



News from the Chief Executive

The suggestion by the Board that Full Membership should be opened up to Sports Turf Groundsmen seems to have sparked off a very mixed debate, but that should come as no surprise to anyone! There does however appear to be some confusion over the Association's motives for making such proposals and I will try to explain the rationale behind the move:

1. The discussions between BIGGA and the IOG during 2007 (ultimately terminated by the IOG) identified a great synergy between greenkeepers and groundsmen. Today greenkeepers can join the IOG as Full members why should BIGGA not afford the same privilege to suitably qualified groundsmen?

2. BIGGA will be putting a recruitment campaign into place to try to enrol further greenkeeper members but why should it not also market its services and the benefits of membership to groundsmen?

3. BIGGA is not setting out to 'wage war' on the IOG it is merely hoping to increase the available choice of professional representative bodies for sports turf employees. There are a great number of such employees who do not belong to either organisation - because they see no value in membership or because they are currently not entitled to join.

4. BIGGA has had a positive influence on the development and accreditation of the greenkeeping modules of sports turf qualifications through its active membership of the GTC. This has been achieved thanks to the close working relationship that exists between employer and employee, resulting in successful consultation with the awarding bodies. A process that is ongoing.

5. A great deal of the success in greenkeeper training is transferable directly into the rest of the sports turf industry. Why should BIGGA, and the GTC, not try to capitalise on this?

6. BIGGA, like so many other businesses, is suffering from the current downturn in the economic climate but it is not in financial trouble and it did make a surplus in the last financial year. If really necessary savings could be made but this would inevitably lead to a reduction in standards. A greater number of members would help improve financial stability, create better buying power, should attract better trade support and could help the Association win more official grant aid.

7. The sports turf industry is fragmented and BIGGA, working with the GTC framework, the awarding bodies and the training providers is in pole position to develop a National Centre for Sports Turf at Aldwark.

8. Courtesy golf is a privilege extended to BIGGA members so that they may improve their greenkeeping experience by playing other courses. It is not a right of membership, although I will be asking clubs to look more favourably at this through my connections within the GCMA and the Home Unions. The inclusion of groundsmen within BIGGA membership should not jeopardise these relationships and clubs will have the option to refuse groundsmen the same privilege. Membership cards will clearly distinguish greenkeepers from groundsmen by virtue of their job title and employer details.

My space is limited but I would like to clarify one point that seems to be misunderstood. BIGGA is governed by a Board that is made up of greenkeepers, with one exception (Mark Dobell - Guardian and the Finance Director of the R&A). The Board sets the policy that is administered by the Staff, headed up by myself, all of whom are accountable for their actions. I, in turn, am accountable to the Board. Contrary to popular belief the Association is therefore run by greenkeepers for the benefit of its members and not by the staff for their own ends!

The draft proposals for a change to the Constitution have been circulated for the purpose of consultation and will not be implemented without the overwhelming consent of members.



SCOTTISH REGION - CENTRAL

The Central Section held their AGM at Elmwood on October 27, when Gordon McKie, of St Andrews Links, was elected as Chairman and Derek Robson, of the Dukes Course, was elected Vice Chairman. Also elected to the Committee were Donald Gardner, of Scoonie GC, and Bob Meikle, of Craig Golfing Society. Andy Mellon remains as Secretary/Treasurer. Andy O'Hara has stood down as immediate Past Chairman and been re-elected to the Committee. Graeme Taylor and Alan Sharp, who has left the area, have both stood down from the Committee and we thank them for their help over the years, although Graeme will continue to administer the website on our behalf.

Those present heard that Kenny Mitchell, of St Andrews Links, and Charlie MacDonald, of Crieff, were the recipients of the Patrons Award for the Section and that the Spring Outing in 2009 will be held at Scotsraig GC. The question was asked "How much golf will Derek Scott be able to play now he no longer has the distraction of being Chairman?" Answers on a postcard to...

Prior to the AGM, Martin Heywood, of Quadrop, gave an informative presentation on the benefits of good quality irrigation water and the problems that can be encountered by using unsuitable water. The Quadrop system has been used in many areas other than golf course irrigation and is a very simple, safe and effective way of reducing bi carbonates, reducing ph and reducing surface tension among other benefits. Both Kingsbarns Golf Links and The Castle Course, along with Dunbar and Longniddry have been using the system for the past couple of seasons with great results.

The website: www.biggacentralsection.org.uk has been quiet over the summer with everyone being busy, so let's try and pick it up again. We have been trying to drip feed information onto it on a regular basis to try and keep it fresh. It's unfortunate that a lot of this is about St Andrews Links but unless others supply us with the info, there's not a lot we can do so if you have something you think will be of interest to others then pop it in an email to Andy Mellon, Gordon McKie or myself.

A number of members from Clubs in the North East Fife area attended a three-day workshop over consecutive Fridays on Risk Assessment training. An important aspect of health and safety procedure, the course conducted by Pitchblue International, took those present through practical examples of identifying hazards and writing up risk assessments as well as covering current health and safety regulations. With a grant from the BIGGA Education fund, the course cost £125 per person and if there was enough interest from others in the Section then I am sure we could stage another one in a more central area in February. Again, please contact your committee to let us know.

This course might be quite appropriate because through October we have had visits from the Environmental Health Officers for NE Fife to carry out very comprehensive inspections of our operations and procedures at all three greenkeeping facilities at St Andrews Links. This is the beginning of them working their way through all golf clubs in the area so be aware.

On behalf of everyone on the Committee, have a Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year and may all your problems be birdies.

Gordon Moir