



Greenkeepers Training Committee

Donald Steel, GTC Chairman, looks at improving communication within the golf club



One point emerged emphatically from a series of recent GTC workshops conducted very ably at Temple and Gatton Manor by Laurence Pithie MG, the message being that the principles of greenkeeping haven't changed - simply the way in which they are applied and implemented.

Put another way, whole scale mechanisation has widened the scope of what is possible when it comes to course condition and presentation although machinery is expensive and every machine needs at least one person to operate it. It actually makes you realise that, with an average crew of only five or six, it is something of a miracle that our greenkeepers manage to do what they do. Certainly, other countries are open-mouthed in wonder.

I have always maintained the major problem with being a Course Manager or Head Greenkeeper is in dealing with the hundreds knocking your door with something to sell. That undoubtedly gave rise to a regrettable period 30 odd years ago when courses were subjected to overuse of water and fertiliser. It led to bad habits spawned from the belief that American-style courses, green wall-to-wall, were superior to our own. What made it even more reprehensible was the desertion of a traditional formula that was known to work.

The formation of the GTC was one of the influences that brought about a much needed change of heart but it had to be proved to a fresh audience and Laurence's presentations provided enough evidence to show that greenkeeping has mended its ways. Nevertheless, periodic reminders are always wise which is why good communications are so important.

September's workshops to which I referred brought together Greenkeepers, Green Committee Chairmen and Club Secretaries, engaging in an enjoyable open forum with Laurence who kept everyone interested for four or five hours which is no easy task. By engaging



in a comprehensive review of the fundamentals, the recurring theme was that greenkeeping is more common sense than mystic art.

Nobody can question that aeration, scarification, top dressing, over-seeding and sensible cutting heights are the common bonds of course managers everywhere. The skill lies in making on the spot, day to day judgements in adjusting to weather conditions. Details can vary even if principles are constant.

Resources differ from Club to Club and so do budgets which, in turn, can dictate methods. Practically the only advantage of growing old is you can make comparisons and, seeing the list of modern aeration techniques, brought to mind the days when, as a junior member of Denham in the 1950s, we earned welcome pocket money by lending a hand with the annual ritual of treating the greens.

It consisted of scarifying by hand with a springbok rake, cutting the shoots by hand that were raised, hand hollow-tining to a depth of no more than 2-3 inches, applying a dressing of soot and later rounding off with an application of dried blood, hoof and horn meal.

It was a laborious and dirty process involving working on perhaps two or three greens a day whereas, nowadays, the entire operation

can be completed in two days and the greens back near their best in little more than a week. In today's context, it is merely part of an industry's proud heritage in the same way as hickory shafts and gutta-percha balls but, while the only shot over which a player has influence is the next one, greenkeeping can only look ahead. Here the future couldn't be brighter.

BIGGA and the GTC have joint interests and responsibilities in raising standards and performance. The Home Unions lend practical and financial support, leaving golfers to understand that it is all being done for their benefit. Whether they do or not depends, as I have stressed, on the vital role of communication.

Owing to the demand for Chairman of Green – Secretary Manager – Course Manager workshops, more are being planned. Dates and venues will be available from the GTC and on the website.

Delegate feedback has also encouraged the GTC to organise more workshops covering such subjects as Health & Safety including EMPLOYER responsibilities and how to improve communications within the golf club.

All workshops will be conducted by GTC Quality Assured Training Providers.



The GTC is funded by:



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