

The new BIGGA Chairman Clive Osgood begins his year in office with some strong views on how the Association should proceed in the future, as Scott MacCallum found out...

Passing the baton

A year after becoming a Head Greenkeeper, Clive Osgood prepared a course for a Ryder Cup match which featured the best Ryder Cup team ever to compete for the famous trophy.

But BIGGA's new National Chairman says that he didn't probe Past Chairmen too deeply about the role as it probably would have frightened him. He laughed as he said it but you can be sure that for him the responsibility of leading the Association for the next 12 months is a challenge that compares to 1981 when he ensured that Walton Heath was at its best for the historic Ryder Cup match. Of course he's jesting when he says that he didn't look into the workload that a modern BIGGA Chairman can expect, Clive Osgood is a thoroughly professional man who doesn't approach important matters lightly.

Knowing the commitment that is required he gave the matter serious thought before accepting the role. He is the first to admit that he is a home-loving family man and wouldn't have taken it on without the support of his family.

"The club has also been very supportive and they look upon it as a great honour for Walton Heath as well as for me.

"I've certainly gone into the Chairmanship with my eyes open and I'm now looking forward to getting out and meeting people. I know I shall gain a great deal from the experience and so will Walton Heath Golf Club as I shall be looking for ideas as I go round having the pleasure of meeting fellow greenkeepers."

Walton Heath boasts a large greenkeeping staff to maintain the two magnificent courses currently running at 17 including a mechanic and a gardener.

"I have absolute confidence in the team and in my able Deputy, Mick

Haynes, that they will work well during the periods that I'm away from the golf course on BIGGA duties."

As he settles into the role he has firm ideas of how he would like the Association to progress over the next 12 months.

"I'd like to think that the membership will continue to rise. I believe there is still scope for that to happen and it is good to see that the numbers have

organised into a more orderly fashion."

So you can already see that Clive Osgood is a man of firm ideas with a quiet determination to move the Association forward and it is just those qualities which has seen him ensure that Walton Heath Golf Club has maintained its place as one of the country's foremost golf clubs over the last 20 years.

A local man born and brought up in

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Clive also has strong views about how the collective know how of the BIGGA membership could be put to better use.

"I'd like to think we could pool our knowledge a bit and that we should stand up and be counted on the technical side a bit more than we do at present," he explained.

"I think the website should help us to share the vast knowledge that our membership possesses. For example on the subject of waste disposal wouldn't it be nice to ring up BIGGA, or visit the website, and be advised on who was the best person or company to contact in a particular part of the country.

"This information could be gathered informally on the web initially and then

Walton-on-the-Hill - he's lived there all his life apart from a two year spell in Boxhill...two miles away! - he joined the greenkeeping staff as an apprentice.

"As a lad, golf was very much a rich man's game but I got into it through the local Artisan Section as a junior and I had hopes of being a pro," recalled Clive, who reached a handicap of 4 and represented Surrey at Colts, Youth and Artisans level.

"I was never going to make it as a professional but thought that greenkeeping would give good opportunities to play the game. After that I still played golf but greenkeeping took the upper hand."

Clive was taken on by Head Greenkeeper, Fred Dulake, who was an extremely well respected greenkeeper.

"He was here for 27 years as Head Greenkeeper and one or two will remember him because he used to ride around the course on his bike. He was famous for his bike and he taught me a great deal about greenkeeping," explained Clive.

Walton Heath has obviously benefit-

ed from the continuity that has been in place at the golf club. Not only was Fred Dulake Head Greenkeeper for 24 years and Clive 21 and counting, James Braid, one of the great triumvirate and a five time Open Champion was professional at the club for 46 years.

The club has always held important golf events including right back to the turn of the century when the course was first opened and Braid played big money challenge matches with his great rivals Harry Vardon and JH Taylor. It also hosted the oldest professional tournament in the world, the News of the World Matchplay which attracted some of the finest players of their generation. But the event which brought the course to worldwide fame was the Ryder Cup in 1981.

"That really was the highlight of my career and it goes without saying that it was a privilege to prepare a course for a Ryder Cup.

The American team that year, Captained by Dave Marr, has been lauded as the best ever and the margin, by which they retained the match, 18.5-9.5, is wide by the standards of the more recent matches but still a tribute to the performance of the European team, which included youngsters such as Faldo, Lyle, Langer, Torrance and James

All but one of the American team was a Major winner and the other, Bruce Leitzke, was a multiple winner on the US Tour. The majority of the team would be known even in the homes of non-golfers. They were Crenshaw, Floyd, Irwin, Kite, Leitzke, Miller, Nelson, Nicklaus, Pate, Rogers, Trevino and Watson. Try finding the weakest link among that lot.

"The weather was poor but the course stood up to it very well and I got some very nice letters from the players afterwards."

The highlight for the greenkeeping



staff came when Lee Trevino popped into the sheds and had a chat with the guys.

"It was early in the morning and he came in looking for an axe because the clubhouse was closed and he wanted to get in to change his shoes so he could go and hit a few practice balls. It made everyone's day when he came over," recalled Clive.

Since then Walton Heath has hosted several European Opens and many top amateur and ladies events and Clive admits to enjoying the buzz of preparing for tournaments although they have caused headaches.

"In the old days entry was free and there was no problem but the course is

on common land so in more recent tournaments when entry fees were charged this meant extra work. An Act of Parliament allowed us to enclose the course for one week in the year but we had to erect fencing with the help of the local Artisan Section just before the start and then bring it down as soon as the tournament was finished. We had four and a half miles of chestnut fencing at one time but the arrival of the M25 cut on any access on one side so it made it a bit easier for us."

Clive is proud of the course for which he has had custodianship over the last 20 years.

"I'd like to think we have kept it as a true heathland and that has involved a

constant effort to keep the trees and scrub at bay. Surrey is the most heavily wooded county, would you believe, and if you stand in the middle of the course you are surrounded by trees but for our little patch and we want it to remain as it is, a heathland habitat with a feeling of openness.

"Heathland is just a semi permanent state and there will always be encroachment. At the moment we are in the middle of a big project clearing quite an acreage," he revealed.

While much effort goes into retaining the heathland qualities of the golf course a great deal of change, and for the better, has taken place in the maintenance facilities.

The compound, opened by the local

Mayor four years ago is state-of-the art and Clive has shown round many other greenkeepers keen to gain an idea of what they should look for in their own new facilities.

"For us it really was a case of from stable block to modern facility. We didn't have power or hot water until 1996 and sitting here with our computers and security cameras I often think back to Fred Dulake and wonder where he would have parked his bike."

It would be hard to find a better measure of how far the industry has come in the last 20 years and under Clive's stewardship you can be sure more strides will be made over the next 12 months.