

## St Andrews Bay Follow-up

In response to Neil Ballingall's letter (Jan issue) the connection which he, unlike many others who have contacted me, claims not to understand is that in both cases a combination of power and ignorance results in either an unsatisfactory end result or damage to an experienced and professional Course Manager's career. Too many American inspired extravaganzas have gone or are going broke to doubt this.

Perhaps it is unfair to blame someone who knows what he wants - and perhaps even what his 'clients' want i.e. lush green conditions all year round but not how to get it.

The real blame lies with those advising him, many of whom lack experience and often are motivated by a desire to be instigators of 'new' ideas, which prevents them warning their clients of the known inherent risks. As Paul Copsey (of American Golf) admits, some (many!) high cost ventures have folded or are in severe financial difficulties. Part of the reason may be wrong location, but the commonest causes are bad specification or bad construction or bad post-constructional management (or all three). Building courses in the wrong place admittedly pulls the plug quicker than bad building and bad specification, but the latter faults add huge and insupportable costs for repairs, rebuilding and just plain too expensive maintenance. In the foreseeable future golf, already commercially in decline, will predictably suffer more and only those who cut back or manage on sensibly low budgets will survive. Low budgets do not mean poor condition, often the reverse.

I have a copy letter addressed to all the members of a club that I used to advise (needless to say on a 'nitrogen only' diet but now with a new greenkeeper who has switched to heavy NPK) explaining that part of the reason for the adverse balance sheet was the "steep rise in the expenditure on chemicals".

By implication, I am accused of being old fashioned and out of date but I would point out that I am not concerned with detail but with principles. Paul Copsey may well have progressed from a Cortina but he is still driving a car with four wheels powered by an internal combustion engine, not a Tardis.

It is unrealistic to make comparisons between tee mats, worn out bent fescue and dwarf rye. Good management will ensure traditional winter tees in good order, but not if 'green-mad' golfers prevent any operations, that may temporarily inconvenience them, being implemented in summer.

The secret of good all year round condition lies in following basic principles which, like the grass, have not altered since greenkeeping began; avoiding gimmicks and educating both the members and too often the greenkeepers and their advisers, few of the latter seeming to agree among themselves.

This does not mean condemning every new idea, but it does mean evaluating them as few survive the test of time and performance but some have.

As an indication that the majority agrees with this philosophy a survey shortly to be published on fertiliser and fungicide use conducted for the R & A shows that 91% of clubs use under three tonnes - for everything - with 21% well under one tonne and only 2% used in excess of five tonnes p.a. per 18 holes. A majority (65%) use nitrogen or nitrogen with a little potash, and of the 35% using NPK more than half use very low phosphate mixes e.g. 10:2:10.

I ought also to stress that tradition is not linked solely to links and heathland. There are hundreds of first class courses, both old and new in superb condition all year round which have been maintained on sound traditional lines often for 30 years and more. Their secret is a first class greenkeeper who has the benefit of working for a convinced and intelligent club and often no green committee but a management structure.

**J H Arthur, Honorary Member**

## Contribution to the Debate

May I contribute to the current debate initiated by Jim Arthur?

As a supplier, I visit many golf courses. There are some excellent Course Managers, and there are some poor Course Managers. The former are good at communicating, delegating, and planning. The latter are not, and will not survive today's demanding standards and resulting pressures.

Successful Course Managers realise that "new golfer" is the life blood of the industry, and they have the confidence, born of experience and professional training, to put forward their case and to compromise if necessary. The key is an understanding between the Chairman of Green and the greenkeeper about what is expected and what is possible.

How can we progress? By attracting the highest calibre into the greenkeeping profession, and giving them a first class training.

**Tim Fell**

**Managing Director, Tillers Turf Company Ltd**

## Health and Safety Considerations

The recent cold snap has highlighted a concern I have had for sometime and I am hoping that through your pages a little light can be thrown on the subject.

The course closure variances from course to course undoubtedly give rise to numerous problems. Many clubs have adopted a no closure policy to avoid the aggravation of disgruntled golfers. However in this ever increasing culture of blame and litigation imagine the following scenario.

Frosty conditions underfoot and the Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper keeps the course open for play. During their round a golfer slips and sustains a nasty injury and decides to sue the club for neglect on the grounds of allowing play in dangerous conditions.

The question is then asked who is responsible for deciding if the course is fit for play etc. I would hazard a guess that the finger would point in the direction of the Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper.

As the Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper is responsible for all matters relating to health and safety on the course, is it a fair assumption that he will have been expected to have made a risk assessment as to this hazard. If this is so how many have?

If a risk assessment has been carried and the dangers identified would it be expected that the club inform their insurance company.

Every Owner/Manager of a golf club should surely have some kind of ruling to refer to. If it already exists please excuse my ignorance and if it does not, do you think now is the time for a golfing body to establish a clear definition of when a course is fit for play.

I look forward to any comments.

One other point that you might like to include now or at some other stage, again related to health and safety, is the hazard of dog excrement. In this age of increasing environmental concerns how many other courses suffer from this unnecessary problem. The environmental impact and health implications should surely warrant greater attention from the Managers who are being faced with the problem. Has anyone done a risk assessment with regard to contamination of machinery? As I say, it is a concern but I'm not too sure where I should go with it for fear of upsetting the dog owning community.

If any of your readers has any experience of dealing with this problem I would be most interested to know. I can just imagine some of the thoughts going through your head as you read this and as funny as they are there is a serious health issue attached to the problem.

**Paul Seago, Course Manager, Gullane Golf Club, East Lothian**

## Inappropriate Photographs

I write, outlining concerns that I and many of my colleagues have regarding pictorial adverts, which often appear in the Greenkeeper International Magazine, which show a complete disregard for basic Health & Safety Regulations.

In particular I refer to female models operating machinery dressed in street clothes wearing inappropriate footwear and without facial and ear protection.

(Pages 39 Dec, 2002 and page 38: Jan 2003 are examples)

I understand fully however, that the client provides these pictures for you and is no doubt a valuable source of revenue. However, as the magazine is obviously proud of its award winning status (front page) and representative of the industry, I feel that more cognisance should be taken of the content of these pictures by your staff prior to publication and how that reflects upon the industry in general.

BIGGA has many female members and adverts such as these do nothing to help their integration within an industry, which has been a male bastion for many years. I personally find these adverts insulting and no doubt somewhere across the industry inappropriate references will have been made to the embarrassment of our female colleagues. I ask you to review this and hopefully reconsider your advertising policy and take appropriate steps to rectify the situation.

I hope that you feel this is worthy of publication in the Your Letters page of the Magazine which will give you an opportunity to explain your position to BIGGA members, many of whom share my concerns.

**Tony McLure, Head Greenkeeper,**

**Whickham Golf Club, Newcastle Upon Tyne**

## Editors Note:

Editor's Note: The photographs Tony highlights are not actually adverts but were included in the New Product section of the magazine. These are supplied, along with a press release, by the company producing the product or its PR agency. In an ideal world the perfect photograph would be used but often it is a case of using the supplied picture displaying the new product or showing no photograph at all. I have taken the view that it is better to show the product even if the photo supplied has contained the elements to which Tony refers. However, should Tony's views be shared by a significant number of others it is a policy I may review.