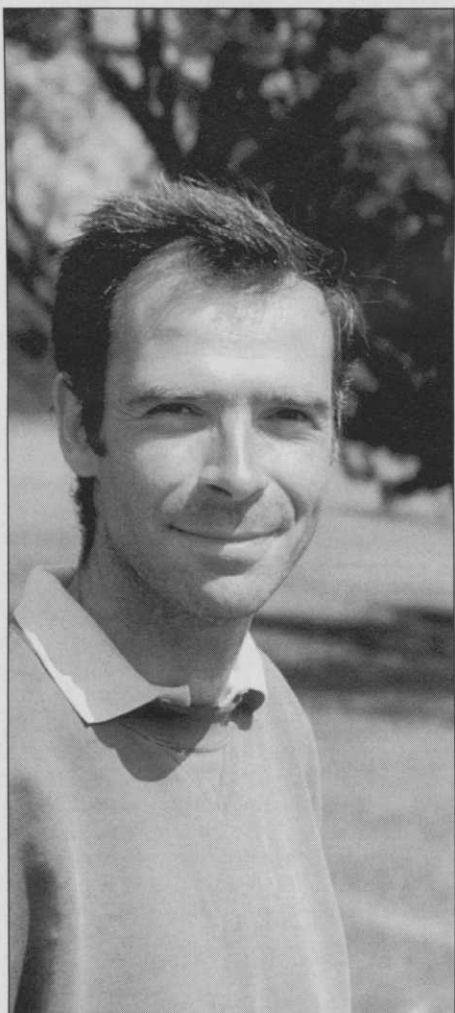


In the bleak



Richard Barker: Gets nine months out of his course

Few golfers enjoy temporary greens but in this country they are a necessary evil. Scott MacCallum talks with Richard Barker about the subject.

Some things in life are all about selling. Convincing people that their pint pot is half full and not half empty; they're so many years young rather than old and reminding them of the two 40 footers they holed when they want to dwell on the three footer they missed on the 18th green. It all adds up to making them feel brighter, more positive.

It is this technique which should be employed when the hoary subject of winter greens rears its head at the club. No-one likes playing on them but in the eyes of the greenkeeper they are a necessary evil and it's a case of selling members the idea that the alternative to winter greens is not the retention of the regular playing surfaces but a closed course – so they are a good thing after all!

Well that's the defence Richard Barker of Kirby Muxloe GC tries to employ when the groans go up.

Like every greenkeeper in the land Richard

knows he will get an ear bashing when winter greens are discussed and like every greenkeeper in the land he tries to soften the blow when they inevitably come into operation.

"I'm aiming to get an all year round surface with annual vertidrainage, slitting, hollow tining but in reality we get nine months play out of the course and for the other three months we've got to be looking at the possible use of temporary greens," he explained.

It is a problem which is relatively new as it's only recently that we've wanted to play golf all the year round. Previously it was only fanatics who didn't put their clubs into hibernation from November until March.

"The club has nothing written down but my policy is to keep the greens in play as long as possible and move on to temporary greens when they are not fit to be played then ultimately, when they are not fit to be played, the course has to be closed. Like many greenkeepers I am accused of being over cautious and they are probably right but the alternative is to be cavalier with the greens and that could be catastrophic.

"Given the choice I would like to keep the temporaries cut out all year which is what

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mid-winter

some golf clubs do but the committee here requested that I don't maintain them during the year for the simple reason that they think it reminds people that they are going to have to be used. I think it would be better if I could keep them cut out and top dressed, with a white line round them and deemed GUR to keep divots off them.

"So I'm faced with preparing temporaries around August time. I don't make them too big which is possibly a fault of mine - around 10 metres by 10 metres - but I don't want to spend too much money and time maintaining them. Scarify them with a Sisis auto rotor rake and try to give them a couple of top dressings with a 70/30 sand soil mix and maintain them a couple of times a week. I would expect them to come into service around mid-December and have them usable right through to April.

"I always come off the green when there is a good frost but I know some greenkeepers will play them because they say there will be no damage done. The most dangerous time is when the frost is coming out but even if the frost is still three or four inches deep I would still rather come off.

"Generally at the start of the season we might find ourselves on half a dozen temporaries and 12 greens it depends upon those which remain wet or always hold the frost longer. But through the season as a rule it will be all temporaries or no temporaries," he explained.

One of the problems with temporary greens is that any hazards or playing characteristics of the hole are often lost.

"I always try to position the green in front of a bunker or to one side or towards trees albeit they have no leaves on them so that there is still some definition to the hole.

"I generally move them to one side of the green or slightly short. I also try to put them to the side where the tee is for the next hole just to prevent people walking back over the approach to the green nearest the exit."

Another ploy to make the playing of temps



Put it between two bunkers and a tree to give a little interest

more enjoyable is to put in the oversized hole pots as this means that a few long putts are holed and the players have the odd chip in which always keeps the members happy. When they start missing putts even the best temporaries greens will be lambasted.

"I put the large pots in last year and the move was received very well by the gents but not by the ladies. The problem with the ladies is that they have been told that they can play winter medals they can play on temporary greens so long as it is a measured golf course but they cannot play to an oversized hole. The R&A ruling is that it is up to the individual golf club what they decide to do."

Another alternative is to have a local rule where you have a maximum of two putts on

every hole.

"The reason I don't have temps on the front of the green is that in frosty conditions the ball tends to bounce through onto the green and you're not really achieving anything.

As a low handicap player himself Richard is well aware of another problem which afflicts the better players in the club.

"I think it's about time the individual golf clubs, the R&A or the golf Unions came up with a different handicapping system in the winter. The biggest problem I've encountered in the winter through the use of temporary tees and greens is that it makes the course very short and the lower handicapper can't give shots to the higher handicapper.

Giving the members the chance to make a

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Moving tees can help vary length and relieve wear areas



decision is another way in which problems later can be removed.

"Last year I got two or three tee mats and put them side by side and marked in chalk please try these tee mats and let me know which one you prefer because people do not like tee mats. None of them was the answer but those who did express a preference made the decision. I wouldn't recommend that in many aspects of the job but in this instance it worked and they chose the most expensive mat. I took this to the committee and the answer was fine we'll get them.

"If I had an unlimited budget and unlimited

room I would have different tees that would encourage different walk ways and different wear areas. I think that is the whole idea about using temporaries both tees and greens is to rest those areas which get worn during the season. We would build a tee which is 30 yards away we could make a straight hole into a dogleg shorter longer. Winter golf is not all that serious and you can do things with the positioning of tee and green that you wouldn't do in the rest of the year.

"Ideally if you have the room you give the golfer something different with the playing characteristics of a hole they enjoy it more

than just playing a shorter version of the original.

"I either position the tees right at the front or right at the back and make the hole longer and rest the original positions," he explained.

"Like many greenkeepers I struggle to know how best to handle the temporary green situation and I'd be delighted to hear from anyone who has bright ideas about making them less of issue."

■ If you have kept the members on your side though the use of some clever ploy why not write to *Greenkeeper International* and share it with your colleagues.

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