

Stand by for a challenging tournament



BIGGA's 1994 National Golf Tournament, again sponsored by ICI Professional Products, moves to Dartmouth on August 1-3. Chris Boiling met up with head greenkeeper Terry Farkins to discover what's in store

Bring plenty of balls with you if you're coming to Dartmouth Golf and Country Club for this year's ICI-sponsored National Tournament. And a scuba diving outfit might not go amiss as this picturesque course boasts seven water hazards, including an irrigation lake that holds 1.5 million gallons.

The tip from head greenkeeper Terry Farkins is: "Don't take your driver out until the 6th." After that the 6663-yard (off the white tees) par 72 course becomes more open.

"Once you've played it a few times you know where to stick your driver in your bag and you know where to get your iron out," says 12-handicapper Terry, who joined the course two and a half years ago halfway through its construction.

When I went down to Devon to see him and view the course, the main thing on his mind was when were his six men going to be paid?

Receivers were called in on March 28 and are running the club for the banks which financed this £6m project. Although there is much uncertainty about the future of the club, Terry has assured BIGGA and ICI that it is "business as usual" and they are looking forward "to welcoming all BIGGA members and feel confident you will all enjoy our superb golf course and leisure facilities."

These facilities include a £4million, 40,000sq ft clubhouse on an elevated position overlooking the 18th green and surrounding South Hams countryside. On the ground floor of the clubhouse is a leisure club with swimming pool, sauna, steam room, jacuzzi, solarium and gymnasium. On the top floor is a conference/function suite that can seat 300 delegates or guests.

The complex was

a local property developer's dream. Ralph Hitchens, a keen golfer, wanted to build something special. He's done that, although he's no longer involved to take advantage of it.

Ralph bought the land, which is five miles west of Dartmouth, from three farmers. Englishman Jeremy Pern was brought in to design his first UK course. A massive earth-moving programme went into action and, a year later, race ace Nigel Mansell, the club's first president, opened it in August 1992.

There are 27 holes, 18 of which make up the Championship course with the other nine being an easier Club course. All the greens were constructed to a USGA spec. The front and back nines of the Championship course are very different. The first holes are very picturesque with several man-made valleys to drive through and lakes to hit over. The back nine are more "linksy", set 500ft above sea level with man-made mounds framing the fairways.

There are just over 50 bunkers on the course but some are very big. One bunker on the 9th required 100 tons of sand.

Terry's favourite holes are the 4th, 5th and 18th.

The 4th is 491 yards off the white tees, through a valley with a lake near the green. "If you get a par 5 you can be really pleased," he says. "With the water, it's easy to walk off the green with a 10 on your card."

His tip is to take two 4 irons and then an 8 or 9 iron.

The 145-yard 5th is a very pretty hole. Sitting in a valley, the green butts onto a

lake. When we were there, the pin was very close to the edge of the lake – and Terry says it's one of only a few pin positions possible on this hole because of the size and contours of the green.

The 18th is a spectacular finishing hole requiring a 214-yard tee shot over a lake to a green guarded by three bunkers. The tees are terraced into the hillside opposite the clubhouse.

At Dartmouth there are four sets of tees on each hole – red, blue, white and gold. From the gold tee, the 18th measures 244 yards. When the gold championship tee is used on the 10th, it completely changes the hole. From this tee the drive must carry 190 yards over a wood-filled valley (home to several badger sets) to reach the landing area. A sheer rock face borders the fairway to the left, whilst to the right the valley plunges away to a stream. A good drive on this 407-yard par 4 is rewarded with a comfortable second shot to the green. From the white tees the hole is a relatively straightforward 384 yards.

Getting to the greens is only half the fun. When you get there we think you'll like what you find. Predominantly creeping bent (Cobra) grass on sand (see panel), these greens have a reputation for being slick. Terry expects them to have a stimpmeter reading of 8.5. "I'm not a great lover of that, but that's what I'm asked to produce," he explained.

Another thing that you will like is

Terry Farkins, 29, is a former Cannington College student and was the '91 regional winner in the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year awards. Terry spent eight years at Torquay, where he was born and still lives before hearing about the Dartmouth job. He joined after 12 holes had been constructed. The developer, Ralph Hitchens, said to him: "There it is, show me what you can do. He let me run my own show." Terry had the back nine ready to play from seed in six months. "We were talking about closing it for the winter but because it had established itself so well, and they needed the money, we stayed open."



THE GREENS

The greens at Dartmouth Golf and Country Club use a USGA method of construction. There is a herring-bone drainage system set into the subsoil, followed by a 100mm-deep layer of 6mm gravel. The rootzone was laid on top, no blinding layer was needed. The 250mm-deep rootzone mix is 90-10 sand and fen soil. The sand came from a local quarry (Watts Blake and Bearne) and

is described as irregular to sub rounded with particle sizes of 93 per cent between 0.25 and 2mm. PH is around 6 to 6.5. "We have had no problems with the sand, it is of excellent requirement as it does not compact."

The seed mixture after construction was as follows, but they have now introduced creeping bent (Cobra) to the sward and this has dominated

the surface:

- Chewings fescue (*Festuca rubra commutator*) – Frida – 60 per cent
 - Slender creeping red fescue (*Festuca rubra litavallis*) – Rufilla – 20 per cent
 - Oregon bent (*Agrostis Castellana*) – Highland – 10 per cent
 - Browntop bent (*Agrostis tenuis*) – Bardot – 10 per cent
- Tees are subsoil graded with

falls from front to back and are finished off with a 4in layer of site soil and sand, mixed 50/50. The seed used was the same as the greens but with smooth stalked meadow (Julia) and creeping bent (Cobra). The fairway is similar, except the Cobra has been replaced by perennial rye (Hermes), a dwarfed variety. All seeds were supplied by British Seed Houses.



The driving range, with a dangerous slope for maintenance

the atmosphere at the club. It's a modern club, set up by a businessman who wanted a place where people could come and unwind. You can dress casually in the bar and restaurant. And with all the other facilities, you can still enjoy your visit even if you don't play well.

Nervous

We thought Terry might be nervous at the prospect of dozens of greenkeepers descending on his course. But he's not. "Greenkeepers are more sympathetic than anyone, because they understand each other's problems. Every green's different, every green has its own problems. Some days people play a course and moan about it, and the only difference in it is the cut. They moan about a green not being very good, and the only difference is that it was left that day. Golfers don't see it that way, greenkeepers do. They can see the type of surface and grasses someone is working with, and understand the problems that they've got."

Dartmouth was designed for a major competition but, because of the financial situation, the course has had to stay open all year, apart from when it's

snowed. Golfers always get to play the main greens and are on grass tees all year. "We've got good tee and greens construction," says Terry proudly.

To keep on top of that build-up on the creeping bent greens, Terry uses an aggressive programme of hollow-coring, slitting, and verti-cutting. They verti-cut every three or four weeks during the growing season. This programme also stresses the annual meadow grass.

It's a high maintenance course with many banks that need mowing and large, unusual shaped bunkers.

The front nine, in particular, needs more manicuring because it's meant to be pretty. Because the second nine is more linky with vast mounding "we can get away with more and we can leave it more rough and ragged".

The large mounds and steep banks also make it a dangerous site to maintain. The driving range is particularly hazardous and they aren't venture on it if there has been the slightest dew.

Terry's biggest problem, however, is the bunkers. It's not just their size, but the sand is so light and fluffy and the course so windy that they are constantly having to refill them.

Top soil shortages

The first season Terry was here he concentrated on getting the greens right, then the tees, and now he is looking to improve the fairways by weed spraying, verti-cutting and scarifying.

One thing he has noticed with the recent wet winter is that the fairways drain well. This is partly because of the shortage of top soil following the construction of the mounds. There is supposed to be two inches of top soil all over, but it's a bit sparse in places. However, the grass seems to be growing well: "We've used a lot of nutrients (high nitrogen and agricultural fertiliser) to get it established, but the result now is that you only get boggy areas in the few spots where there is too much top soil," explains Terry.

They have been verti-drained twice since opening.

When I visited the course in early April, Terry and his team were looking to topdress with fine sand "but because of the bad weather we weren't able. We're two weeks away from a county match, so we're limited as to what we can do. So maybe next week I'll verti-cut them, and give them just a light dressing if I can get away with it, and give them another feed and get them going again. As soon as the match is finished, we'll be in hollow-coring, overseeding with creeping bent and top-dressing."

Being a modern club, there is no greens committee and Terry has good communication with the pro (director of golf) and the members and is able to oversee etc at the best times for germination.

Terry, who originally wanted to be a cricket groundsman, tries to play once a week himself and he tries to play as many other courses as possible "because you always think you've got the biggest problems, but you go somewhere else and you see they've got bigger problems than you."

One of the key people in his

seven-man team is Steve Hunt, who worked the land when it was a farm. He knows the land inside out and, according to Terry, is an excellent weather forecaster.

He says it will great in August, so the only other thing to worry about is the pin positioning: "I'm always fair," says Terry, "at least they're on the greens." But sometimes only just.

MAIN MACHINERY

The £139,000 worth of equipment in use at the club includes:

- 1 Toro 3000D green mower
- 1 Iseki 40hp tractor with front loader
- 1 Browers 5 unit rough cut mower
- 1 Bucker power unit and rotary deck
- 2 Toro Reelmaster triples (216 D)
- 2 Lloyds Pallidins pedestrian mowers
- 1 Outfield Spiker
- 1 Flymo
- 2 Pro 24 strimmers
- 1 Toro fairway mower (223 D)
- 1 Toro Sand Pro bunker rake
- 1 Cushman power unit
- 1 Top Dresser
- 1 Vari Tyne Aerator
- 1 66-gallon sprayer
- 1 8ft brush
- 1 Multi-depth aerator
- 1 Allen Reciprocator
- 1 Cyclone fertiliser distributor
- 1 Small trailer
- 1 Vert drainer
- 2 Knapsack sprayers
- 1 21in rotary
- 1 Cylinder grinding machine

Machinery borrowed from Hitchens Quality Homes includes:

- 1 Trailer (3 tonnes)
- 1 Quad ATV
- 1 21in Toro rotary
- 1 Glymo
- 1 Strimmer
- 1 JCB
- 1 Mini digger