



Greenkeepers Training Committee



This month it's GTC Chairman Donald Steel's turn to write the column...

GTC Chairman Donald Steel examines two ways of doing the same thing. Could greenkeeping throw up anything more contrasting?

One part of a job description for a Head Greenkeeper should surely be "you do what you have to do when you have to do it".

It might even carry the rider, "if you can do it. Constant adjustment, on account of the weather, makes me wonder how often, in fact, programmes can be implemented in any year without a hitch. Either that, or important exercises don't get carried out at all. Which is worse?

It is cold comfort that, in the more predictable climate of Augusta, preparations for the Masters progressed uninterrupted with every conceivable technical aid at their disposal. On the other hand, the bigger question is whether the maintenance and presentation of the course is the right way of doing things.

Although the Masters is watched on television from Kuwait to Kathmandu via Karachi, and hailed by some as golf's colourful shop window, to other eyes it represents more what not to do.

Scott Corrigan pulled no punches in his article in last month's edition. I must be careful not to tread on his territory except to say "hooray for his thoughts". What was equally fascinating in the same edition was Laurence Pithie's interview with Chris Mitchell at Royal Ashdown Forest and the comparison it threw up between Ashdown and Augusta and the different methods of maintaining the two courses. Apart from plying the same trade, the outlook for Chris and Brad Owen, the Augusta National Superintendent, has little in common.

It made me wonder, in fact, how an exchange would work, Chris



Heathland in all its glory behind the 9th green at Royal Ashdown GC

with a bottomless purse and Brad Owen, the Augusta Superintendent, restricted by austerity.

The first peculiarity is that, while Ashdown is launching a new playing season, Augusta is shutting its doors. In the heat of summer, the Augusta greenkeeping crew have the place to themselves - most likely carrying out one of the changes to the course for which they are famous.

They may be envied that they can re-lay a green in May and have it back in full play by the fall. As we heard and saw on television, the 14th green was the latest to be re-laid although it is still a minefield of crafty slopes.

Another revelation in the Links Golf Magazine was that Augusta has started using sensing camera technology at the 13th and 17th greens. The "Hawkeye" system provides infrared temperature readings every ten minutes to detect areas of stress caused not only by temperature, but by insects, fungus, disease, and other environmental stressors. That is in addition to four iPad controlled sensors on every green to monitor soil moisture, temperature, and salinity.

As far I am aware, such extremes

of scientific assistance haven't yet infiltrated Forest Row where Royal Ashdown Forest is celebrating its 125th anniversary and, without bunkers, has claims to being the most natural of golf's settings. However, one joint aim shared by Mitchell and Owen is a preference for a fast running course to high-light strategic subtleties.

Augusta was, after all, designed for Bobby Jones by Alister Mackenzie based on the love of both for St Andrews. If it doesn't rain for The Masters and the greens are firm, chipping and putting becomes a test of nerve and judgement like no other but, if either element is slightly awry, even the best can look stupid - horribly stupid.

Some players may try to blame the insects and soil temperature readings although the caddies may not include their iPads in their golf bags. In any event, they could constitute an outside agency but they are further examples that The Masters and the Augusta National Golf Club occupy a golfing world of their own, a far cry from the days when Bobby Jones founded the Club so that he and his special chums could gather in the winter for a little, gentle golf. Now, look what's happened.



The GTC is funded by:



Contact Details

David Golding
GTC Education Director
and European Greenkeeping
Education Unit Standards
Director

01347 838640
david@the-gtc.co.uk

GTC
Aldwark Manor
Near York
YO61 1UF

www.the-gtc.co.uk
www.egeu.eu
www.greenkeepertraining.com



You can follow the GTC on
Twitter @TheOfficialGTC