



Greenkeeper Education and Development Fund

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For details, please contact Ken Richardson on 01347 833800 or via ken@bigga.co.uk

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Education Update

Ken Richardson, Education and Training Manager, reports on his trip to the GCSAA Golf Industry Show in Atlanta, USA.

A week in Harrogate followed by a week in Atlanta, attending the Golf Industry Show, has shown me that we achieved a great deal at Harrogate Week with a minimum of resources. Yes, the Golf Club Show is larger, they have more education opportunities and more people attend, but their resources, both financial and human are much greater than ours.

As others have indicated elsewhere, there is a threat to Harrogate Week 2007 from some of the larger machinery companies deciding not to exhibit at BTME. However, we plan to have even more educational opportunities targeted at all levels of greenkeeper, at golf club secretaries, at groundsman and at golf club professionals. We have had some excellent feedback from delegates at Continue to Learn 2006 and we are using that feedback to design our programme for 2007. You can have your say on what you would like to see included in the Harrogate Week programme by contacting me at BIGGA HOUSE.

What were my impressions of the Golf Club Show? Considering that the Show was scheduled to take place in New Orleans, then in Houston, it was a miracle that the GCSAA managed to put together such an extensive education programme and trade show. Overall, the Show was very much like Harrogate but on a larger scale.

American superintendents have the same sort of problems as British greenkeepers and their education programme contained subjects such as 'Strategies for poa annua prevention and control' through to 'Speaking with impact' both subjects included at Harrogate. Other similarities were seminars on Microsoft Powerpoint, Excel and Word, plus management subjects such as Financial Management and Project management. Some subjects such as Managing an Hispanic Workforce or Spanish for Golf Course Managers may not be quite so popular however.

What about Atlanta? Well it was big, cold (around 34F, 1°C), wet and expensive. It was also full of British and European greenkeepers. Highlights of Atlanta were the Coca Cola museum, an aquarium and dozens of shopping malls. However, the highlight of my week was a trip to Augusta National.

I am very grateful to Brad at Augusta for allowing us to visit, to Jim for hosting us so well and to Stan Zontek for arranging it all. We spent a full morning touring the maintenance facilities and the golf course and it was apparent that customer care was their top priority. We have all heard of the Augusta factor that happens each spring when the US Masters is on TV, but being there, walking the course and talking to the greenkeepers gives you a completely different view of the place.

Yes, it is a wealthy course, they have plenty of staff and plenty of machinery but the way that they manage the course is no different from many other



courses. Just one example was the use of green sand for top dressing so that golfers did not notice what had occurred.

Now that I am back in the office and my jet lag is almost gone, my thoughts turn to the help that we can give greenkeepers to develop their careers through education and training.

BIGGA HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS

Thanks to continued sponsorship from Ransomes Jacobsen, we can, once again, offer Higher Education Scholarships to BIGGA members. Scholarships are awarded to greenkeepers attending or about to attend a course of higher education, for example N/SVQ Level 4, HNC, HND, Foundation Degree, BSc/BA or MSC.

Successful scholars are expected to keep BIGGA informed of their progress, to supply educational material for Greenkeeper International and agree to be photographed and interviewed at their graduation. Scholarships are usually awarded to cover half tuition fees.

TORO STUDENT OF THE YEAR COMPETITION

Application forms for this year's competition will be sent to training providers this month. If you do not receive a copy by March 31 then please contact us at BIGGA HOUSE.

The winner in 2005, Alan Pierce, had an interesting visit to the Golf Industry Show in Atlanta. His flight back to the North East of the US was cancelled due to heavy snow and he was stuck in Atlanta until the airports opened again. It did give him time to complete his revision for his final exams.

Rachael and Gemma would like to welcome 61 new members to the Association and talk about a car hire affinity scheme.

Membership Update

BIGGA welcomes...

SCOTTISH REGION

Chris Barnard, Central
Lewys Bryce, East
Barry Campbell, North
David Cooper, Central
Dane Macpherson, North
Anthony Marr, Central
William McGhie, Ayrshire
Colin McKay, Central
Matthew McLean, Central
Kevin Muir, Central
Michael Petrie, Central
Robert Richards, Central
Andrew Richards, Central
Alan Russell, Central
William Stenhouse, Ayrshire
John Williamson, East
Graham Winter, Central

NORTHERN REGION

Shaun Conway, North West
Sam Wilkinson, North West

MIDLAND REGION

Steven Harvey, Midland
George Mennell, BB&O
Adrian Myatt, Midland
Danny Saunders, BB&O
Jonathan Shaw, Midland
Philip Vaughan, East Midland
Ashley Webb, BB&O
Simon White, East of England
Clint Woodall, Midland

SOUTH EAST REGION

Gary Cheeseman, Surrey
Liam Close, East Anglia
Stephen Goodliff, Surrey
Edward Goodwin, East Anglia
Kevin Goude, East Anglia
Barry West, Surrey

SOUTH WEST/SOUTH WALES

Adam Dando, South West
Ben Flower, South West
Simon Free, South West
Brian Gogan, South Coast
Daniel Greening, South West
Elliott Holman, Devon & Cornwall
Ian Larcombe, South West
Mark Lewer, South West
Nigel Pring, South West
Steve Randall, South West
Christian Ross, South Coast
Ben Sears, South Wales
Stephen Woodward, South West

INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS

Lars Bange, Sweden
Thomas Hellickson, Switzerland
Soren Nicholson, Denmark

STUDENT MEMBERS

David Feeny, East Scotland
Colin Kirby, East Scotland
Paucic Mc Groary, USA
Steve Newell, N Ireland
Steindor Ragnarsson, Central Scotland

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

David Nelson, Ayrshire
Christian Donaldson, East Midland
Colin Rutterford, East Anglia
Nick Saunders, East Midland

CORPORATE MEMBER

Gary Tait, Kent

Discounted Car Hire for BIGGA Members

BIGGA has enrolled on National's Affinity leisure programme, which enables BIGGA members to benefit from preferential rates on car and van hire in the UK and on international car hire in over 80 countries worldwide. The discounts are available when renting a vehicle in your leisure time and prices are continually checked against other companies to ensure competitive rates.



If you fancy a bit of luxury then a car from the Guy Salmon Fleet is also available at a discount. For a National car or van quotation or to make a booking you need to call 0870 191 6950.

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- A099084 for Car Hire
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Forthcoming Events

It's that time of year when all the Sections are putting the final touches to their fixture lists. As these are being published they are entered onto the events page of the BIGGA website, www.bigga.org.uk, so you are always fully up to date with what's going on in your area.

If you do not have access to the website then the Around the Green pages in Greenkeeper International contains information about any events coming up shortly.

MARCH'S MEMBERSHIP DRAW WINNER



Just introduce one or more new greenkeeping members to BIGGA and your name will be placed into a draw to win a Digital FM Scan Radio/Alarm. The radio can stand alone or can be clipped onto a belt with headphones for when you're on the move. Our congratulations go to Antony Bindley, of Kirby Muxloe GC.

USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS:

Please be ready to quote your membership number when calling.

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(Ask for Ira Mullish or Michaela Edwards)	
ALL MEMBERS	
LEX Personal Car Leasing	0800 419 930
Quote: 'Staffselect - BIGGA'	
Unique Insurance Quotation Service	01603 828255
Arco Hotline (20% off Selected Products)	01482 611773
Haztek International Health and Safety Hotline	0845 1081339
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Letters ▶▶

Help!

I am an ex Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper and worked at various golf clubs around the UK for 23 years up until 1999. I was also a member of BGGGA, which became EIGGA and finally BIGGA and was a committee member in the Surrey Section, working at Bramley Golf Club, between 1980 and 1983 where I met and talked passionately with Jack McMillan and Kenny McNiven, amongst others. From there I took up a position at the Royal Norwich Golf Club. I hope that some of your members can help me.

I own a pedestrian certes mower, which was originally one of three units from an unused Ransomes Overgreen donkey engine triple greens mower dating back to the 1950's. The brass plate on the RH side casing states that it is a Ransomes certes MK12 made by Ransomes, Simms and Jeffries. I don't know where else to look for specific identification numbers.

It is a geared push mower with a 16" width of cut (certes mower units are listed as 12" or 14" wide, but I can assure you that this one was used on an overgreen). The cylinder has 10 blades and is approx 4.5" in diameter at present, although a new cylinder may be closer to 5" in diameter.

The problem is that the cylinder blades are now worn down almost to the webbing and it is difficult, if not impossible, to adjust the cut. I estimate that it will last until the end of this season and then the cut quality will deteriorate to the point where it will no longer cut at all.

I have tried contacting various people and companies to try to find a solution to the problem, but to date have not had any success. I am mystified by the situation as I know that certes cutting units are well renowned and some are still in use.

As I see it I have four options:

- 1) A new cutting cylinder, but that will be expensive (I have been quoted £150 net by Garfitts).
- 2) A reconditioned cutting cylinder, but I'm not sure whether anyone supplies them.
- 3) Have the blades removed and new or reconditioned ones installed, followed by grinding. This will be expensive due to the time involved.
- 4) Find a complete unit for sale. In all cases, I will probably need a new or reconditioned bottom blade. Or have my present one, allows for a height of cut as low as 3mm (1/8") reconditioned.

Am I correct? I hope someone can help, or if not can suggest a course of action or a contact who can help me?

Tel: 07905 848981; Email: bertiep@yahoo.com.

Paul Bertenshaw

Over the Pond

Having just returned from Atlanta and the GCSAA Show I felt that I wanted to drop a quick note to say thank you to all those involved in the BIGGA Delegation, sponsored by Bernard & Co.

The week long trip was full of new and innovative ideas from across the pond and from the Delegation, which I will undoubtedly use on my return to my golf course.

I would thoroughly recommend this experience to anyone from the greenkeeping world. It was a packed seven days with access to areas of the Show, which not everyone can reach. For this I would like to thank Steven Bernard, Kim Furnell and the Bernard team. Also John Pemberton, Richard Wyman and the other Greenkeepers in the Delegation.

J. Austin

Course Manager

Windwhistle Golf Club

YOUR LETTERS ARE REQUESTED!

Send to: Scott MacCallum, Editor, Greenkeeper International, BIGGA HOUSE, Aldwark, Alne, York YO61 1UF, or email them to: scott@bigga.co.uk.

AFT

HAD THAT **SINKING** FEELING THIS WINTER?



AFT 45

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Say Cheese!

Do you fancy yourself as a photographer and do you have a golf course that you feel you'd like to show off to a wider audience? If the answer to both is a resounding "Yes" why not enter BIGGA's Golf Course Photography Competition?

You all have them. Those special places on the golf course where you like to spend time. It may be it gives you inspiration for the work you have in front of you or it might be somewhere you go to buck up your spirits when you're having a bad day. Perhaps it might not be the most stunningly attractive part of the golf course, but the chances are it will be.

That's why that special place will probably be what you chose to capture in the first BIGGA Golf Photography Competition. More and more greenkeepers are using cameras to record the work they do on their courses while, at the same time, commercially aware clubs are using photography to market themselves to the golfing public.

The BIGGA Golf Photography Competition will allow greenkeepers to display their artistic talents and earn some publicity for their club.



The winner will receive a full course profile in Greenkeeper International, a trophy and a special prize, while the 12 best will be selected for the 2007 BIGGA Calendar.

Photographs will be accepted in three forms. Prints (nine inch by seven inch), transparencies or digitally (pictures must be at least 300 psi and capable of being blown up to nine inches by seven inches in size).

Judging the entries will be a professional golf course photographer; Alan Birch, whose inspiration the golf course photographic competition has been, and Scott MacCallum, Greenkeeper International Editor.

Entries should be sent to BIGGA HOUSE, Aldwark, Alne, York YO61 1UF (Digital photographs should be sent on disc), by June 30, 2007.



Playing a pivotal role

The concept of applying products to the turf to encourage both soil bacteria and fungal populations has gained momentum in the turfgrass industry over the past number of years. Numerous products have been and continue to be developed to help turf professionals deal with day-to-day management challenges arising from their constant quest for perfect playing surfaces. One such group of products are biostimulants and microbial inoculants. However the actual benefits of these products are still not yet fully understood.



WHY USE MICROBIAL INOCULANTS AND BIOSTIMULANTS?

The environmental consequences of turfgrass management, in particular golf course maintenance, have captured much media attention. Unfortunately, most of it negative. Golf course greens are an extreme example of a stressed setting. On a green, the grass blade is severely reduced by regular mowing. Added to this is the removal of grass clippings, which eliminates the ability to recycle the valuable minerals they contain. Thus an understanding of the requirements of turfgrasses is among the most important factors in their successful culture.

We all know that correct nutrition is essential for the plant to carry out physiological processes and for maintaining high quality, disease-free turf. However to maintain high quality playing surfaces, particularly on golf greens, moderate to large amounts of fertilisers and chemicals are often required. The need for high nutrient quantities is often compounded by the use of inert sand-based rootzones especially on golf greens which in contrast to sand/soil greens have limited amounts of soil organic matter and require higher quantities of nutrient fertilisers. It is well known that, although sands provide favourable physical properties, they are prone to leaching of water-soluble nutrients.

Because ponds, lakes and rivers border golf course greens, fairways and tees, there is potential for fertiliser and chemical leaching and run-off, which would be a serious source of water pollution. One of the greatest potential threats is from eutrophication, which can cause excessive production of the suspended planktonic algae. Thus developing low risk fertiliser and fungicide programmes may reduce potential pollution.

THE SOIL ENVIRONMENT

Natural environments are extremely diverse and the majority contain a wide range of micro-organisms. An important soil function is the harbouring of a diverse community of organisms that includes bacteria, fungi, mites, springtails, protozoa, millipedes and many others. The most important of these being beneficial bacteria and fungi which are critical to plant health. The microbial community is essential to the decomposition of organic residues and the recycling of critical nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus. Due to these activities, soil organisms help in supporting the growth of plants and absorbing, neutralizing and transforming compounds that might otherwise become pollutants in the environment.

Undisturbed soil rootzones normally have healthy populations of these micro-organisms. However in recent years it has been claimed sand-based rootzones, in particular newly-constructed ones, are relatively sterile in comparison to sand/soil rootzones. Thus, any possible benefits that micro-organisms may confer during the early establishment of turfgrass in a newly-constructed putting green are severely reduced.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF BIOSTIMULANTS

The term biostimulant usually refers to those products that are aimed at stimulating the biological content of the soil by providing food for microbes and in doing so increasing microbial populations. Sea kelp, humic acids, plant hormones, organic products, molasses, yeast extracts and vitamins are common components of biostimulants.

Kelp is probably the most widely known biostimulant in turfgrass management and contains numerous trace elements, alginic acid and plant hormones. One should remember that all kelp is not equally suitable for use as biostimulant material, with cold-water kelp containing higher levels of plant hormones than heat-processed kelp and is thus an excellent biostimulant component.

Humic acids, which are naturally occurring organic materials derived from biological sources, are also commonly found in biostimulant products. In recent times, biostimulants are often made up of a mixture of various different products, with seaweed extract/humic acid being one of the most popular.

Other possible benefits of biostimulants are based on their ability to influence plant hormonal activity. Hormones in plants are chemical messengers regulating plant development such as root and shoot growth, as well as responses to the environment. Therefore they influence overall plant growth and health.

Auxins, cytokinins and gibberellins are the principle growth-promoting hormones found in plants. When growing under normal conditions, plants have adequate endogenous levels of hormones for normal growth. However if the plant becomes stressed then the plants natural production of these hormones can be negatively affected.

Some biostimulants have added levels of inorganic and organic fertiliser to provide some direct plant growth. It is important to remember though that biostimulants, even those containing some added fertilisers, do not supply all the essential nutrients a plant requires. Some of the potential benefits from using biostimulants are given below:

- Possible reduced fertiliser requirements
- Increased microbial activity
- Enhanced plant hormone levels
- Improved drought and heat resistance
- Increased root and shoot growth
- Amplified tolerance to disease infection
- Promotion of antioxidant activity

Tim Butler investigates Microbial Inoculants and Biostimulants.

Plants typically grow well without biostimulants in favourable environmental conditions. However, one must remember that biostimulants help to condition the plant by enhancing the plant's defensive system. So when the plant becomes stressed, biostimulant-conditioned plants perform. In my opinion, it is vital that if one is to use a biostimulant programme, then it is essential to begin using it in the spring, before the summer heat and stress sets in. Biostimulants will not perform as well once the plant is stressed.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF MICROBIAL INOCULANTS

Microbial inoculants, which are often known as bio fertilisers, work differently to biostimulants in that they actually contain spores of beneficial fungi, bacteria or both. These spores are formulated into powder or water-dispersible products that can be applied to soil.

Bacteria occur in the greatest numbers in soils and are possibly the most diverse in their physiology. Bacteria within the genera *Azotobacter*, *Azospirillum*, *Enterobacter* and *Klebsiella* are efficient, free-living, nitrogen-fixing organisms, taking nitrogen and converting it to a form that plants can use. Bacteria from the genera *Pseudomonas* and *Azospirillum* are well known for their growth-promotive effects. These bacteria are commonly included in microbial inoculant blends.

The nitrogen in inorganic fertiliser sources is in a form already available to the plant. No microbes are required. However, for organic sources, we often forget that microbes are required to convert the nitrogen into a form that can be used by the plant such as ammonia. Synthetic organic nitrogen fertilizers include ureaformaldehydes, sulfur-coated urea, resin-coated urea and isobutylidenediurea.

In some cases, large populations of bacteria may give rise to what are known as suppressive soils. These are basically soils that have conditions ideally suited to disease development and have the disease pathogen present yet no disease occurs. This may be due to the activity of the bacteria, which inhibit turfgrass pathogens by competing for resources and producing antibiotic compounds.

Fungi are also a very important component of microbial inoculants. These fungi can be present as spores, hyphae (see Picture 1) or colonized roots. Mycorrhizal fungi are among the most popular fungi used in inoculants. Mycorrhiza refers to an association between the plant and fungi, where the fungi colonize the plant's root system during times of active plant growth. Several types of mycorrhiza fungi form mycorrhiza with grass plants, with arbuscular mycorrhizae also known as endomycorrhiza being the most common.



An arbuscule attached to a root



Soil hyphae establish contact with roots and penetrate the root's surface

Mycorrhizal fungi function by hyphae of the mycorrhizae penetrating between and inside the outer cells of the plant roots. Once inside the root, the fungus forms special coiled hyphae called arbuscules that provide increased nutrients to the grass in exchange for food for the fungus. This hyphal network within the soil is a vital component of the soil ecosystem. The mycorrhizal fungal system will in time form a dense network around the grass root system and provide the grass plants with plenty of food and water. This dense network ensures that the grass plant will be able to access a lot more nutrients than if it were depending solely on its own root system.

- Potential benefits of microbial inoculants include:
- Enhanced plant nutrient availability
- Lower fertiliser requirements
- Superior pathogen resistance
- Better stress resistance
- Improved soil porosity and thus increased water and air movement
- Augmented plant root length and number
- Reduction in thatch build-up

However, it is important to remember that mycorrhizal colonization can be greatly influenced by soil phosphorus levels and herbicide use. It has been shown that high phosphorus levels can severely reduce fungal colonisation, while large volumes of herbicides can desiccate fungal populations.

Looking to the future, I feel that biostimulants and in particular microbial inoculants will play a pivotal role in turfgrass nutrition and maintenance. I believe that these products will never or could ever replace the use of fertilisers and fungicides. However, they may allow us to be less dependent on traditional turfgrass practices by an integrated approach and ultimately contribute to a reduction in fertility and chemical inputs.

Tim Butler is carrying out research in the area of turfgrass nutrition for a doctorate degree at both University College Dublin, Ireland, and Michigan State University, USA.

Pictures courtesy of Professor Nair, Michigan State University, USA

Course Feature

Golf. The Future?

Scott MacCallum travels to north London to see a complex which might just kick start a new wave of young golfers and gives more playing opportunities for the more time-poor player.

If I'm struggling to sleep - tossing and turning about how to make Greenkeeper International a better read - I often play a round of golf in my head. I might start on the 1st of the Old Course, St Andrews and take in the best holes in the world of golf until I nod off usually about three under par with four to play.

Greg Evans, Course Manager at the new Northwick Park complex in Harrow, North London, doesn't need to close his eyes to imagine such an eclectic course - he's looking after some of the finest holes in golf every day of the week.

Northwick Park, in sight of the new Wembley Stadium, is a revolutionary new venture, designed to open golf up to a wider participating audience and provide a solution to those who feel the game takes up too much of their time.

The complex boasts a two tier driving range; restaurant cum coffee shop and bar; gym, baseball batting cages; enormous golf shop; a state-of-the-art short game practice area; five coaching studios; children's course; an adventure/crazy course and, of course, those famous holes.

The six hole course - there are actually eight, but two are rested on a weekly basis - offer golfers the rare chance to pit their wits against the challenges that face the biggest names in golf.

Let's just run through them. The 1st is the par-3 6th at the Riviera Country Club in the US, with its famous bunker in the centre of the green; the 2nd in a shortened version of the 16th at Ganton; the 3rd is the par-3 6th at Oak Hill, where Costantino Rocca made a hole-in-one during the '95 Ryder Cup match; the 4th is modelled on a traditional Gleneagles fairway with the 9th green at The Belfry; the 5th swaps between the 12th at Royal Birkdale and the 8th at Royal Troon - the world famous Postage Stamp, while the 6th flips between those two frightening par-3s on Augusta's back nine, the 12th and 16th.

Northwick Park is owned by Playgolf, which has traditionally been a driving range operator, and was the brainchild of Peter McEvoy and Ricky



Northwick Park greenkeeping team

Willison. Peter, the legendary British Amateur, is the last amateur to make the cut at The Masters and inspirational Walker Cup Captain while Ricky is a former Walker Cup player and European Tour player who is now pro at Ealing Golf Club, the club where, Greg, the new Course Manager is a member.

The initial spark for what has become known as Urban Golf came from Ricky who visited a golf complex while playing a tournament in South Africa.

"He paid a fee and spent most of the day practicing and thought it was a great idea," explained Greg, no mean golfer himself as a former winner of The Berkshire Trophy, the English Champion of Champions and member of the England "B" squad.

Ricky then discussed his ideas with Peter and they took the idea to



1st green and fairway - Riviera Country Club in the US



What the site looked like before work started on the 1st

Playgolf who had purchased the old rubbish tip on which Northwick Park now exists and which was earmarked for a more conventional range and short course.

Peter and Ricky's enthusiasm for the project, experience and skill sold the idea to Playgolf and they then set about designing the golf course on land that to the untrained, even trained, eye offered little by way of clue as to what might be possible.

"They walked the site and saw a mound and Peter suggested that it could be the mound to the left of The Postage Stamp and they moved on from there," explained Greg.

"Peter wanted an Augusta element to the course and also a Ganton hole, as that was where he had captained the Walker Cup team to victory. The rest fell into place based on the knowledge they had of holes around the world. They wanted the Riveira Country Club hole as the bunker in the middle of the green is such a distinctive feature."

St Andrews has not been forgotten as there is a tribute to the Road Hole green, complete with Road Hole bunker, on the short game area.

Prior to taking over, Greg was self employed to give himself enough opportunities to play amateur golf, when Ricky introduced him to Playgolf who offered him the chance of becoming Course Manager.

"I saw it as a challenge and a fresh new idea and I was keen to become involved."

He joined just after the course had been constructed by Midland's-based Delta Golf and seeded and he started putting a greenkeeping infrastructure into place.

"I was on my own for six months then employed Warren Clements, from Ealing GC, as my Deputy six months later, two more staff followed in the autumn of 2004 and then a further four last summer," said Greg, adding that four of his staff are Polish.



The 5th - Royal Troon and Royal Berkdale



Would you believe that this is now the 4th!

"The team is superb. They all work hard and learn quickly which has been important as some of them didn't know anything about golf when they started. It has only been since last November, and the grand opening, that we have had golfers on the course so they have had to learn rules and etiquette. This, in itself, has helped me become a more effective communicator and manager.

"It has been a great experience for me setting up the team and ensuring everything has been put in place with regard to machinery, maintenance facilities, policies etc."

The team is worked extremely hard as tees and greens are hand cut - there are eight greens on the course plus the equivalent of several more on the practice green and short game area, while there are 26 bunkers on the course plus another six in the practice area.

They also have to collect balls from the driving range - up to 40,000 while they are also responsible for the other outdoor areas including the baseball cages.

"We top dress and verticut on a weekly basis but it can be difficult on the fairways as the course sits on four inches of sand with rubbish underneath. You can be digging up iron bars and all sorts of things.

"Golf starts at 8am and will go on until dusk - play will be limited to 200 rounds a day at 15 minute intervals - so we have to have everything done before the start as you can't do the front nine first when there is only six holes and everyone is round in an hour."

The greens are all built to USGA specification, sown with creeping bent (G6) while the fairways are a mixture of rye grass and fescue. Each hole is presented in the style which befits the nature of the course it came from. The 1st has rye grass fairways and sports a diamond cut; 2nd is fescue and cut half and half and receives very little feeding with gorse to give it the inland links look; the 3rd and 4th are rye and diamond cut the two 5ths



The 4th - 9th green at the Belfry

Course Feature

receive no feeding and are cut half and half while the 6th Augusta holes are diamond cut with the greens striped while in the winter there are artificial azaleas and rhododendrons until the real McCoy develop and the seven pine trees were moved from the short game area and need daily watering. There are also three types of sand been used - PS White, Leighton Buzzard Medium and Silver White, brought in from Plymouth.

"The links bunkers have been revetted, it was taken on as an in-house project, but we are discovering that they are still settling. Other problems are being caused on the Riviera bunker with the green suffering from sand blast and people taking divots," said Greg, who added that the entire complex is contained within 33 acres.

"The creeping bent has been superb. It was germinating within five days of it being sewn and after two months we were cutting at six mil. It is very labour intensive - we poa pick the greens after every cut a job that takes about five minutes per green - but it produces superb putting surfaces."

The team is also working hard to improve the collars where initially seed had become mixed in. A two year programme involving the Graden, hollow coring and overseeding has been instigated.

Agronomist John O'Sullivan, from Ireland, has been retained to assist with any problems with the creeping bent as he has experience based on his time as Superintendent at Waterville and Druid's Glen.

"Other courses with creeping bent in this country include The Grove and The Wisley and they are top quality venues which regular golfers would struggle to get on. People can come here, pay and play and experience the greens," said Greg, who added that he played his greens a couple of weeks before and is convinced there would be none quicker in the country.

Indeed, Middlesex County Union are to base themselves at Northwick Park, a move assisted by Greg, a former Middlesex County Champion.

"We only previously had one practice facility in the county and I used to practice on the 13th green at Ealing, having to move when golfers arrived. I think our practice facilities are on a par with those at Woodhall Spa (the EGU's National Golf Centre)."



The 6th - the 9th and 12th at Augusta

The nature of the course is that temporary greens won't be possible and although Greg has closed the course for frost in the time the course has already been open he is sure there will be pressure on him to keep them open all year round in the future.

What struck me when I arrived at the Centre, and its leisure centre-style reception facing the two tiered glass backed driving range and flanked by the restaurant and coffee shop on one side and the golf shop on the other was the enthusiasm being shown by the young clientele.

It was half term and the place was full of young children from every ethnic background, dressed as young kids do, in tracksuits, baggy trousers or football tops, some wielding baseball bats and helmets and others carrying golf bags and clubs. The range was full and while the quality of the golf swings would have David Leadbetter waking up in a cold sweat they were all enjoying the game of golf as their parents or guardians enjoyed a latte or a glass of wine. It was as far removed from the conventional scene at a traditional golf club as it is possible to be and might just open the door to many more new golfers.

"Playgolf are hoping to open another in Glasgow and Cardiff has also been mentioned. It is urban golf and I think there is a big future in it," said Greg.

In the meantime he will enjoy his trip around the world every time he walks his special little course.



The 5th at Royal Troon's world famous Postage Stamp