



600 Greenkeepers

John Haley pens his own thoughts on Burton Golf Club and his role as Chairman of Green



Just over three years ago I was appointed Chairman of Green at my Club, with a mandate to re-energise the Head Greenkeeper and his staff as the Course - one of the best in the County - was looking tired and below the standards our Members had come to expect. Unlike all my predecessors I made no pretence that I understood the finer art of Greenkeeping, I just thought I could use my motivational skills and the Greens team's expertise would do the rest.

How wrong I was! Within two months, one member of the greens staff had a serious accident on the course; one broke his ankle playing Cricket; his brother tore ligaments playing Soccer; the trainee disappeared; the Health and Safety Executive swarmed all over us; the Irrigation system finally conked out and we had an undetected leak that cost us half our water supply! In addition we had just had the driest winter/spring for many, many years.

There was also the small matter of 600 plus members, all experts in successful maintenance of Golf Courses (As there is little difference between a 20 square foot back lawn and a Golf Course Acreage!) wanting to know what I personally was going to do about it and why, despite all the aforementioned problems, the Course was not yet to the same levels as Augusta!

Well, to cut an ever lengthening story short, the Head Greenkeeper decided the time had come to move on (his Deputy having already left to take up a Head Greenkeeper's position) and the recruitment process started. We had a very good response to our advertisement and out of 35 applicants drew up a shortlist of six. I should say at this point that the recruitment process was left to myself and the Club President and our selection only needed the rubber stamping of the rest of the Club Board.

If I am honest, our eventual appointee was not top of the list before the interviews commenced but was clearly the best candidate at the end of the process. Now this is where I know you will all, particularly those from the Midland Region, be surprised, if not shocked, that this candidate was none other than Gavin Robson!

Moving the clock forward two years and our course is now considered not only a very good test of golf but in magnificent condition and considered the best in Derbyshire and up with the best in the Midlands (other clubs members views who have played the course, not only ours). How has this been achieved? By a lot of hard work; putting together a very professional and skilled team; motivating them; a hands on approach;

proper training of staff and a very professional knowledge and expertise of the art of Golf Course Management.

This is what Gavin has brought to the Club and although he has achieved this in a very short space of time, he and we, are not resting on our laurels but continuing to develop and give Gavin the resources to achieve this.

So what have I brought to the "party"? Well I now know my Hollow tining from my verti draining but not much else. I see my role as the go between the Greens Committee and Gavin but do not allow any interference in how he manages his team or the work they do. Gavin and his team are the Professionals and should not have interference from the other 600 Greenkeepers in the club. As I said to one of our members who used to work in the coal industry, if the Head Greenkeeper at the local course came in and started telling him how to dig coal he would have told him what to do... Why do members of golf clubs think they are different when it comes to Course Management?

Of course I listen to what members say and any ideas they have are always discussed with Gavin and many have been acted on, but I believe the excellent relationship I have with Gavin is I let him get on with the job because that's what he's paid to do. I truly believe that if more clubs had the confidence to let their Head Greenkeepers/Course Managers get on with the job, with a minimum or no interference, most courses and clubs would be all the better for it. So come on all you Chairmen of Green stop interfering and see the results for yourself!

So finally, where is this course that's so good? Its Burton-On-Trent (which is actually just inside Derbyshire) and many Greenkeepers/Course Managers, will get the chance to play it in October because the BIGGA National Championships are being held here this year. We look forward to seeing you then and with no pressure on Gavin seeing for yourself the quality we now have.