



ROUGH JUSTICE

Scott MacCallum chats with John Philp, about preparations for this year's Open and looks back at the most controversial Championship of recent times

Let's rewind to the end of April and a function room within the excellent Carnoustie Hotel, which overlooks the 18th green of this year's Open venue. The annual R&A press conference has just finished and one man is surrounded by the nation's golf writers, with a battery of dictaphones and tape recorders stuck inches from his nose.

Carnoustie Links Superintendent, John Philp, is the man at the centre of all the attention. Eight years ago he was identified as being responsible for the famous links being renamed "Carnasty", when many players hit out at the playability of the course. John was infamously described as "an out of control greenkeeper" who, among other devilish acts, had fertilised the rough in a warped attempt to make the players look foolish.

Three months ahead of this year's Championship the press were taking their chance to quiz the man himself.

John coped with all the attention admirably, answering the questions as fully as he could and certainly giving as good as he got in a relaxed, honest, and up-front manner.

What those golf writers missed out on, however, was the opportunity to sit down with John at length and listen to his philosophies on golf course management and on his beloved Carnoustie Links.

For example, had they heard him talk about the work he and his staff have done to reward a player for finding the fairway, or ensuring consistency of bounce when the ball lands, they would have discovered a man as knowledgeable as he is passionate on the subject of fine turf and golf. They would also have learned more about the reasons why so many of the world's best struggled in '99.

Sitting in his office, close to the 10th green on the Championship course and 5th green of the excellent Burnside course, John first of all paid tribute to his team and outlined some of the work they have been doing since the Open's last visit.

"I've got a wonderful team and, although they are split over our three courses, they combined over the winter to re-do over 90 bunkers on the Championship course. We have 26 greenstaff in total, as well as four in the workshop, some of whom were here in '99, but also a lot of lads working on an Open for the first time. My staff produce the highest standards of workmanship and I'm very proud of their achievements.

"I am very fortunate to have very talented people in key positions. Sandy Reid is the skilful and committed head man on the championship course and Eric Watson with his wealth of experience leads the workshop team. I have worked with my Deputy, Paul O'Connor since 1990. He has an impeccable knowledge of links turf management and has been instrumental in the development at Carnoustie Links over the years."

The team has spent a lot of time trying to get a balance on the fairways between low areas, which obviously can be a little lush and higher parts so that they will perform similarly.

"The ball is not going to sit on a crown, it's going to roll into the hollows but we feel that the crowned area is the type of turf, providing a nice tight lie, that enables a player, with the skill to do it, to squeeze the ball out and get spin."

For a good number of years the team has been verticutting and hollow coring to get as much sand into the low areas to give them the same playability quality as those higher areas.

“We’ll cut these areas a bit lower, 6-7 mm is not uncommon in good growth, to control the mixed grass sward. We also overseed the higher areas with fescue, adding wetting agent and liquid seaweed where necessary to hold moisture and retain sward density. The Hydroject has been a great tool for us.”

John is well aware that this sort of high intensity work is not something many clubs could tackle.

“We’re fortunate that we have a big enough staff and the equipment to do this compared with the more limited staff single course clubs would have,” said John, who when asked whose turf he envies most, offered up Muirfield, Gullane and, in particular, Luffness.

“I get a lift when I go to these places and look around. Basic greenkeeping principles have been followed over the decades and they haven’t had to fight back from misguided agricultural policies.”

Back at Carnoustie - where John has had a constant battle with rye grass contamination in many playing areas brought in as a new “super grass” many decades ago - and having catered for the skilled golfer, who has found the fairway from the tee, John and his team were intent on ensuring that the player could then be rewarded when it comes to the shot in to the green.

“When the ball lands on the approach or the green itself you want a reaction on the ball that is consistent and to know that if it lands on the approach to the green it will get the same reaction as if the ball landed on the green itself.

“And you need rooting for that, which you get from fescue and, indeed, brown top bent grass, but which you can’t get with meadow grass. I don’t care how well it’s prepared, you can’t get proper ball reaction from meadow grass because it doesn’t have the root system to give you that resilience and consistency of reaction when the ball lands.

“With a meadow grass dominated sward the ball will either land soft, make a dent, bounce up and perhaps suck back, or, if it’s hard and dry enough, have no resilience at all and bounce on through the green. A

player sometime doesn’t know what to expect,” explained John, whose passion when he describes such things shines through like a beacon.

“We want to retain more of the residual spin when the ball lands. Greens are not only prepared for smoothness and puttability – but also for how they receive the ball and, from a well struck shot from the perfect lie, we want the ball to bounce twice then, on the third bounce, grip - not spin back, but stop. That’s what we are trying to achieve, but a lot will depend on moisture levels at the time.”

“The guy who is sitting in the perfect lie in the fairway and with the skill to spin the ball should be rewarded, but he won’t be if the green is such that everyone can control the ball all on it from any lie on the course,” said John, who in conjunction with the R&A, has been using the Turf Thumper, a USGA designed-tool, comprising a tube with a ball shaped centre, linked to a computer, which drops on the turf to measure the firmness and resilience of greens and, indeed fairways.

So there you have it. Just a snapshot of the thought and skill which has gone into some of the preparation for this year’s Open venue.

What then happened eight years ago to cause such controversy and produce such negative headlines?

“In the lead up we were aware of the severity of the rough and that some of the fairways were a bit narrow in places, narrower than they will be this year, but following on from a wet year in ‘98, the rough was very severe on many courses on the east coast of Scotland in the lead up to ‘99,” recalled John.

What couldn’t have been foreseen however was the situation which arose on the 6th hole – Hogan’s Alley.

With a strong prevailing headwind the players were frightened of the out of bounds left so were laying up short making it a genuine three shotter. They then couldn’t reach the regular second shot landing area about 60-70 yards short of the green. The second shots were landing in a very narrow area bordered by thick rough about 50 yards in length which was never intended to be a landing area,” explained John.





That area was widened just after The Open and has remained so ever since while the landing area off the tee has been made more inviting, encouraging players to hit driver, with the fairway bunkering amended by Martin Hawtree.

The 3rd hole has also been altered by Martin and the rough on the 17th and 18th holes recontoured. The course is now actually 60 yards longer than in '99, and is the longest on the Open rota at 7421 yards, complete with two par-4 measuring more than 500 yards. It will be no cakewalk.

What disappointed John and his team more than anything in the aftermath of '99 was the fact that the attention was firmly on the penal rough and not on the wonderful condition that the "in play" areas were in.

"The lads were very disappointed because they knew what they'd put into the course and they knew what the playing surfaces were like - the areas the players were meant to be on. This wasn't emphasised, because it wasn't controversial to say that the fairways were firm and the greens were consistently pacey and true," said John, who did say that some players, including Ernie Els, praised them for the course condition, while others, among them Tiger Woods, didn't make any negative comments.

John's opinion on golf course set up and the nature of player power and press coverage, is also equally well argued.

"Rough is a hazard area. If players go into the Barry Burn, as is very common, there is never anything said - players fish out the ball, take a penalty drop and play on. But go into the rough and there is a totally different outlook. 'I'm 150 yards away, 40 yards off line. I should be able to get to the green from here, but this rough is ridiculous.'

"To me the other way is far worse. When a player, 30 yards off line - in the rough, a supposed area of punishment - can hit a 3-iron 220 yards onto the green. No-one says that's nonsense, he shouldn't be able to do that, but the media will say, 'What a fantastic shot. What a player!' But he was 30 yards off line and had the perfect lie!" said John.

"Ok, we obviously accept that we want to progress in golf turf management, presentation and quality, ball reaction, etc but when it comes to hazards on the links, nature prevails."

So what is the definitive answer to that fertilising the rough rumour and how did it get started?

"That came from Greg Norman who had just taken a 7 on the 17th. It was quoted that he was just a couple of feet off the fairway but, in fact, he was through the three metre wide semi rough and in the really thick stuff. What he said in his interview afterwards was that he'd never seen links rough so green.

"Like other courses in this area the rough can colour quite well and it can take quite a bit of dry weather to discolour it. That year it never did turn to semi dormancy and certainly was nothing like Hoylake last year." Having talked about the rough it is perhaps ironic that the lasting memory of the '99 Open is of Jean Van De Velde, shoes and socks off, standing in the Barry Burn as he nightmarishly threw away a certain win.

Jean's thoughts of playing from the Burn seemed ambitious at best but John revealed that Sam Snead successfully extracted himself from a sand bank in the burn during the 1937 Open. This year, though, the wall around the burn is one block higher where Van De Velde dropped in.

It is to be hoped that 2007 brings no more rough justice for Carnoustie but that all the memories it creates revolve around wonderful golf and a fine tuned and well received golf course. They should be.



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MAKING THE MOST OF THE PRACTICE GROUND

Colin Jenkins, takes a look at some of the issues in relation to adding a commercial golf range to a golf club's facilities

In the British Isles there are nearly 1500 golf ranges, with a little over 800 of these ranges located on their own as 'stand alone' facilities. Nearly 700 golf clubs have fully functional practice grounds, that is to say a range type system where balls are sold or provided and then collected centrally, cleaned and distributed to other golfers.

Golf clubs have changed substantially over the last 100 years. First, it would be most unlikely for any more 'members clubs' to be built. Originally these clubs or associations were the normal way that clubs came into being. These days golf clubs are built for commercial reasons and, due to changes in society and the law, it would be most unlikely that a group of individuals could create a new club from scratch, although some existing proprietary clubs are still being bought by groups of members.

The original golf club had little need for those wishing to learn the game, as golfers seemed to just materialise, and the lack of practice facilities definitely led to some interesting swings – in fact the quality of golf swings has changed significantly in the last 20 years. There are many reasons for this: improved coaching techniques, video analysis, television, a massive increase in tournament prize funds for professionals and, of course, much improved practice facilities.

Many clubs are struggling to retain their membership numbers as changing social trends in society have made many unwilling to commit to a single club with a large annual fee. Rising house prices and a more inclusive nature for families have caused a major drop-off in the number of full club members in their 20s and early 30s. Golf clubs have always been a useful and rewarding pastime for the retired, but this ageing customer base is an increasing problem for many clubs. The highly prestigious venues, such as Wentworth, Chart Hills and Sunningdale, will rarely struggle to fill their allocation, but even these clubs have invested heavily in the best practice facilities, which their members have come to expect.

Many traditional clubs with a less prestigious tradition are now facing real dilemmas, with the easy option of increasing the subscription rates to counter falling numbers, proving less viable as members decide that golf is just too expensive to support just one club.

The traditional style of membership holds less appeal to young couples and families than the vast array of leisure pursuits open to us all today. Two for One green fee vouchers are readily accepted by too many facilities, fearing that by not swallowing this poison pill they will lose



the decreasing income to other clubs in the area, willing to take a cut price rate. Clubs must also look at different ways of marketing their core product – membership and green fees.

So for those clubs that are less willing to change their rules, relax their dress codes (and embrace breast feeding in the clubhouse!), the answer may well lie in teaching new golfers that are socially acceptable to the rest of the club's membership. Put simply, if you can't find enough suitable members in the market, then 'grow your own'. Clubs may also find that such a policy is lucrative in its own right.

In order to improve the practice facilities of a club to a point where new golfers can be taught there are several points to consider –

The area must be large enough and not just long enough. A good range area would be 300m long by 200m wide. Such a size may seem excessive, but it is the wayward shots that threaten the boundaries, particularly to the right of the course, which can lead to ball escape issues and health and safety problems.

Planning restrictions will often allow a structure to protect golfers from the elements, but if your club wishes to illuminate the range, then such planning consent is far less likely to be achieved. Golf courses tend to be in rural areas, so floodlights will normally be alien to the local residents and the borough's plan.

Although floodlit golf ranges take far more than those without illumination, careful thought must be given to the decision to operate during the winter evenings. Ranges need to be attended and this may require the full clubhouse to be open to provide toilet facilities and possibly food and beverages. Clubs will also have to invest in additional lighting and be prepared to have several additional staff on hand, even if the returns from the range may prove lower than expected.

Access to the site is vital. Too many clubs have introduced a wonderful practice range 500 yards from the clubhouse, so few use it before or after the round.

Dress rules for the range should be less stringent than for formal play, as many will want to use such a facility on the way home from shopping or other normal domestic chores. To enforce a strict code is damaging to the income of the new range.

Almost all ranges should be run by or in conjunction with the PGA professionals engaged at the club. This is not part of the old pals act (the writer is a PGA professional!) but PGA pros are without question best placed to ensure that the new range is used to maximum effect. Lessons for all types of player can be given and once a new golfer is comfortable coming to the club to practice, then he or she can be gently introduced to the other facilities and may well be attracted enough to wish to join the club.

The normally agreed truth about beginners is that they do not mix well with existing golfers. In fact the reverse is true – new golfers mix well with everyone. They are charming, polite, humble, keen to learn and excellent customers – it is a shame the same cannot be said of all existing golfers! The reality is that beginners have to be carefully integrated with experienced golfers. Once their initial set of lessons is complete, some venture out onto the course with no care for others



around them – this is where the trouble can begin. Careful introductions and beginner oriented days are vital. Many ladies sections have a great record of ‘mentoring’ new golfers. Experienced players give up their time to guide new golfers through the minefields of etiquette, rules, the history of the game and even a little socialising to make the new player comfortable and easy in this new environment.

With regard to the physical issues relating to building a new range, there is much to consider. The first decision is vital – is there enough room to safely create a golf range? If the practice area being considered is even fractionally tight for space, then real problems will ensue. Practising golfers are far less accurate than those playing and the number of times an unusually bad or off-line shots occurs will be alarming to some.

Secondly, is there enough demand to justify the expense of building a range? This is to some extent less important, as a practice ground converted to a quality golf range will attract custom that had previously not been considered. Demographic surveys will give some indication of population and lifestyles, but a rule of thumb that is worth considering is that a range can normally expect to take £1 per annum for each of the people that live within 10 minutes of the range. This is assuming that it is floodlit and also that it is offering a good quality facility and is open to all, with reasonable marketing. Do not assume that range users are the same as golfers – many clubs have been surprised at how few of their members actually use the new range, despite voting for its introduction at AGM's and EGM's.



Once the range site has been established, it is best to work backwards from muddy balls to the customers' first approach to the range. The cleaning, collection and distribution of range balls is so often overlooked by those designing the range. If this is not given sufficient thought, then the range will be blighted by extra labour costs and inefficiency forever. Golfers should never see a muddy ball and preferably never see mud, however, the number of ranges where they actually get muddy trying to practice their favourite game is a testament to the lack of forethought or expertise employed in the original design. Many ranges leave this ball management issue so late that they 'plonk' the ball management room at the end of the range and trail wet balls daily across an otherwise elegant carpeted range.

For a range to succeed at a golf club it is vital to have the co-operation of the greenkeeping staff, as it is almost always the case that they will be responsible for ball collection and maintaining the outfield and surrounding area. Targets are vital for any range to succeed, but are



a nuisance to avoid with ball collection and cutting equipment. Often clubs expect the additional work and responsibility to be provided for no extra remuneration – this is ridiculous and few people in business expect more work for the same money. It may well be necessary to collect balls at night, if pilferage becomes a problem on the range. This can easily disrupt the workings of the greenkeeping team and so it is sometimes better to have a separate ball picking contract or team of collectors – much depends on the area and the number of balls involved.

In the UK most ranges will need to be cut once a week in the growing season. To clear the range of 95% of the balls on it can take the same time as the remaining 5% of balls, which must all be collected prior to a cut. Cutting the range should be carefully scheduled so that both course and range are not inconvenienced.

There are many other points to consider in establishing a golf range as a paying contribution to a golf club. The best route is to take advice from other clubs that have gone down a similar path, much can be learnt from mistakes!

Colin Jenkins is the editor of Golf Range News and operates four golf centres in the UK. For further advice on any aspect golf ranges, contact him at: colin@golfrangenews.org or by phone on: 01580 715248, 0776 8887033.

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Growing success



Water feature at The Manor House Golf Course

MAKING WATER A FEATURE

By Jackson House

The obvious success of a golf course is shown by the repeated visits of members and, although we cannot take away the importance of a good round of golf, water features can play an important part as well as providing attractive, environmentally enhancing areas, giving pleasure to all.

As with any large country house, a lake, constructed in full view from the residence is important and, an attractive water feature by the clubhouse can provide a tranquil area in which to enjoy a drink or lunch. A water feature can provide a very good 'first impression' and should be seen from the entrance.

Working closely with golf course architects, The House Brothers designed the three lakes and waterfalls for The Manor House Golf Course at Castle Coombe. It took a model of the proposed water areas to convince the architect and the client that it was worthwhile. The architect has since been heard to say that The Manor House Golf Course has the 'finest 18 hole' in the country.

Winter storage reservoirs for irrigation are, with global warming, even more important. In many situations it is possible to construct a reservoir which will also be an attractive water feature. Waterplants provide an attractive edge to any water feature and these will camouflage the waters edge when the levels drop a foot or so. However, in years like the 1976 drought, the greens must be kept watered and it does give the Environment Agency comfort if a golf course is irrigating from its own winter storage reservoir.

If the average 18 hole golf course is 120 acres with 0.5m (20") of rainfall this gives 240,000m³ (52,800,000 gallons) for evaporation, run off and restoring the water tables. To take advantage of this it may be possible to construct a reservoir at the lowest part of the golf course and, with a small submersible pump, pump up to a larger reservoir on another part of the course. With a more sophisticated submersible pump it could pump directly into the high pressure irrigation system.

Lakes and adjoining canals can be incorporated into the golf course to form attractive hazards and these can be either a 'love or hate' for some golfers, and a great deal of thought needs to be given to the design including the siting of the tees and greens.

An attractive 'canal type' linear lake along the contours may be possible on a golf course with a clay subsoil. This opens up the possibility of a canal which resembles a large river with weirs and bridges which, with imaginative design, can also be a feature of the golf course.

An island green is an outstanding water feature. It has been a long ambition of ours to design a 'floating green' which can be easily moved. It could also remain green in dry weather without irrigation.

The golf course at Pyrford (Near Wisley) has one of the largest areas of water features (25 acres). The design involved lakes constructed down into the water table with a submersible pump to lift the water to a large waterfall into high lakes running around the course in an attractive stream. This attracted the sand martins.

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