

BIGGA's quiet man takes control



The current 'in' joke amongst members of the board of management, indeed amongst all those involved in the management of BIGGA in all of its multifarious activities, is the one concerning the outgoing chairman, who goes from being high profile Mr Roy Kates to that of yesterday's man, the *who d'ya mean Mr Roy Who?* Roy Kates has delighted in 'milking' this joke for all it's worth, after all it's only meant in fun and is of his making. That stated, it is a fact that the feeling of deflation following a year of hyper activity can affect different people in different ways, some taking it more in their stride than others.

John Crawford, our new 1993 chairman, will I know forgive me if I describe him as 'the quiet man' of BIGGA, for on first acquaintance he appears the very essence of intensity, a 'still waters run deep' type. Those who take the time to dig a little deeper, however, will find that he hides behind a streak of wicked humour which surfaces on numerous occasions. Having watched him and listened to his often caustic wit over the past year or two, I predict that whilst John Crawford may well begin his year of office as the quiet one he'll surprise us all, for like those illustrious and high profile chairmen in whose footsteps he follows, he'll come through as being anything but a John Who?

Who, then, is this man of quiet countenance? Certainly he's a modest man who admits to a dislike of tape recorders, of being interviewed. His fellow board members will nevertheless aver to his having made a distinct mark in BIGGA affairs, a stand up, speak up and shut up sort of fellow who thinks carefully before committing his thoughts for public consumption, but one who has positive views and ideas that are his alone, never a 'yes' man.

John, true Scot and archetypal canny Fifer, began his greenkeeping career in his native county, joining Aberdour GC at the age of eighteen as a humble assistant under the eagle eye of John Robb, the now retired head greenkeeper whose name is always spoken with reverence and one who still remains active in local BIGGA affairs. John is quick to declare his true allegiance by stating that it is to John Robb that he owes everything, ever his mentor and a trusted friend.

Came the time to put John Robb's teaching into practice, John, still a youngster of just 22, moved to Glenrothes GC to take up his first head greenkeeper's post, an enviable one as Glenrothes, designed by Hugh Middleton, was still under construction with only the very basic shaping completed. There can be no finer way of gaining expertise than in such a hands-on situation and John enjoyed some six years of working in local authority golf, sorry when local government reorganisation – essentially the establishment of a Parks Department which engulfed the previous golf-only set-up – caused him to re-think his future. Such experience meant not only controlling the destiny of a golf course but also hiring his own staff. On reflecting that situation, he declared that by so doing he became the youngest member of his own team, often mistakenly identified by salesmen as the boy!

A brief sortie across the English border followed when John joined Chorlton-cum-Hardy as their head greenkeeper, hired over the current head man, though it was brief indeed

– just two years – as it proved to be a period of tension, a 'them and us' situation at the time that was not altogether palatable and he returned to Scotland, joining the Lanarkshire course of Airdrie, as keeper of the green and the pro shop. This was not such an uncommon situation as it may now seem, as income derived from the shop helped supplement the greenkeepers package, though John found this side of the work less palatable and it also meant a seven day week, every week. I suppose it speaks volumes for the man that despite such enforced commercial activities he stayed for over three years and only moved when the lure of returning to his native Fife, to Dunfermline GC, came about through chasing an advert in the trade press.

A light sparkles in John's eyes when he recalls Dunfermline. He took over from Bob Winton, a fine man who was suffering from a debilitating disease which subsequently took his life. The course, quite understandably, was a mite neglected. The job offered the very challenge for which John had been searching and he was to remain there for 15 years, during which time he was to ably demonstrate not only his skills as a greenkeeper but his mettle as a course builder. Elsewhere it is written that John is a modest chap, and I must say that I had almost to drag the story of John's nine-holer from him. With the help of a local farmer, Wag Allen, who had served both as club captain and green convenor, John set about constructing a nine hole junior course which to this day is seen as a great success and, equally important, is a splendid money spinner for the club.

If Dunfermline was a great challenge, there can be few more challenging than course management of Hagsgs Castle, and it was to this established high profile club that John came in 1990, taking over the mantle from Chris Kennedy, who had nipped across the border to take over the reins of Wentworth's championship arena. John has not attempted to become a surrogate Chris Kennedy, for that would be impossible and not his style anyway. What he has done, and seen to be highly successful in so doing, is to continue to provide excellent playing surfaces, making his philosophy one of 'good golf for every occasion, 365 days a year.' I've talked to Hagsgs members and though some found Chris's departure hard to accept, at first perhaps even a mite resentful at the thought of having to accept a perceived interloper, to a man they now declare that John is making great strides and, to quote one perceptive observer, 'is doing a bloody fine job'.

On the Association front, John has been around since SIGGA times, as a beginner at Aberdour, as one who helped form the Central section in 1981 (with valuable support from John Souter), as a committee member in 1982, later to become chairman and secretary and later still elected in 1988 as board representative for Scotland. He was vice to Harry Diamond's chair until Harry retired in '92 and now is chairman of the Scottish region.

John Crawford the canny Fifer is on his way, set to make his mark as chairman of the board in his own inimitable style. You may be sure we shall hear much from this likeable character – perhaps finding a whole new audience for his acerbic wit in the speeches he will inevitably be called upon to perform – let's persuade him.

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