

# Chairman's Column

## DRIP DRIP DROP LITTLE APRIL SHOWER?

It is not often I look forward to April showers but this year they followed a dry end to March and the rain arrived just when it was needed to kick off some consistent grass growth. Spring renovation of greens and tees on The International Course in early April benefited from the improved conditions with core holes growing over completely in two weeks. Golfers are out playing on the firmer surfaces unaware of the disruptive work that has recently been done and the turf is in better condition to withstand this season's play.



There are just five weeks left to prepare The Heritage Course before The European Open at the end of May and making the most of the growing conditions as early as possible now becomes really important. Verti-cutting too early can easily set the greens back but with limited time available to apply light topdressings every opportunity to get this done in the dry has to be utilised.

Lowering winter heights of cut on fairways and approaches is timed well in advance of the event with a further drop nearer the tournament. Bottom blades on the fairway mowers will need to be changed to allow greater flexibility on cutting height in varying conditions. Tournament

time highlights the work done by the workshop technicians when they are flat out re-grinding cylinders and preparing every piece of cutting equipment.

The work involved in maintaining golf course equipment properly, demands the skills and experience of trained staff together with an adequately equipped workshop. Many clubs rely on dealers and outside help whilst some see in house facilities as essential to the smooth running of their operation. Whatever is appropriate, workshop facilities need to be clean, well organized working environments to attract the right staff and allow them to do a good job. Unlike the car industry

where the service bays these days look more like the showrooms with not a drop of oil to be seen, golf course workshops remain a less clinical environment but that doesn't stop us making the best of what we have to offer.

There is a need to continue to interest young people in this side of the business, as well as greenkeeping, to ensure we have the skills and experience to maintain all the equipment that we all rely on so much. Salary levels reflect the demand for those with good skills and experience to fill these positions and when compared against the values of the equipment fleets being maintained represent a very worthwhile investment.

Turning to Association matters, the board has discussed improving the way the sub committees operate and to include non board members in the Membership, Learning & Development, Communications and Environment meetings. This change will allow more BIGGA members up and down the country the opportunity to contribute their suggestions and ideas to the running of the Association.

The current financial climate is causing most of us, both at work and at home, to review finances and see where economies can be made. The same belt tightening process has been well underway at BIGGA and wherever efficiency savings can be made they will be.

The previous recession in the 1990's affected many clubs and caused them to take a long hard look at their operations and strip out the 'nice to haves' and pare down to just the essentials. As course managers we only directly control the expenditure side of the balance sheet however clubs also had to refocus on what they needed to do to create more income. It was an experience and exercise that left those involved in a much better position this time around to make the right decisions at their clubs.

Strong competition has been the result of the rapid expansion in the number of courses built during the 1980's and 1990's. This coupled now with a downturn in the economy and the disappearance of most membership waiting lists means the market for golfers is likely to remain highly competitive. Unlike the last recession when the new proprietary clubs bore the brunt of its effects, members clubs are now feeling the pinch to a much greater extent.

What does this mean for all of us in the industry?

It provides a challenge for us to produce courses that attract golfers to play at a price they are willing to pay for. It also means that more will be asked of us at a time when there will not necessarily be any more resources. Deciding on priorities and making choices is a skill we all have to learn and put into practice and those that can grasp this and help steer their clubs through the downturn successfully will emerge better for it.



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