

# TALKING HEADS

**Arne van Amerongen says head greenkeepers and course managers should be appointed during the early stages of a golf course project as they're the ones who have to correct them!**



**'I consider the end product in any new course project would undoubtedly benefit from the course manager's input from the very earliest stages through to completion'**

The golf course manager often complains about the aspects of construction or design on his course which cause maintenance problems. In the past I have tended to blame the contractor, but while working for Brian Pierson Contractors I have formed a very different opinion. I think the majority of mistakes in the construction of a golf course come about as a direct result of lack of communication between all parties concerned.

It is still the case however, for whatever reason, that agreed specifications are not always met and the quality of the end product – the golf course – suffers in consequence. Such problems often do not become apparent until after the new owners have 'taken delivery' of the course and 'the baby' is placed in the hands of their 'nanny', more commonly known as the course manager. It is he who is left to bring the course into maturity, one of the most mis-used phrases relating to golf courses up and down the country, incredibly often applied to courses more than five years old!

In reality, reconstruction using correct materials and relevant specifications is more often than not the only way forward to realise expectations for what then becomes a very expensive 'baby' indeed.

Let's look at a typical development. If a company or individual wants to build a golf course they contact an architect and a golf course contractor. The architect draws the plans and may also arrange for all specifications, as well as appointing a contractor. Alternatively an independent body may be consulted for the critical aspect of project specifications. The appointed contractor commences construction of the course, working from the architect's plans and following the relative material specifications. A course manager has in many cases not been considered at this stage, leave alone appointed. Some architects unfortunately fail to realise a course design, (any course design), has to result in a layout which is playable and affords enjoyment and satisfaction to the average golfer – not just the tiger – as well as be maintainable cost effectively, especially in view of the current economic climate. Granted, the construction people build the

course, but all the decisions are made by the owner and/or architect.

Where does the modern course manager fit into the overall scenario in the development of a new course? Many people in the golf industry still perceive the head greenkeeper or course manager as the man who tends the course or 'he who cuts the greens'. Clearly they fail to recognise the wide-ranging skills, capabilities and responsibilities required of today's course manager. I consider the end product in any new course project would

undoubtedly benefit from the course manager's input from the very earliest stages through to completion.

Not only will he have first hand knowledge of underground installations and materials used but he can identify aspects of the design which may lead to maintenance problems, ie too sharp contouring, steep banks, traffic concentration; especially around greens, required green and tee areas to accommodate intended levels of play on the site, tree planting schemes which may not allow for adequate airflow in the future, particularly around greens and tees etc. The list goes on.

By being involved from the very beginning he will be in a far more informed position as to the necessary machinery and equipment requirements for course maintenance, as well as staffing levels.

Some people may not accept that today's highly trained course manager should have an influence on the design and construction of the golf course for which he is responsible. I consider this to be folly on their part, if only for the very reasons I have highlighted. If indeed a man appointed to such a position had no valuable input towards the end product, I would suspect his suitability for the job!

In conclusion, I am of the opinion that it is as important as ever to make the most of limited resources. It follows therefore that the owner, architect, contractor and course manager all have to be involved in any new project from the beginning, so that all interests can be voiced, explained and agreed before construction gets under way.

The so common mistakes can then be avoided, instead of having to be corrected (at great inconvenience and cost), more often than not by the man who inherited them. Who is he, this trouble-shooter? He's the course manager, the one whose services are so often deemed superfluous by the powers that be at a time when they would have proved most beneficial.

■ Arne van Amerongen has just taken over as course manager at Paultons Golf Centre near Romsey, Hampshire. This Brian D Pierson constructed centre offers an 18-hole par 72 parkland course, a nine-hole par 3 course and teaching academy. There is also a 30-bay driving range.

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