with all the positive vibes that this latest initiative creates, we should not forget those key members, both within BIGGA and in previous old Associations, whose tireless efforts on behalf of greenkeeper education are finally bearing fruit. They were the real pioneers in the field of education and they can look back on a job well done.

In discussing with our chairman, Roy Kates, the matter of David Golding's pending transfer to the GTC, he expressed the opinion that the move by the GTC to take the responsibilities of financing greenkeeper education to the employer was "probably the biggest 'happening' since the inception of BIGGA, something we have long been striving for because everyone thought the game should pay for the training of greenkeepers." He continued,

"It is tremendous for the expansion of greenkeeper education in that it will enable us to spend more time and put valuable resources into other important things like the management training courses held at Aldwark Manor and, of course, the National Education Conference and the seminar programme at BTME. There is no doubt - it is good for BIGGA members and the board of management are totally behind it."

Moving to another matter, I've long held the view that so often it is golf club officials who need educating - or, at least, regularly seem to be in need of a liberal dose of common sense - and now seems as good a time as any to raise the matter of an alarming trend - albeit a mere trickle which could become a flood - for club management to be tempted into saving money by sacking, declaring redundant or otherwise manoeuvring deservedly well paid head greenkeepers - on the grounds that they can do the job themselves, 'with a little help from their friends'.

Some cases have come about by unscrupulous professional advisors suggesting 'we can replace expensive staff by coming at fortnightly intervals', others with the inexcusable reason that the club is in severe financial difficulties - this at a time when there are countless thousands who queue before dawn to pay for the pleasure of a game and thousands more who cannot ever hope to gain entry into a private club. In my view, if cash flow is a problem there is no clearer case for raising funds than by increasing annual dues, which often are little more than the price of three pints of ale per week - utterly, ludicrously low, even in recessionary times!

How on earth does an advisor hope to replace a skilled head man, one whose vigilance, anticipation and experienced eyes are far cheaper and more effective than expensive cures after problems materialise? By coming once a fortnight and relying on unskilled supervision for the other thirteen days! We know the answer to that one, don't we! I

hold the view that these advisors lower the whole professional standing of agronomy, damnable by ethical standards, for no advisor should set himself up as a surrogate greenkeeper and in any case, should a crisis occur shortly after one visit it may go undetected and uncorrected for ten or more days - with disastrous consequences.

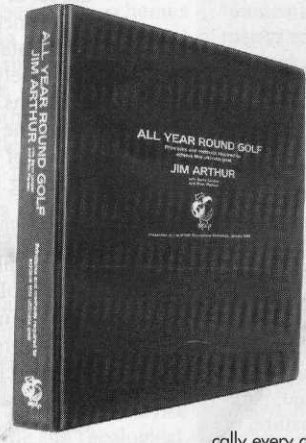
On the club front one such victim of a cash flow crisis, a hugely talented professional of many years standing, has been told that his skills were duplicated on the green committee and they were to replace him with a retired milkman who has sat on the green committee for 20 years, whilst another member, a mechanic, could do the machinery maintenance! The ludicrous nature of such an approach will no doubt show itself as their course suffers and falls into decline and morale plummets, whilst the implications of the Health and Safety at Work

Act will take them into serious legal difficulties if they use unqualified or unsupervised staff for specific operations such as pesticide spraying.

I could continue, but suffice it to say that clubs entering into these dubious transactions are playing with fire. Granted, in this magazine I'm preaching to the converted and these words should be blazoned through the golfing press, nevertheless I hope that somewhere a club official will take this warning on board: "The function of an advisor is to lay down policy, that of the greenkeeper to implement it and that of the green committee to see that it is funded. The latter should never interfere with methods as they cannot be expected to know anything about them". Spoken a decade ago by that doyen of professional advisors, Jim Arthur, and still true today!

DAVID WHITE

'It is tremendous for the expansion of greenkeeper education'



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