

Your Letters...

Bunker Follow-Up

Will Bowden's tips on perimeter bunker drains in the March edition of *Greenkeeper International* are an intriguing answer to the perennial greenkeeping headache of sand wash-out.

As a greenkeeper, I find it impossible to envy the poor souls whose job it is to return the sand from whence it came. As a golfer, I find it tricky to predict the reaction of a ball played from wet/compacted/contaminated/inconsistent sand. The article could have gone further to suggest that bunker design is the sole cause of sand wash-out.

One of the most important considerations in building a bunker, or indeed any feature on the golf course, is water movement and there are two aspects of water movement that must always be catered for within the design.

Firstly, surface run-off should never be directed into bunkers and secondly, bunker faces should have a gradient that is neither so steep nor so long that it is predisposed to repeated sand wash-out.

It is especially disappointing to see modern courses where the architect has had no thought for the effects of wash-out: I have seen one recently opened course where a green is contoured to direct water into a greenside bunker.

Some might argue that an establishment with large labour resources can afford the luxury of sand wash-out because they have the manpower to redistribute washed out sand after every heavy downpour.

However, the quality of the sand is of prime importance to the golfer and sand that is washed out frequently becomes contaminated with soil particles and hence acquires unsavoury properties. It becomes compacted and thus difficult to "fluff up" for the golfer; and the contaminants will impede and eventually totally inhibit drainage.

How many greenkeepers have heard the golfer's cry: "Why is the sand in this bunker different to everywhere else?" And how many greenkeepers can genuinely convince the golfer that the sand in this bunker is exactly the same, but for the contamination caused by water?

Those who design bunkers that are susceptible to frequent sand wash-out are not only placing an extra, unwanted burden on greenkeepers, but they are failing the golfers whom they are paid to serve.

Richard Andrews, Highgate Golf Club

Call for Ladies' Forum

Calling all lady greenkeepers - I am hoping to arrange a 'lady greenkeepers' forum' at BTME Harrogate next year. The forum would discuss various issues directly affecting women in the golf course industry and ways of improving the accessibility and development opportunities for us, as well as looking towards raising the profile of lady greenkeepers to encourage more people to enter the profession.

I was recently asked why so many women start in greenkeeping only to leave after a few years? Although there are many different factors, I feel it can be a very lonely and intimidating career always feeling you have to go a little bit further to be able to get ahead, this in turn got me thinking, the GCSAA have a forum for women at their annual conference and show.

It is a great opportunity to meet other lady greenkeepers and discuss the future as it directly relates to us. It is very important that I get as much support and generate as much interest as possible, so please contact me with your thoughts and ideas: e-mail to: wendypob@hotmail.com

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YOUR LETTERS ARE REQUESTED!

Send to: Scott MacCallum, Editor, *Greenkeeper International*, BIGGA HOUSE, Aldwark, Alne, York YO61 1UF, or email them to: scott@bigga.co.uk

Your Letters...continued

"It is no-ones fault but ours"

I am compelled to reply to your contributor's letter entitled "It's not only the weather we greenkeepers are up against" published in the April edition.

This was an excellent letter and brings up the very real problems associated with the job we are trying to do.

Every Course Manager can relate to many of the points raised and I would like to offer some of my experiences which may help everyone when they find perceived insurmountable problems of this nature.

Unfortunately the problems we have are very much of our own making (conscious or otherwise) and I believe if we do not accept that, we might as well give up now!

Training is the answer (which is easily accessed through BIGGA and the GTC) - it furnishes us with the necessary skills so we may portray ourselves as professional, well organised, competent individuals where officials within golf clubs, whether proprietary or private members, will accept what we tell them.

I take this opportunity to relay a recent personal professional problem to illustrate the point.....

We have just started an unsuitable tree/scrub removal and restocking programme as part of our recently completed tree/ecology policy, in line with our overall golf course policy.

We had been some two to three years in the planning stages and those who know me know that I leave no stone unturned in the quest to inform everyone about what is going on and what is planned for the future - but I did not do it well enough.

The work (planned 1st phase of three) which commenced during March 2004 caused quite "a stir" (that is an understatement - to some tune!!) as it can appear to be devastating - the average person's perception on trees is that all trees, of whatever species, are good for nature - which we know to be far from the truth.

My immediate reaction was to hide until the heat died down or shrink behind officialdom - but through experience I know that this only delays the inevitable.

My response was therefore to make myself available in the clubhouse during Saturday and Sunday, when members come off the course, to answer any questions and concerns.

To help I surrounded myself with information from experts in the areas concerned and tried to placate the vociferous and simply get the message across - I cannot say it was easy but the response from the vast majority of the membership, and particularly the support I received from the Board of Directors, was exceptional.

Following that enlightening experience, though difficult, was that all the club are fully supportive of what we are trying to achieve and we can look forward to phases two and three of the programme in 2004/5 and 2005/6, resources permitting.

None of this would have been achieved if I did not...

- Take responsibility for the situation - training gave me the confidence.
- Possess the necessary skills, received from training, to handle the situation and use it to gain respect and professional kudos.

The benefits to the golf course and the surrounding area in ecology, landscape, and arboriculture in future will be immense.

So if you do have problems, like those mentioned in the letter, seek out the training required (specifically personal presentation training - it is not for public speaking - just necessary for us to do our job properly) and we, but more importantly our employer, will not regret it.

Your contributor also mentioned continuity within the committee structure - this type of structure is not going to go away, so we have to learn to live and work with it, and training gives us the skills.

The solution to continuity, or lack of it, is policy - policy ensures continuity of management, no matter who the personnel/officialdom is, and it is the course manager who must instigate policy for the benefit of the golf course in the long term.

The Course Manager must also demonstrate professionalism through attitude, commitment and enthusiasm/disposition - no-one, not even the Royal & Ancient, national golf unions etc. can do that for us.

And just to add another positive note - at no time in the past has the communication between the various golfing bodies been greater, and BIGGA can be proud of their increasing importance in the discussions taking place at this time - my thoughts for the future are therefore very exciting and positive.

We have an opportunity to go from strength to strength in the jobs we do, but only through taking responsibility for ourselves and our profession and not blaming everything and/or everyone else for the slightest problem which comes along.

Duncan McGilvray, Course Manager, Potters Bar Golf Club

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