

Berkshire College's new six hole course is a testing challenge for the man charged with maintaining it, but Bob Woodward relishes a challenge...

# Man with a mission



Bob Woodward (left), and Steve Gingell (right)

Keeping a level of consistency over all 18 holes, particularly if the course covers areas of different soil types or perhaps a phased programme of replacing greens is being carried out, is a problem that many face.

It creates a number of difficulties and great skill is required to produce putting surfaces which look as though they belong to the same golf course and stimp around the same mark.

Spare a thought then for the Head

Greenkeeper at Berkshire College's Golf Greenkeeping Academy who chose to accept what many would regard as a Mission Impossible.

Sure, he only has six holes to maintain and no members to worry about but he works alone - save for some assistance from the college's students - and each hole is designed and constructed to a completely different specification.

Bob Woodward whose orders, which I don't believe subsequently self

deconstructed, were to maintain the course to the best of his ability and he returned after a career which had taken him to Hawthorn Hill and Maidenhead Golf Clubs before a spell at The Berkshire.

Not put off, Bob, who is an "Old Boy" of the College himself, saw the task as not so much impossible as difficult and there is no chance of him waking up in the middle of the night surrounded by a pool of ice cold sweat.

# Man with a mission

"I think this is a dream job. I like the college environment and I believe that I can expose students to practical skills out on the golf course which will be of benefit to them," said Bob, who was one of those chosen to meet HRH The Duke of York when he opened the course earlier this year.

"Before his Royal Highness's visit, I got the course looking reasonable and then took the chance to sit back and think what a good situation I have found myself in. In fact, I've got a chance to learn as much as the students," said the man, who oozes enthusiasm for the job.

Speaking during the growing-in period of the course, Bob explained the approach he has taken so far with regard to its management.

"In consultation with our agronomist, David Stansfield of PSD, I've treated every green the same with regard to the fertiliser regime, although it has been adjusted for the sand based greens. In that regard I've been lucky that in the first year it has been fairly straight forward."

When we spoke, all six of the greens, with their different grasses, were also being cut to the same height - five millimetres - and the stimp metre readings for them all was remarkably similar.

"David Stansfield is coming down soon and we'll sit down and discuss how to maintain each green. I have my own views on the matter having seen them now for a year and from there he will write a specific report," explained Bob.

He is well aware of the problems being a "one man band" will cause him if a decision is taken to have widely different regimes for each hole.

"For example if we use purely liquids on one green, I could be half a mile from the sheds where they are stored and I'd have to wash the tank out for just one green. I have got a logistical nightmare."

"My view, in consultation with everyone else, would be that I should spend a year doing all six greens with sea weed and see what results we would get. Then the following year, do them all with plastic coated fertiliser and check the results. Everyone knows that a plastic coated 25-5-10 on a USGA spec creeping bent is fine but keeping them all the same with a different product each year will mean we can learn more about what we can and can't do," he said.

He also has views on the presentation of each hole.

"Cutting wise, my suggestion for the

6th - the centenary hole - was that we cut it 50-50, while the 1st would be double cut in a diamond pattern to represent the modern way of thinking. Another follows the left hand contour so I've done wavy lines and another is a dead straight line down the middle. One of the par-3s is just cut in a semi circular arc outwards. I'm just trying to represent as many different cutting patterns as we could."

The original idea for the six hole academy came from a view that the students should have a proper greenkeeping facility upon which to develop their skills.

"We have great local support through our Greenkeeper Liaison Committee, which includes Martin Gunn and Malcolm Peake, of the neighbouring Temple Golf Club, and Ray Clark, of Harleyford Golf Club, which was committed to helping us develop the idea which grew to become what it is today," explained Steve Gingell, at the time the College's greenkeeper training lecturer.

"Once we'd agreed the concept I went away and spoke with companies and organisations within the industry to gauge the potential of the idea and found that everyone was extremely positive."

The R&A put in a substantial grant, with the industry contributing between £60 - £100,000 in terms of equipment, root zone, seed, turf and signage while the College put in the remainder of the cash required to make the project succeed.

Once the decisions on the make up of the holes was made - see table at the end of the feature - Tom McKenzie, from Donald Steel Associates, then put together the architectural make-up of the holes.

"He came back with a 1970's flat green with lumps around the outside; a USGA style with mounds and bumps; one with Sunningdale-like swails and shaping and what he would like a modern green to be like," explained Steve.

"It wasn't just us as a college saying we want this or that it was very much the industry deciding what would be best," said Steve, who explained that due to planning restrictions play on the course would be limited and that the course would never become a commercial operation.

"We need play to make it realistic but it will be from friends of the college and not members or green fee paying visitors."

One of the companies which embraced the idea was Barenbrug who have since used the course to demonstrate one of their newer varieties.

"We saw it as an opportunity to use some of the more unusual, future looking, cultivars that we've been

Below: The Duke of York shows interest in the project at the official opening



developing but which we wouldn't necessarily use on commercial golf courses at the moment," explained Paul Johnson, Managing Director of Barenbrug UK.

"We've got our own facilities where we trial and test but this was a unique chance to put down fine leaf perennial rye grass and also a crested hair grass on a green which we could subsequently show, in a life situation, to other greenkeepers," said Paul.

The first sod for the new course was turned by then BIGGA Chairman, Pat Murphy, in 1997, with the construction proper starting a short time after.

"It was very much felt, through the committee, that the construction should be done professionally and I would agree with them. Having said that there does need to be some poor construction put in so that some of the problems that can develop from such construction can be demonstrated," said Steve.

One of the perceived problems with the project was the difficulty in retaining the individuality of the greens in terms of grass type and construction over the course of a season.

"Poa will obviously get in as it is a perennial problem but we'll be monitoring the development of what is of interest to us," explained Paul.

"I envisage a biannual overseeding of the particular mixtures," he added.

The one green which has attracted particular interest has been the 3rd, sown out with Bareine, the fine leafed dwarf perennial ryegrass.

"People are hearing from the States that it is a potential way forward and like to take the chance to take a look at it on site here," said Steve.

It is a point that is carried on by Bob.

"The first time I walked on to the green and was told that it was a dwarf ryegrass I said it had no place on a golf green but now I'm a convert. It has had no disease through the winter and I'm waiting to see what it is like after some play."

The dwarf ryegrass green demonstrates how the Academy will be of interest to many over the years and Steve is sure that the project will continue to develop.

"Looking five years down the line to 2005 I think we'll have dug up a few greens and started again.

"We have to keep it moving. It is not a static project. What I would hope is that in five years time the industry is using the facility as much as we are," said Steve.



**Examine Berkshire College's unique course breakdown, with a hole by hole technical analysis overleaf**



## Details of the Six Holes

### 1st - 194 yards par-3 Dutch putting green for possible British Standard

The green and teeing ground represent a look into the future of the British greens guidelines: a hole for the 21st Century. The specification is based on a Dutch method of construction. The hole is constructed on a sub sand root zone. The fairway is cross cut at approach height of cut and boxed off to demonstrate modern techniques.

**Sward**  
Green: Fescue turf  
Surrounds: Fescue turf  
Tee: Smooth stalked meadow grass fescue turf

**Construction**  
**Green**  
80:20 sand: (medium fine) 12"  
Single washed sand subsoil: 12"  
Drainage: Herringbone

**Tee**  
Top quality sand assuming 80:20  
Sand:soil (medium fine) 12"  
Single washed sand subsoil 8"  
Drainage: Single drain

Sponsored: Roffey's Ltd; Toro; Rolawn; Greenkeeping Supply Company

### 3rd - 139 yard par-3 Research Green

The teeing ground of this hole represents a unique construction using high tech foam materials and systems. Based on roof garden technology this demonstrates research for the future. The green is in 1970's style with a flat pulling green and severe mounds to side and rear. It is constructed using USGA guidelines using recycled materials.

**Sward** **Fescue bent seed**  
Green: Dwarf ryegrass, fescue, bent seed (B'brug)  
Tee: Ryegrass, fescue seed (B'brug)

**Construction (no bunkers)**  
**Green**  
80:20 Ecodress root zone (med/coarse) 12"  
Blinding layer 2"  
V2 - 1" stone carpet 10"  
Drainage: Herringbone into swale

**Tee**  
Local sand (fine) Various depths  
Bacel foam sub base various depths  
Drainage: Side of teeing ground

Sponsored: Greenscapes UK Ltd; Hepworth Minerals and Chemicals; Barenbrug; Pattison

### 5th - 380 par -4. Donald Steel style hole

The Donald Steel & Co hole on the Academy has been built using the perched water table technique for putting green and teeing green construction, as they are water efficient offer best all year round surfaces. The design of greens and bunkers is strongly influenced by the great architects of the 20's and 30's but tailored to modern standards of play and maintenance. Construction uses fen soil and root zone improved drained sub soil.

**Sward**  
Green: Creeping bent seed  
Tee: Ryegrass, fescue turf

**Construction**  
**Green**  
Fen soil root zone (med/coarse) 80:20 12'  
Blinding layer 2"  
Half - 1" stone carpet 10'  
Drainage: Herringbone

**Tee**  
Fen soil root zone (medium coarse) 8"  
Blinding layer 2"  
Stone carpet 10"  
Drainage: Herringbone  
Bunkers: One revetted and grass faced

Sponsored: Banks Horticultural Products and Bardon Aggregates; J&E Ely; Watermation; Nelson; Mommersteeg; Inturf; Amenity Technology

### 2nd - 304 yard par-4 USGA Guidelines

This hole is designed in a modern American style. Considerable rear of green mounding and bunkerage invoke the American style. The green is two tiered. Fairway cutting is straight from the teeing ground.

**Sward**  
Green: Native bent  
Tee: Creeping bent seed

**Construction**  
**Green**  
80:20 USGA root zone (med/coarse) 12"  
Blinding layer 2"  
Drainage carpet 8"  
Drainage: Herringbone

**Tee**  
80:20 USGA root zone (med/coarse) 8"  
Blinding layer 2"  
Drainage carpet 8"  
Drainage: Side sump  
Bunker: On putting green complex

Sponsored: Hepworth Minerals and Chemicals; Inturf; Barenbrug; Rainbird; Hunter; Standard Golf

### 4th - 154 yard par-3 Clay bowled, natural sand on clay putting green

A clay bowled putting green and teeing green construction reminiscent of the turn of the century with Old Tom Morris style architecture. Local sandy soil is used in this construction.

**Sward**  
Green: Bent, fescue seed  
Tee: Bent, fescue, poa seed

**Construction (no bunkers)**  
**Green**  
As dug - fine sand  
Drainage: Single at front of putting green (drained to sump)

**Tee**  
As dug - fine sand

Sponsored: Weathermatic; Mommersteeg

### 6th - 348 yard par-4 Traditional 1920's/1930'S heathland hole

A very traditional Harry Colt style hole using design and construction methods of the 19th century in a heathland setting reminiscent of many famous Surrey/Berkshire courses. The green has numerous undulations. Local sandy soil has been used throughout this construction.

**Sward**  
Green: Crested hair grass, fescue, bent seed  
Tee: Poa, fescue seed

**Construction**  
**Green**  
As dug fine sand/soil  
Drainage herringbone

**Tee**  
As dug fine sand soil  
Bunkers: Single washed sand - sweeping grassed tongue

Sponsorship: Barenbrug; Mommersteeg; Par Aide