

Ripe for a change

Scanning the front cover of this particular issue you might be forgiven for thinking that you had been sent a cinema magazine, and not your regular issue of Greenkeeper International, by mistake.

However, on this occasion "Back to the Future..." does not refer to Michael J. Fox's travels through time in a DeLorean car, but to BIGGA Executive Director, Neil Thomas' article of the same name. Neil looks back at the growth and success of the Association over the last 15 years and then to the future, explaining some of the initiatives which are being put in place to ensure that such progress is not only maintained, but accelerates, over the next few years.

The motivation for the article is to highlight to you, the reader and BIGGA member, that despite the undoubted success of the Association since its formation in '87, there is no resting on laurels by the Board of Management or the staff in their efforts to improve.

Why now?

Well, following the Mike Williamson survey which many of you took part in last year, there emerged a feeling that now was the ideal time to take stock of what the Association does and how it goes about doing it. In other words the famous old adage "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" was measured against the not-quite-so-memorable adage "If you don't take time to examine things every so often they might just break".

Next, there followed the flood of letters inspired by Duncan McGilvray's original "Should we lead or be led?" article in the November magazine, which demonstrated that there were many greenkeepers keen to take more control of their own destiny.

It became clear to the Board of Management and the Headquarters staff, therefore, that the time was ripe for the next stage in the development of the Association and the profession. Neil has outlined what will be happening but we want to hear from you, whether it be through the magazine or through elected representatives of the Association. Don't worry if what you want to say is not complimentary. We are keen to hear criticism, particularly the constructive variety, because if members have taken the trouble to make their voice heard it proves they care about their Association. The one sort of criticism which is not so welcome is the sort which arrives "second hand" because it removes the opportunity for us to explain seemingly anomalous situations more fully.

I equate it to a piece of jigsaw. On its own it might look a little incongruous or even downright daft, and it is only when it clicks into place and you see where it sits in relation to everything else that it starts to make sense.

That is why if you have a concern or criticism make sure you go through the proper channels. If it is valid, great, your thoughts can be taken on board and if it isn't, the very least you will get is a better understanding of the bigger picture.

Scott MacCallum
Editor

Plea to introduce Tournament Ball

Jaime Ortiz Patino has joined the ranks of those who believe limits should be placed on golf technology or the game we know will cease to exist.

The President of Valderamma Golf Club believes that the "specification of tournament golf balls is something that the USGA and the R&A could establish quite easily, and this specification should be adopted by all manufacturers of golf balls and played by professionals and scratch amateurs.

"By doing so, we would avoid losing a great many historic courses (in particular the traditional links courses) simply because they are no longer long enough for championship play.

"Thankfully," Patino wrote in his annual report on golf in Europe, "the USGA has announced plans to implement new test methods which will better determine whether golf balls conform to the Rules of Golf. It has held extensive discussions with the R&A, which I understand intends to follow the same methods. This is to be welcomed, as long as both organisations agree on a championship ball with reduced performance. Should this be the case, we might be able to dispense with regulations on the spring effect of metal woods."

"It is of considerable concern to many prominent figures in the world of golf that some of our

great courses are under threat, and that championship golf is becoming a drive and wedge game. It would indeed be a great pity if the game were reduced to simply breaking records, and if future generations were to be deprived of such magical moments as Gene Sarazen's remarkable shot at the Masters in 1935, when he made an albatross at the 15th his second shot being played with a 4-wood over the lake that borders the green. Tales of this marvelous shot reverberated around the world, and will be forever recorded in the annals of golfing history. By comparison, Tiger Woods generally plays a 7 or 8-iron for his second shot.

"Despite his undoubted genius, to me he is quite simply not playing the same game that Gene and his contemporaries played 50 or more years ago." Mr Patino points to statistics to substantiate his charges about the impact of technology.

From 1968 to 1995, the players' average drive on the USPGA Tour increased just one foot a year. From 1995 until 2001, the drives increased 7.2 feet each year.

"This is due to a combination of increased spring effect since 1995 and the introduction of new golf balls."

Mr Patino is quick to add that he does not advocate any changes for the vast majority of



Jaime Ortiz Patino: Limits needed to protect the game of golf

golfers, and that he believes that even the finest courses need to be "refashioned from time to time to keep up with the changing nature of the game. This can be accommodated within the parameters of the game as we know it. But continued increases in the distance a ball can be struck is something different. There has to be a limit.

"Tournament golf is the showcase of the game, and that should include strategy and finesse as well as just power. Golfers have the right to watch the great champions of today play the traditional and famous golf courses worldwide that will become obsolete unless we do something to control the distance that the leading players today can achieve with modern technology both in the dubs and balls they play."

Monty launches his Golf Schools

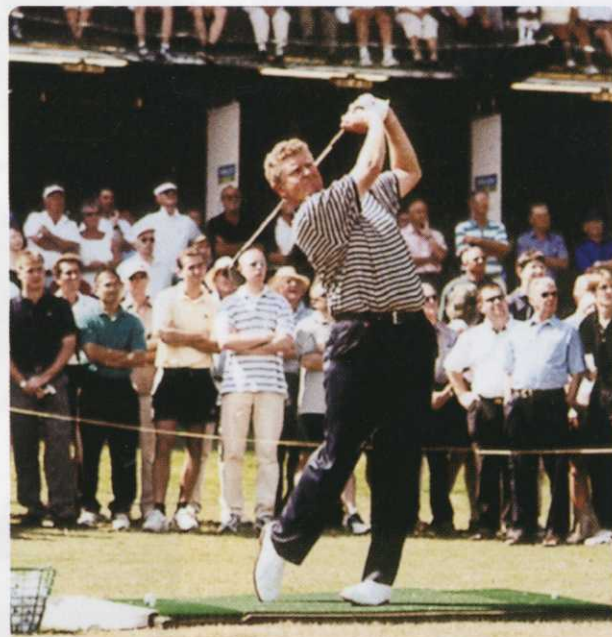
The prospect of affordable "golf for all" is being brought closer through a new venture from Open Golf Centres, which has chosen Toro turf equipment to maintain the 15 golf complexes it plans to build.

Open Golf Centres aim is to combine superb pay-and-play facilities and friendly service with top tuition at The Monty Golf School, which is supported by seven time European number one Colin Montgomerie.

The venture is the brainchild of Stephen Bridges and Martin Wright, who opened their first complex in Christchurch, Dorset, this year after extensive research they undertook showed an appalling lack of opportunities for UK pay-and-play golfers to enjoy high quality, affordable golf.

The result was Open Golf Centres, where golf is available to everyone with tuition being paramount.

As part of providing its customers with the best, the organisation entered into a five-year exclusive partnership with Toro. A wide range of the company's turf machinery is already



Seven time European number one Colin Montgomerie lends his support

used to maintain the two 18-hole courses at Christchurch, including the putting and chipping greens, bunkers and range. split-level, 60-bay driving range.

And the company expects to spend between £2.5 to £3 million over five-to-seven years putting Toro into all 15 of its complexes.