



Membership

Education & Training

Merchandise

Greenkeeper International

Exhibition

[www.bigga.org.uk](http://www.bigga.org.uk)

# A man steeped in the game

Scott MacCallum talks with BIGGA's new CEO, Jim Croxton, about his life, aims and aspirations and what attracted him to a life at BIGGA

**BIGGA's new Chief Executive Officer is a man steeped in the game of golf, having grown up on a golf course and worked in golf administration at the top end of the game ever since. He is even a former BIGGA member.**

"Golf is close to my heart and I've been involved in it all my life. It's the best sport in the world and I have to say, one of the things I most enjoy about the game is the actual golf courses themselves," said Jim Croxton, as we sat in his new office in BIGGA House in the grounds of Aldwark Manor Hotel and golf course, just north of York.

"Growing up I did practically every job going at the Golf Club, from cleaning the toilets, working in the Pro Shop, running the handicaps, working behind the bar (when I was old enough) and some sales and marketing," he recalled, of the club which his father, David, who sits on the Board of the EGU, has run since 1978.

"But my favourite job without question was working as seasonal labour on the golf course. I loved it. I was very lucky that I wasn't doing a lot of greenkeeping in the winter, but I was doing about four or five months on the golf course a year. When I finished university I went full time for a while which was when I joined BIGGA, giving me the opportunity to learn a bit more about greenkeeping and feel part of the industry."

A year or so in to this period he joined the staff of the PGA where he was to fulfil a number of roles over the next 18 years, until his move to BIGGA.

"My perception of greenkeeping has always been a very positive one



**"My perception of greenkeeping has always been a very positive one and the improvement in course quality over the years has been incredible"**

and the improvement in course quality over the years has been incredible. If you watch Shell's Wonderful World of Golf you see the greats playing top golf courses but one thing you do notice is the ball bobbling along on the greens. Nowadays you watch golf on TV and they are playing on billiard tables week in week out. That is

down in part to improvements in equipment and greenkeeping techniques but mainly to the increased education and diligence of the greenkeepers and course managers responsible for all of our courses.

"Nowadays it's very rare that you find a course in poor condition."

His other perception of greenkeeping is one shared by so many who work in the profession the length and breadth of the country – that the excellent work carried out is taken for granted.

"Because standards are now so high golfers have come to expect excellence when, in fact, an enormous amount of skill and effort

goes into achieving this. Throw in the variable and adverse weather conditions we now experience such as the current drought and the results are bordering on miraculous. We at BIGGA need to shout about the excellence of our members from the rooftops and also assist them in communicating with their members, visitors, colleagues and employers to ensure their work is appreciated."

While he arrived at BIGGA with more knowledge of what greenkeeping entailed than the average golfer, and a healthy respect for the job greenkeepers do, he didn't have as strong a knowledge of the breadth of work of BIGGA as an Association.

"I had had contact with BIGGA over the years and even spoken at a couple of Section events, but two weeks into the job, I can now see the sheer scale of the challenges BIGGA faces and the opportunities that are out there. That means working directly with the myriad of other governing bodies in the game and the many excellent colleges that provide greenkeeper education through to organising trade shows, golf tournaments and seminars."

During his time at the PGA Jim worked for four years in the tournament administration section at regional and national levels, became R&A Rules qualified and refereed at European Tour events, before moving into management with eight years as Regional Secretary for the North Region, based at Bolton GC, looking after the 1200 PGA members in the Region as well as putting on a tournament calendar worth in excess of £300,000 annually.

"The public face of the PGA is its tournament activity but actually it is just like BIGGA in that it is an educational body with professional standards and CPD and also is actively involved in representing the needs of its members at all levels.

"It is not a trade union and neither is BIGGA but I spent a lot of time working with members to improve their lot at golf clubs and driving ranges by helping them understand how better to be involved with the business and thus to protect their future. I spent the majority of my PGA career in 'member facing' roles and thoroughly enjoyed that day-to-day interaction.

**"The public face of the PGA is its tournament activity but actually it is just like BIGGA in that it is an educational body with professional standards and CPD, and also is actively involved in representing the needs of its members at all levels"**



"I sincerely hope that I can develop similarly positive relationships with the membership of BIGGA."

"Four and a half years ago Jim was asked to manage sponsorship for the PGA and look after and develop the various Partner, Official Supplier and tournament sponsorship income streams.

"The term sponsorship in commercial terms used to be relevant but now sponsorship is what people ask for when they run the London Marathon. You hand over £20, but get nothing in return other than a warm feeling for having done something for charity.

"Nowadays it is all about investing and partnerships. Companies

# Turf disease protection that

after cut... after cut... after cut... after cut... after cut...



are looking for a return on their investment and the challenge is for BIGGA to put together packages for partners or suppliers whereby there can be achievable targets which can then be measured. Then it can be demonstrated that there has been value for money. Once you've done that, renegotiation is much more straightforward."

From what Jim has already identified BIGGA does give value for money to its partners and suppliers, based on the number of re-bookings that regularly come in for Greenkeeper International and for Harrogate Week.

"Early conversations suggest that our customers value their relationship with BIGGA and what we offer. This is evidenced as our advertising, exhibition and sponsorship activity is all healthy at present, but we need to make sure that we keep listening to them about what value they are looking for and make sure they get as much of it as they can."

Jim has been a regular attendee at Harrogate Week over recent years, seeing it as the ideal opportunity to catch up with the industry and meet up with the movers and the shakers who also

see Harrogate as the ideal January meeting place.

"Since joining BIGGA I've studied the statistics for Harrogate Week 2011 and they prove that it was a successful week, with strong attendance and good feedback from exhibitors.

"Additionally our educational programme is thriving with attendance in 2011 being more than 24% up on 2010. It was a worthwhile week and shows that it certainly is not a show on the wane. I think that's because this industry thrives on face-to-face meetings and the demonstration of product.

"This is a very established industry. People have been looking after sports turf for many years and a lot of the companies we work with, although they may have gone through buyouts or name changes, have actually been around for a long time and are steeped in integrity. They are good businesses and are about people. The opportunity we provide for our visitors and those companies to interact for a few days each January, is a vital benefit for everyone.

Harrogate provides the perfect platform for this," said Jim.

His first priority now that he has

started is to put together a long term strategic plan for the Association and a comprehensive review of current activity.

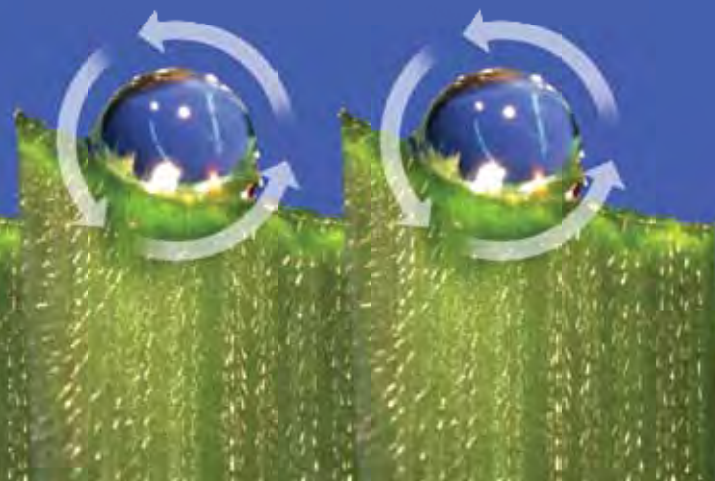
"The Board's ambition for this is that it should be in place within six months of my starting. It's a tough target as it is not a passive strategic review, but an active one being formed while we continue to run the business," said Jim, who is also hoping to get around the country attending as many Section, Region and National meetings and events as he can as well as arranging meetings with BIGGA's trade supporters.

"Over the next three to five years the aim is to create a sound financial and commercial model to ensure that the business, which is currently healthy, remains strong and grows in a sustainable fashion.

"At the same time we've got to increase the recognition of the work that greenkeepers do and, to use a modern expression, make it a 'no-brainer' for greenkeepers to join BIGGA."

It's going to be a busy short, medium and long term for BIGGA's new CEO but you can be sure that he is up for the challenge.

stays cut...  
after cut... after cut...



#### For peak performance turf disease

**control NEW** Heritage Maxx now delivers faster, more direct and long lasting disease control, to consistently maintain outstanding turf quality.

- Faster and more complete uptake by leaf AND root
- AI recycling gives long lasting effects
- Tackles foliar AND soil diseases
- Magnificent SEVEN turf diseases on the label
- Five-way turf disease protection
- Exceptional easy-to-use Maxx liquid formulation

**Take Turf Disease Control to the Maxx**

[www.greencast.co.uk](http://www.greencast.co.uk)

 **Heritage Maxx®**

**syngenta®**