

# Spring time – or stress time?

It's early April and spring is in the air. The nights are drawing out and the dark days of winter are but a fading memory. A time of optimism when greenkeepers sally forth with a new spring in their heels. Or is it? For many greenkeepers it's stress time once again. No sooner is the month under way than greenkeepers are confronted with their first major problem best summarised as the 'Augusta Syndrome'. As the last images of the Augusta Masters tournament fade from our TV screens the knocking brigade come into action. Suddenly the golf course which was in fine condition for the time of year only the previous week is now perceived as far from that when compared with the idyllic conditions prevailing at the Masters. Little heed of course is paid to such mundane matters as climatic conditions, maintenance budgets or greenstaff numbers. Winter is over and the course should be in mint condition.

The Chairman of the Green Committee is called into action. Surely it is time the greenkeeping staff were sorted out. It is cold, it is wet and the grass is not growing – but the Course Manager protesteth too much and in vain. Conditions must improve and they must improve rapidly. Yes, it's stress time. Less the reader thinks that the writer exaggerates then yet again this year reports have reached the office of greenkeepers throwing in the towel. This article is not about protecting the lazy, incompetent greenkeeper but it is a plea for a greater understanding and for a move away from the traditional 'spring madness'.

No doubt many of the problems revolve around communication and consultation and lack of knowledge on the part of members. The regular changing of green committee personnel does not help. Are all these problems insurmountable? I think not. Much can be achieved if the golf club adopts a positive attitude to greenkeeper training. The Course Manager's technical skills will be complemented by managerial and communication skills and he should be encouraged to keep members informed on course maintenance matters. I heard recently that one Course Manager, who for some years has been running an annual seminar for members, is now setting up



## BIGGA in focus

BY NEIL THOMAS

workshops for 20-25 members at a time on a rolling programme basis. Certainly more and more Course Managers are benefiting from a regular dialogue with members and this is a move in the right direction and to be very much encouraged.

Where a negative situation exists in a golf club and there is a lack of communication, it is all too easy for the Course Manager to become isolated and inward-looking – both within the club and indeed from his local BIGGA section where, if approached, caring fellow greenkeepers would be available to advise and help in instances where an individual is facing particular problems. Within the club this would seem to be the time when a sympathetic employer should seek to help the Course Manager whether the problem be an agronomic or personal one. Before acting precipitately wouldn't it be better for the employer to consult

and perhaps, if necessary, seek advice or guidance from BIGGA as the professional body representing their Course Manager's interests. Greenkeepers do not generally seek confrontation. They ask quite simply for consultation, consideration and understanding in carrying out a difficult job to the best of their ability and under increasingly complex rules and regulations, let alone bad weather, inadequate capital and maintenance budgets and too few staff. They do not seek to stand above criticism or deny their own foibles. However, they surely have a right to expect the employer to protect them from the diatribes of those small groups of ill-informed members whose knowledge of golf course management is at best scanty and at worst non-existent. Yet how easily can such members produce a career-threatening situation for the greenkeeper.

As we move through May and June as peak playing months the pressure is really on and perhaps these two months more than any others will determine whether the Course Manager's services are terminated or indeed whether he decides that he has had enough. I would venture to suggest that such pressure and the resultant stress is in no-one's best interests. As a result Course Managers who are highly competent are lost to golf clubs and maybe to greenkeeping. The golf club then has to seek a replacement and there are no guarantees that the new Course Manager will perform bet-

ter than the departing one within the resources made available to him and prevailing attitudes within the club. Indeed it may not be too long before the scenario repeats itself. So it could well be that the club will reflect on the loss of a good man in the course of quietening a few over-excited members who really needed no other antidote than a few low-scoring rounds of golf before declaring the golf course to be in the best condition they could remember.

So now it is July and hopefully for the survivors 'spring madness' is over for another year. For those who haven't made it one can only hope that there are better days ahead. Before we go full circle once again is it too much to hope that a new spirit will prevail? Is it too much to ask that clubs provide the wherewithal for greenkeepers to receive training in areas of identified weakness? Is it too much to ask that green committees show greater understanding and put their faith in their most important employee, the golf course manager, rather than interfere in matters where their knowledge is at best limited? Finally, is it too much to ask that meetings and workshops for golf club members are established to enable the Course Manager to disseminate information on the golf course – its maintenance and management? In some instances the answer may be yes on all counts but hope springs eternal and I am optimistic that a wind of change is beginning to blow. The grounds for such optimism emanate from the tremendous upsurge in the education and training programmes made available to greenkeepers in recent years and the increasing recognition within the game for the well-qualified, experienced and technically competent individual. Such individuals will be consulted and find that their advice is heeded and their maintenance programmes are sanctioned and implemented. The golfer, much to his delight, will come to appreciate the well-maintained golf course on which he can aspire to perform great deeds. All then is not lost and there must be a concerted effort on the part of golf club and greenkeeper to ensure that, in the course of time, the bad old days of 'spring madness' will become but a fading memory.

## Golfing triumph for Emma, ex-BIGGA girl with ambition

There was great excitement recently in the office with the news of Emma Duggleby's triumph in the Ladies' British Amateur Championship. Many of you will recall that it is only just over a year ago that 22 year old Emma relinquished her position with BIGGA in order to pursue her golfing ambitions. Talking with her at the time, Emma was in a real quandary whether to chance her arm in the quest for golfing glory or to pursue a career with BIGGA. In deciding on the former, she must surely have exceeded her

wildest ambitions when, just over a year later, she has succeeded in winning golf's most coveted ladies' amateur title. Emma was a popular, unassuming member of staff whom we were very sorry to lose. However, we keep in touch and will follow her career with interest in a future which we hope will bring Curtis Cup honours and who knows in the years ahead perhaps she will tread in the footsteps of Nancy Lopez and Laura Davies. We all join in sending our congratulations and best wishes for the future.