

Welcome



A Greenkeeping Anachronism

Occasionally we receive calls at BIGGA HOUSE from golf club officials keen to learn a little more about specific greenkeeping issues. “Can golf be played in frost without damaging the surface?” “What is BIGGA’s view on trolley bans?” “What green speed should be achievable on our course?”

The first answer to all these questions is always “Have you spoken to your Course Manager?” The reason being, other than the fact that BIGGA Headquarters staff are specialists in their own areas of responsibility and are not greenkeepers, is that you can’t help thinking that any information gleaned could be to use against the club’s own Course Manager.

They may be trying to increase their own knowledge, but more likely is the fact that they don’t agree with the approach which is being taken at their club and are looking for evidence to back up their own point of view.

Wouldn’t it be far better to engage with the Course Manager on the subject and at least learn why he or she adopts the particular approach? It’s more than likely that there is a perfectly good reason for going down one route and not another.

It is all part of the old chestnut of the average golf club having 650 greenkeepers and the generally held belief that anyone who sits down in front of the box on a Friday to watch Alan Titchmarsh or Monty Don, and who possesses a modicum of knowledge about gardening, is perfectly capable of double guessing a Course Manager on matters agronomic.

The make up of many traditional members’ clubs doesn’t help, with Green Committees often charged with planning the working week of the Greenkeeping Team rather than acting as a communication link to the rest of the membership.

I’ve met some wonderful Chairmen of Green over the years, many of whom have developed good greenkeeping knowledge and who have been big supporters of the greenkeeping staff, but the fact remains that their sole role should be to act as a middleman between the Maintenance facility and the Board Room. Even then, in an ideal world there should be no room for them. They are a greenkeeping anachronism. Any modern Course Manager worth his salt should have the skills to communicate with club members whether it be on the course, in the bar or in the Board Room.

While out visiting members at their clubs I’ve noticed that the Course Managers who play golf with the membership, and who take time to learn names and chat with members, are the ones who have fewest problems when it comes to the whispering campaigns about the state of the course.

It might seem that you have enough to do without adding to your workload and adding to your day by popping into the clubhouse but it is time well spent. It can nip potential problems in the bud and, if you press the right buttons, you might find that 650 strong greenkeeping team losing some of its recruits.

HOW CAN GOLF CLUBS RETAIN ‘NOMADIC’ GOLF MEMBERS?

The GTC has recognised a growing expectation amongst golfer’s seeking to play on golf courses in pristine condition for as near to 12 months a year as possible with those in golf club membership seeking to derive full value for their annual subscriptions.

The commonly acknowledged trends of reducing waiting lists, removal of entry fees and marketeers actively promoting new member packages, now offer the ‘nomadic’ golf club member an ideal opportunity to satisfy his/her needs to move freely between golf clubs, at will.

Kevin Weir, The Scottish Golf Union’s, Golf Service Manager, says: “The reasons for joining a golf club are obvious - location, cost, length of waiting list, ease of access to the course, practice facilities, condition of the course and many more. But fundamentally golfers simply join clubs to play golf.”

Kevin explains: “Golfers will therefore seek a course that is presented in the best possible playing conditions at all times for as near to 12 months of the year as possible, having had their expectations significantly fuelled by current TV and golfing media coverage. Augusta and the Masters inevitably kick starts this in early Spring every year.

“Expectations such as these will apply whether playing in a club championship, an open competition, a monthly medal, a bounce game with friends or a few holes on a summer’s evening - the player will always want to enjoy the best possible course conditions at all times.” Kevin continues.

It is important for golf clubs to identify and implement course management practices appropriate for their courses that will best deliver the best possible quality playing surfaces for their members and visitors alike. To do this golf clubs must plan ahead utilising a long term Course Management Policy framework. This process should not only include the course management and development programme for the golf course but also the commitment of the golf club to support and fund this agreed programme.

The policy document should be openly shared and communicated to the golf club membership, allowing them to understand the agreed long term plans for the golf course, some elements of which they will have voted for. The policy should be reviewed regularly and updated as required.

Kevin adds: “The success of the golf club will depend on high quality playing surfaces that can reap huge rewards for a club and also significantly enhance the reputation of its green staff. This will retain existing members, attract new members, establish the club as an attractive venue for visiting parties, visiting golfers and corporate events, and external sponsorship. Most importantly golfers will achieve value for money, have access to the quality of a golf course they desire and become extremely satisfied customers!”