

# A FAMILIAR FACE

**Scott MacCallum  
meets a National  
Chairman who  
needs little or  
no introduction**



Above. Leicestershire County Second Team Captain meets the 1999 European Ryder Cup Team Captain, Mark James

Below. Richard gets some last minute pointers from outgoing Chairman Clive Osgood, just before taking over the reins



Richard Barker is one of BIGGA's best known members. Since the Association was formed in 1987 he has rarely missed a national event while he has been a regular at most Midland Regional functions and a stalwart of the East Midland Section having served continuously on the Committee for the past 15 years. He perhaps shouldn't shout about it but he was also on the interview panel which appointed the current Editor!

It would be fair to say that he will have met many of the people reading this piece during that time, but if you haven't had the pleasure of meeting the 2002 BIGGA

National Chairman yet the chances are that by the end of his year in office that situation will have been rectified.

"If anybody would like me to attend an event at Region or Section level

they should contact me or Head office - my clubs are always in the back of the car and I'm more than willing to come along to present prizes and say a few words," said Richard, as we sat in the Majestic Hotel foyer, a couple of days before he donned the famous red blazer.

"I want to be seen and I want to be approachable. It is my aim to visit as many Sections as I can and really make the most of my year," said Richard, who could never be accused of being anything other than "approachable".

Although a youthful 37 - he is the youngest BIGGA National Chairman beating Dean Cleaver's record by around five months - he has the distinction of being the longest serving National Board of Management member having sat continuously on the Board since 1994. When it comes to the business of the Association, he has a wealth of experience.

"I do believe that BIGGA has done a tremendous amount of good within the industry and I'm sure the trade also realises what the Association has achieved and through donating into the Education and Development Fund they have assisted us in producing better trained greenkeepers and Course Managers," he said.

There can be no doubt that Richard was destined to become involved in golf.

"My father is an Past Captain of Longcliffe Golf Club, in Loughborough, and they rang a bell in the club when I was born," said Richard, whose general love of the game turned to a love of greenkeeping when he was in his early teens. "When I was 13 or 14 I used to work part-time in the summer holidays for Walter Cole at Longcliffe in the summer, fly mowing ditch banks, edging bunkers and divoting tees for three to four days a week.

His skill as a player - he has reached 2 and currently plays off 3 - offered up the opportunity of becoming an assistant pro when he was 18, when

he was playing off 5, but the poor wages and long hours put him off. Instead he was taken on as an assistant greenkeeper as part of the Youth Opportunities Scheme. When the year was up he was taken on full time and embarked on the first stages of his formal greenkeeping education at Brooksby College. He did Phase 1 the first year and Phase 2 City and Guilds the following year.

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Richard Barker  
2002 BIGGA Chairman

"From hating school I found myself getting distinctions and credits in my greenkeeping studies. I'd found my niche. I wasn't interested in school and didn't apply myself but in greenkeeping I was getting grades I wouldn't have believed were possible," he revealed.

"A year after that I was one of the guinea pigs who did Phase 3," he recalled.

The next quantum leap in his career came when he left Longcliffe to become Head Greenkeeper at Kirby Muxloe Golf Club at the age of 24, a position he held for 13 years. He continued his formal education through a Supervisory Management distance learning course at Elmwood College.

In addition to the formal education Richard has taken much from the opportunities BIGGA has afforded him.



"I've travelled to many different places, including going on the GCSAA Conference and Show with the Association on four or five occasions and I've played golf courses in National Championships and other events I'd never have had the chance to play otherwise.

"I've even done a public speaking course and when I started out in greenkeeping I would never have dreamt that I'd end up doing a public speaking course. The marvellous thing about BIGGA is that the Association can put on any course you want to do - Ken will organise it for you. There can't be any other profession which organises a course around your needs in such a way," said Richard.

The realisation that he would be BIGGA Chairman for 2002 came when Clive Osgood, then Vice Chairman to Elliott Small, asked him at the 2000 Open Championship at St Andrews.

"I was honoured, believe you me I was honoured. I certainly didn't think I would be asked just because I'd been on the Board and I was honoured that I was considered suitable to be Chairman.

"Many of my friends have said they always knew I would be Chairman

one day but I don't consider myself to be any different from anyone else.

"I remember, once, when a group of students visited my club and I took them round and showed them what we were doing. To be frank some of them were looking less than enthusiastic so I told them that they probably thought I'd never been one of them and that I'd always been destined to be a Head Greenkeeper. In fact, I'd been just the same as them at their age and had just the same opportunities that they would have and that it was just a case of taking those and they too would end up as Head Greenkeepers."

He is not unused to leadership having spent three years as Captain of the Leicestershire County Second team - he has also amassed almost 50 Caps including a number for the First team as well.

Richard has a clear idea of how the Association should progress during his 12 months at the helm.

"I do feel that as a profession, we aren't really recognised for the work that we do - that's where I'd like to see BIGGA doing more. I want BIGGA to become more of a force within the golf club and for clubs to come to BIGGA if they have a problem they wished solved.

He sees the new Golf Club Show, run for the first time alongside BTME this year, as a superb vehicle for this endeavour as it brings more Chairs of Green, Golf Club Captains and Secretaries to Harrogate.

"Unfortunately Chairs of Green and Captains who have found out and appreciate what BIGGA does are often lost off committees and we find ourselves back to square one

"BIGGA is down at the bottom when it comes to body recognition within golf clubs but in many ways with the practical help it gives and the courses it puts on BIGGA does as much as anyone for golf clubs," he said

"I want us to become better known within the golf clubs and know what BIGGA is all about. I don't think that's happening yet.

"I have not become Chairman with any hidden agendas. I see my role this year as that of Publicity Officer spreading the name of BIGGA around the country and to golfers and the other golfing bodies," he explained.

Richard is currently working alongside one of his long-time friends, Ian Needham, Head Greenkeeper at Beedles Lake, in Leicester, and Ian and the club itself, have been

extremely supportive to him in what will be a demanding year.

"The club owner has been tremendous and will give me all the time off I require to carry out my duties as Chairman."

One of his first duties was to choose his Vice Chairman and if the astute nature of his appointment is any indication of the quality of his decision making over the next year the Association will be in more than capable hands.

"I'm extremely happy that George Brown, from Turnberry, has taken on the Vice Chairmanship. He has one of the best jobs in the country and to have him on board is a great honour."

Richard is an affable character. He accepts the good nature ribbing about the number of times his picture has appeared in the magazine with a shrug and a laugh and is delighted that his record will be extended over the next 12 months.

"I basically look upon BIGGA as a big family. It could be corny but I come to Harrogate and see so many people that I know and can sit down and have a pint with and I don't intend changing anything other than to make more people aware of what we are doing."