

# Employers or intruders?



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As we are presently in the grip of some seasonal weather, (namely snow, frost and ice) there are many households in the country with some very pent-up and anxious golfers who are suffering (probably along with the rest of their family) from a severe lack of golfing exercise. The more this weather continues, the greater the pressure on the greenkeeper, or committee, to open the course when at all possible in order to relieve these ever increasing levels of stress.

This in itself can have detrimental effects, but as an added bonus the weather for the past 18 months or so for greenkeepers in this part of the world has been odious; with the drought of last

year followed in the spring by frost, snow (with a resulting attack of snow mould) and a seemingly never ending east wind making the first half of the year quite unpalatable. Admittedly Mother Nature eventually relented and provided some conditions for growth albeit well into June when most club championships had already started, but by this time the inevitable grumbles had started on most courses in the area.

During poor growing conditions there are many decent people who empathise and have regard for the work that we are doing, but equally there are many people who seem to be only interested in getting a "fix" of their chosen pastime and woe betide anyone who tries to stop them. In this type of situation I have experienced every type of impassioned reason for opening the course, namely:

■ The irate older member with the equally old line "the course never used to be closed for a wee bit of rain in the old days".

■ The regular golfer who has pleaded almost on his knees that we open the course (the alternative being to spend the whole day with his wife!)

■ I have also been bullied into changing holes in order to keep the course open only to see the same person walk in off the course after half an hour!

So when the season proper starts will we hear comments from those who have played all winter such as "...it's marvellous what good condition the course is in considering the wear the course has had over the winter"; or will the poor condition of the greens almost entirely be due to something the greenkeeper has or has not done "...he hasn't fed them ...he's punched them full of holes!" you know the sort of thing.

■ Soft conditions in autumn and the greens look as if it has been raining ball-bearings.

■ Monday morning after a busy weekend and some of the golfers that have been out seem to prefer that the course be decorated with empty cans, bottles and crisp packets scattered randomly anywhere but in the multitude of bins provided.

■ Hoops and fences that have been carefully placed to spread wear have been cast aside because they were obstacles to the direct route around the course.

The question is, do the perpetrators of these acts do these things simply because they know no better, or is it because they think that they know better?

If it is because of the former and these problems are on a national scale, then all clubs should be making more of an effort to educate new members (adult & junior) on all forms of golf course etiquette. I am led to believe that clubs in Sweden do this in a form of registration whereby anybody who wishes to play golf must attend lessons in golf and golfing etiquette and pass a subsequent exam before they are given a "Green Card" without which they cannot gain access to a golf course. It doesn't really matter if this scheme exists or not, the principals are sound and surely would not be too difficult to implement in this country.

If it because of the latter then all golfers need to take greater care in policing those that use the clubs' facilities. All too often, if there is no green ranger, it is we as greenkeepers who face the sometimes intimidating job of approaching golfers who are flouting the rules. Every fee paying golfer has a responsibility to ensure that the golf course is being looked after, otherwise the destructive minority will amplify the failings of the course and give everyone something to moan about.

So what I would like to know is, am I alone in feeling very protective of the course that I look after, resenting those that wantonly damage my pride and joy, or does this diatribe strike home at the heart of many greenkeepers reading this?

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So come April next year when I receive unbalanced criticism of the course that has been open all winter bar a few weeks snow, what will I think? Will I be able to shrug and accept that ill informed comments are only emanating from a minority of the membership or will it make me wonder why it is that I am a greenkeeper.

Is it that I am an altruist going to work ostensibly to please others or is there a more self serving approach that I take to work?

The answer it is probably a bit of both, because there are plenty of people who care about the golf course that they are playing on and will appreciate the effort put into the production of that course, but lately there seems to be more and more golfers whose selfishness can leave me listless with exasperation. This is selfishness, or laziness on a level that should affect even their own game of golf or subscription rates? So why certain people persist in this behaviour I will never know.

To illustrate this point here are some descriptions I am sure some readers will identify with:

■ Freshly raked bunkers at 9am. By 11am they look as if they have hosted the world rodeo championships.