



DARK NIGHTS, DARK THOUGHTS

For some time I have pondered with the idea of offering my support and help to those among us who struggle to control their drinking. My name is Alan and I am a grateful recovering alcoholic. I am also a Course Manager and at a course with a high reputation and am active within BIGGA.

I haven't drunk for well over 3 years now and I no longer have that craving for alcohol that always ended up the same way – depressed, fearful of being found out, and living a life of pretence. My present state of mind and way of life has proved to me that life doesn't have to be the way it was.

During my latter years as a practicing alcoholic I was Course Manager at a club in the South East of England. I can remember doing my job but hating every moment and resenting the people I worked for and worked with. Away from work, life at home wasn't much better. My only friend, or so I thought was the bottle. I was intolerant of everything and everybody and only had one priority – myself!

Since I have stopped drinking, people who have the same illness have shown me the way to get better and gain a life that is quite incredible, where I am totally at ease with every situation and where each day I learn so much more about myself. I know what a stressful job we have. At times, you can feel very lonely and under great pressure. It is only too easy to forget about your woes by turning to the bottle. But your feelings and emotions don't change. The following day things are usually many times worse in your head – mainly because you haven't dealt with anything, so what do you do? – You drink again. Sheer insanity – but this is the nature of the illness. And as for being able to admit you have a problem – it's just impossible.

All I can tell any of you who can honestly identify with anything I have said, is that I am no longer like that. I had to admit my problem, ask for help and work on it one day at a time. It wasn't easy in the first instance. I so much wanted to speak to someone who not only understood my illness but who knew the job as well. At that time it was not possible but I vowed that when totally confident in my sobriety I would offer my help to any who needed it. With this in mind I contacted the board of BIGGA and the way forward for me to offer this help is by writing this letter for publication in the magazine. I am here to listen, identify and show you what I have done to recover from this killer disease.

If you need someone to speak to in total confidence then either phone me on 07939 806795 or e-mail me at alcoholpalan@aol.com. I don't need to know who you are or where you work but only you know if your life is becoming unmanageable. The first step of asking for help is a very difficult one but the longer you take, the harder it gets, and more devastating are the effects on you and those around you.

I am here to help not to preach, so please get in touch if you feel the need.

A friend

DEAR GREENKEEPERS BIG 'G' 4 BIG 'C'

Finding a way to favour the finer grasses is no easy job. The Danish example shows us that working together in groups can help forward progress. It is true to say that people do better when working together.

The problem when favouring the finer grasses is that every situation is unique and the answer for each course is slightly different. The Danes have come up with at least 3 models so far to our knowledge! "Off the peg" maintenance programmes don't tend to work in differing circumstances. You will need to use your own skill, judgement and experience to help find out what is best for you, but you should also try to draw on the experience of others. Talking to each other about your programmes, experiences and even sharing the results from experiments will only help you progress. Pool the knowledge. This will result in better turf for golf, which is what we all want.

If you want to make headway with the finer grasses and fulfil the potential of your greens then get yourselves together. Talking and listening will breed understanding. Believe us, the development of the finer grasses will happen if you work together.

The future of our game depends upon it...

it's your honour.

Best regards

Richard Windows, STRI Turfgrass Agronomist

Henry Bechelet, STRI Turfgrass Agronomist

I am currently setting up a free gardening scheme for terminally ill cancer patients called Big 'G' 4 Big 'C'. I will be offering either a full or partial service. The full service will be for people who can no longer fully maintain their gardens and the partial service is for people who can no longer carry out the heavier maintenance tasks. For example, hedge trimming, lawn mowing or border digging. These services will be completely free of charge, but if a donation is made based on the work carried out then it would be gratefully received. The working area for this scheme will be Hampshire, east Dorset and south Wiltshire but if I get enough response then I would consider expanding the area covered.

The main reason behind setting up this service is so that people who were once very active can still enjoy the gardens they have worked so hard creating even if they are finding it increasingly difficult to continue maintaining them. The idea for the scheme came from watching my father and father-in-law, who both have cancer, find it more and more difficult to be as active as they used to be.

At the moment I am asking people to contact me if they are interested in the scheme either for themselves or someone they know so that I can judge the need for the scheme and the resources needed. Please visit <http://www.bigga4bigc.org.uk> to find out more, and you can check for updates at <http://blog.bigga4bigc.org.uk>

To register your interest or support you can contact me in the following ways: Answering Service: 020 8133 2719; Website Form: www.bigga4bigc.org.uk or Email: info@bigga4bigc.org.uk

Many thanks and I look forward to hearing from you.

Edward Smith

OPEN ACCOMMODATION WANTED

The 15 year-old son of a family friend is looking for bed and breakfast accommodation in Carnoustie for the week of the Open Championship. A golf lover, he has secured a position as a Scoreboard Carrier for the Championship but his family are no longer able to attend so he is looking for accommodation within easy access of the golf course and is quite willing to pay.

If anyone is in a position to help could they contact me at the following address:

Richard Barker, 27 Spinney Hill Drive, Loughborough, Leicester, LE11 3LB, Tel: 07919 652950

STIMPMETER PSYCHOSIS

Good to see my old pal Dave Woodbyrne once again sharing his well-thought out arguments with the greenkeeping world in December's letters page. I agree with everything he says about the stimpmeter psychosis we all seem to have bought into, but unfortunately I feel the condition is just a sad reflection of the way we have all become completely obsessed with figures and statistics.

I might have been stuck out here on the fringes of civilisation for too long, and may be looking at things from the rosy side of the fence, but it is my opinion that 95% of golfers couldn't actually give a stuff about stimpmeter readings, or indeed, more importantly, how fast the greens are. Granted, you are always going to get a few bravado-fuelled clowns who have a burning desire to putt off the front of all their greens, but on the whole, nearly every sensible human being will take true greens over fast ones every single time. Line them up and ask them honestly whether they would give up a 2 feet of speed in the Summer for year round golf, instead of lightning fast in July and unplayable sponges from September to May, and all but the village idiots will bite the hand off you.

So if the golfers don't care, why are we doing it-destroying the structure of our greens by continually pushing past boundaries that we are not actually being asked to cross? Is it the golfers we are trying to impress, because we are incapable of educating them as to why they can't actually have European Tour speeds in April, or are we actually going past the limits in some vain attempt to impress our peer group, scared to death that Joe down the road might tell the boys at the Section event that our greens are a bit sticky. Because if that's the case, then that's really, really, sad.

I sincerely doubt whether anyone ever gives Dave Woodbyrne any flak for having slow greens, even though he maintains them using traditional methods, with traditional cutting heights and traditional stimpmeter readings. I spoke to a number of people who played at Southernness during the Scottish Amateur last Summer, and to a man they had nothing but praise for what they had played over. Which just goes to show that quality greenkeeping is about good communication with your membership and common sense, and is definitely not about bravado."

Kind regards Simon Freeman