

Should we lead or should we be led?

Duncan McGilvray, Course Manager at Potters Bar GC, has some concerns involving the profession. Do you share his views?

I have become extremely concerned about our profession of late – there appears to be a kind of complacency which I do not wish to be a part of – an “acceptance of our lot” attitude which serves no-one – least of all our industry.

We have come too far in the last 15 years or so to now sit back and not gain strength and confidence from the advances made already in the acceptance of responsibility in managing golf courses.

So why am I so concerned?

I believe there is a serious omission in the management of golf courses – I see it in the average private members golf club, which make up approximately 90% of the golf played in this country.

There appears to be few who have the necessary confidence to stamp their authority and ensure that the right things are carried out on golf courses and therefore ensure the best conditions are available to players.

At this point I do not want people to misinterpret me – I am not a power hungry autocrat! – I just want wonderful golf courses – is that not what we all want?

My argument is that we can only achieve this if the course is managed efficiently and that is not achieved by reactive management, which I come across whenever I hear of problems on golf courses.

Proactive management demonstrated by properly empowered Course Managers is an absolute necessity if golf course management as a profession has any chance of survival or even taken seriously in future.

Alarmist? - I don't think so.

A conversation heard recently at a prominent college – “We are looking at management courses specifically targeting managers both inside and outside the golfing industry to train to ensure that golf courses in the future are managed properly.”

And then the bit that hurts the most – “We are looking at attracting golf professionals and interested club officials, because greenkeepers do not appear to want to take on this demanding role.”

I hope there are now greenkeepers who are fuming at the previously stated comments – if there are not then I see no hope for us in the future.

I have lived through a time when so called experts tried to manage golf courses and had unbelievable catastrophic affects on golf course conditions.

I believe this will happen again but maybe this time they will use us as their technicians and make it work this time – unless of course we do something about it!



Duncan McGilvray

BIGGA have heavily subsidised management courses to fill this gap in training only to find that when offered to our membership these opportunities are not taken up – or certainly not taken up to any extent that would make any appreciable difference.

The excuses given are not worth repeating – it would only infuriate my like minded colleagues.

For a time I was very confident in our future but I am not so sure now.

I recently, by chance, met two colleagues from the past whom I believed to be two forceful young potential future proactive Course Managers – they have now sadly left the industry, and when pushed for a reason, had been let down by ineffective reactive management from above.

“Don't rock the boat” – “Take the salary and do as you're told” – “Blame the green committee when things go wrong”... etc, etc.

These may appear to be easy actions (or non-actions) but as every successful manager knows it is a very short-term view.

At the moment I have a very pessimistic view of our profession – am I wrong?

My intention through this article is to get some sort of reaction from our profession – tell me and other concerned colleagues through Greenkeeper International whether I am right and what we should do about it.

Am I worrying unduly? – unfortunately I do not think so.

Please respond in your hundreds and show the “powers that be” within the golfing world that we are ready and willing to take on the responsibility necessary to ensure not only the efficient management of our golf courses but our own futures.

Duncan McGilvray, Course Manager
Potters Bar Golf Club, 26.09.01



Address your letters to The Editor, Greenkeeper International, BIGGA HOUSE, Aldwark, Aine, York YO61 1UF, or email them to reception@bigga.co.uk

Phosphate Clarification

Since my recent article was published in Greenkeeper International entitled “Soil Analysis: Unravelling the Mystery” (September 2001) I have received a number of enquiries regarding the role of phosphates in soil. The article states that phosphates have a negative charge and thus cannot be held by soil clay organic matter thus leaching quickly through the soil.

Phosphates do indeed have a negative electrostatic charge, in fact, in sandy soil, with relatively little organic matter, certain forms of fertiliser phosphate eg phosphoric acid and ammonium phosphate are relatively soluble. Such products can be leached readily into the rootzone. They provide an ideal method of getting phosphate to bentgrass roots without building up the surface phosphate concentrations which would lead to a promotion of *poa annua* establishment.

Despite this, soluble phosphate gradually becomes immobile in most soils. When an application of phosphate is applied, a chemical reaction takes place in the soil which creates other forms of phosphate that are relatively insoluble. In acid soils phosphate tends to react with iron or aluminium to form iron phosphate or aluminium phosphate. In alkaline soil phosphate reacts with calcium to form calcium phosphate. These chemical reactions create the insoluble forms of phosphate that we associate with as managers of turfgrass.

The article was certainly not intended to encourage excess phosphate application but to clarify the confusing issue of soil analysis. I hope this has cleared up any confusion that the article may have caused.

Daniel Binns, STRI, Turfgrass Agronomist

National Championship thanks

Having just returned from the National Championship at Royal Birkdale and Southport & Ainsdale, I would like to congratulate the organisers at HQ for a superb week. I played with various people over the two days and thoroughly enjoyed the company of these guys. Hopefully I can meet them sometime in the future and play their courses as they can come and play mine.

The courses, the championship dinner, the organisation, the friendship of all the competitors there was second to none. This was my first National Championship and it certainly won't be my last and that goes

for all the competitors from Scotland, and all of our members from wherever they came from across the UK and Europe.

The friendliness of everyone there that week shows that there are no individuals in this Association. We are all equals and that is what BIGGA is all about. So once again thanks for a great week and keep up the good work.

PS. You can put my name down for next year as I will certainly be there. Thanks also from Craig Pennyquick and Gary Rodgers.

Chris Yeaman, Course Manager, West Linton GC

A thank you from Denmark

In the beginning of October, six of us from Denmark decided to go and visit my good friend Matt over in Bristol and play some golf.

We would all like to thank Matt Hawker, Head Greenkeeper Bristol & Clifton GC, and Gary Hawley, Head Greenkeeper Filton GC, their Pro shop and their

members for the warm welcome we all got.

For some of us it was the first time in England, and the weather was with us.

Hope to see you all in Denmark next year.

Mick Steele, Head Greenkeeper Morse Golf Club, Denmark

You've got m@il!

If you've got an email account why not send an email to us here at BIGGA, where we can place you into our exclusive email address book. We can then keep you up-to-date with news and event information as soon as it happens.

Send an email to: reception@bigga.co.uk

Remember to include the word 'updates' in your subject field