

# The Identikit Chairman

There can be few National Chairmen who arrive in post better qualified to undertake the many duties the role calls for than Gordon Child. Of course he is far too modest to harbour the thought but he could be described as the Identikit Chairman.

He was a key contributor at the meeting in St Andrews in 1985 which agreed the amalgamation of the three existing greenkeeper associations into BIGGA; he was Regional Administrator for the South West and South Wales Region for ten years; he has vast greenkeeper experience gathered at among others this year's Open venue and also as head man at the then biggest golf club in the country where he prepared the course for many professional Tour events. Oh yes, he's still possesses a golf swing which gives clues to his prowess as a player in his prime. What's more, being retired, he can devote as much time to the role as he feels is necessary without worrying about what's happening back at his own course.

Not only is he one of the most familiar faces in greenkeeping, he is

also one half of the industry's most famous double acts. With Marion at his side the pair have masterminded the organisation of the successful Westurf Shows and ensured many of their Region's golf events ran smoothly.

"When Pat (Murphy) rang and asked if I would be his Vice Chairman, with a view to taking over as Chairman this year, I asked for a couple of days to think about it but there was really no decision to make," explained Gordon.

With his term in office stretching before him Gordon highlighted a few of the occasions to which he is particularly looking forward.

"I will enjoy going back to America for the GCSAA show while The Open is at Royal Birkdale and I haven't been to Birkdale since The Open in '65 when I played in it," he said.

The Lancashire course holds some extremely fond memories for the man who started work with his grandfather at Dore and Totley Golf Club.

"I was in my early 20s and had been in the forces and got to work one morning and my grandfather told me

I was leaving. He'd arranged for me to go to Birkdale to learn about a totally different golf course," he recalled.

"To go back as Chairman is great. Also, every time I go to Scotland I come back with superb memories and the National Tournament is in Scotland this year.

"It is almost as though someone has said, 'Well he's going to be Chairman so we'll have that there and this here.' It has all fallen into place," said Gordon, who can also look forward to the completion and opening of the new BIGGA Headquarters.

After four years at Birkdale he went to Colne, then Blackburn as Head Greenkeeper before going south to St George's Hill Golf Club in Weybridge.

"I have a real soft spot for St George's Hill. It was a wonderful golf course and the club itself, members and staff combined to make a really homely atmosphere. You felt as though you belonged. It was a real wrench to leave."

There is an obvious question following that and Gordon answers it before it is even asked.

"I only moved because at the end of the day you aim to get as high as you can and in those days Moor Park, where I went, was the biggest golf club in Britain."

There he had not just the two fine courses to maintain but also the municipal course which belonged to Rickmansworth Council. It was also just about the busiest tournament course in the country.

"I did the Uniroyal, the TPC, the Talisman, the first Bob Hope tournament and four or five ladies events and on occasion did more than one event a year.

"The worst year was when we had the Uniroyal at the end of June and then took on the TPC at the beginning of October when the new Foxhills course wasn't ready. It created quite a problem as we only had four weeks warning.

"We managed it and got high praise, in particular, from Gary Player who took time to visit the staff in the rest room."

Gordon left Moor Park in 1981. "I couldn't see myself doing the job at the age of 60 because of the

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pressure so I spoke to the club management and told them that if the right position came along I wouldn't let the club down. In fact I delayed going to Churston so I could do the second TPC in '81.”

Coping without a regular adrenalin fix at the friendly Devon club was not always easy but it was BIGGA which filled the void and in particular the demanding role of Regional Administrator.

“That took up a lot of time and gave me what I was missing from not having tournaments.”

Looking at the industry as a whole Gordon is convinced that the big breakthrough came with the advent of quality education.

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Gordon has a fund of stories to tell some about his own career and some about the industry in general.

“I remember subscriptions at Birkdale going up to £50 per year. The assistant secretary came out

onto the course and said ‘you'd think we'd robbed a bank. It's only the price of ten packets of fags a week'. Now stop and think about the price of cigarettes now - about £2.50? That would make membership £1,300 a year.

He also makes a valid point about golf club members and their perceptions of their own course.

“A member has played his own course so often that he knows it so well - the line and what the hole looks like and does so he starts to look at the little things - small marks on the fairway or indentations on the green. When he goes to a visiting course he's more concerned about the panoramic views and the layout of the holes. He'll come back talking about how superb this course was and all it is a different way of viewing a golf course.”

It's that type of thought provoking conversation you get from Gordon Child and you can be sure that during his period of office many more people will get a chance to engage him in it.



Pat Murphy helps new Chairman Gordon Child into his new blazer

