

Tony has always planned that the team work the same hours in the winter as they do in the summer to ensure continuity of employment and no winter lay-offs and there are always plenty of projects on the go to keep the entire team busy.

“The route of the Tees was altered three times and our clubhouse was once an old corn mill which was built directly on the bank of the river. It was diverted and is now a couple of miles away but the water table is still extremely high,” said Tony, who recalls seeing photographs of people canoeing down the 18th fairway during his early years at the club. Part of the drainage issue was caused by the fact that Teesside is such a flat golf course, with only an eight inch natural fall from highest point to lowest.

The need to create more definition on the golf course galvanised Tony and an army of club members to plant trees on the course and although, starting in 1985, they were a year later than the “Plant a Tree in ‘83” and “Plant Some More in ‘84”, they attacked the project with genuine gusto.

“On a Saturday and Sunday morning I’d give members a spade and, after a short lesson, they were told where to go and they’d go out and plant them. If I wanted some on a specific place I’d place them on the spot. They weren’t great trees, one foot long whips which we were given by Stockton Council, and they didn’t take too well but it brought the membership together and gave us a common cause. People thought I was a nutter – I’d be out with 1,000 trees under my arm.”

Because of the variety and quality of the trees in the initial phase, most of the planting was to the edge of the golf course adding shelter and cover from the neighbouring area.

Prior to that there had been less than 100 old willow trees on the course and that was that.

“I’d never seen a willow tree in my life before that so I read up on them and discovered that their lifespan, if they didn’t have ready supplies of water, was 30 – 40 years. I also learned that crack willow was its common name because the branches used to break in anything more than a slight breeze. It certainly wasn’t the ideal tree for golf courses and once our water table had dropped they weren’t getting as much to drink.”

The second tree planting phase came about 10 years later and John Nicholson, whom he had met at a conference, was brought in to produce a professional design system the second time.

“With the second phase, which was grant aided, I wanted to split the fairways because we had so many open spaces; we wanted to divide the fairways so golfers didn’t see others playing on the other fairways.”

Over the two phases some 31,000 trees were planted and although many didn’t take, those which did and thrived are now 15 feet tall and are integral parts of Teesside Golf Club.

It was the next project, however, which was to create the biggest change to the golf course.

“We had a little spare land which we didn’t know what to do with but we suddenly thought we could get a tipping licence for subsoil waste and build a mound around the golf course to shield us from the noise of the A66, the A19 and the industrial park which had just replaced the remainder of the racecourse which had been our neighbour, this, together with some landscaping, would create some definition for our perfectly flat golf course,” said Tony,

He spoke with his committee and they agreed that, as an experiment,

they could build a mound down the side of the 13th hole as long as it didn’t interfere with golf.

That heralded the start of lorries tipping on the edge of the golf course, a practice that went on for much longer than originally anticipated.

“It took about six weeks to build that first mound but overall we had around 200 lorries a day for seven years and now we have around three miles of six metre high mounds – they are around 100 metres wide – around three quarters of the course,” said Tony who built a two way roadway outside his maintenance complex to enable the lorries to get in and out.

Lorries used to drive along the top of the mounding and tip at the end so the mound grew lengthwise while the weight of the waste and the inevitable vibrations has seen the mound push into the ground and the golf course rise in places.

“I have three trees which are eight foot above their original level and still growing while we had pipes which we’d discover a few feet above the ground,” said Tony.

With those mounds and others which have been installed at certain points on the course it now boasts definition and privacy it could never have dreamt of and the beauty of it is that it didn’t cost the club a penny and actually brought some revenue into the club.

“In fact we could have made more money than we did but for tax purposes it was not appropriate. In fact we used outside contractors for the landscaping work as it could be claimed back against tax whereas if it had been done in-house we wouldn’t have had any tax benefits.”



The massive mounding, together with the trees, offers great privacy to the course

But having completed the mounding – the tip has now been sealed - still Tony and his team didn't rest with further additions and improvements to the course.

“We've added four new ponds in the last two years. Each one is designed differently so they are not all edged with wood or not all edged with sleepers,” said Tony, of a programme he took initially to his committee.

“They said if we wanted to do a couple of experiments with ponds that would be fine so we built the one at the 1st and the committee said it looked nice and could they have some more. In fact I've just completed my fourth pond.”

The ponds don't fill up via a catchment area but through the water table so the level drops when the water table drops in the summer but each of the ponds has added greatly to the course and become home to a pair of swans among other wildlife.

“The male swan was limping a few months ago and we called in the RSPCA. Gary was able to jump on him and it was discovered that fishing line around his leg had almost severed the foot. But he was able to receive treatment and now they both come to get fed by hand every day. I think he knows we helped him,” said Tony, who added that they also have a robin which lives in the sheds and which hops around the machinery and comes when whistled!

“We get greenkeepers from other clubs coming to see what we've done and when they ask how I'd staked the pond out I told them we did it by hand myself – all 2500 of them.”



Course Manager, Tony Smith



Tony Smith and his team



With 26 years service at the club what does Tony think about those greenkeepers who feel you should move every seven years?

“I think you should. It’s my fault I’m still here,” he said in his blunt Yorkshire way.

“The only advice I have is to look at your course from inside and out and don’t wait for people to come to you with suggestions - be proactive,” said Tony, who along with his wife Lorna throw themselves into their out of office activities as much as they do in.

He has just started his second year on BIGGA’s Board of Management and would encourage everyone to become more involved whether it be at Section, Region or National level.

“I get a lot out of the Association but then people only get out what they put in.”

He and Lorna are also stalwarts of the local amateur dramatic society and Tony has appeared as Buttons in the pantomime among many other parts.

“We were both into scouting for several years and Lorna is Company Secretary of the Saltburn Community & Arts Association. We also make full use of our caravan.”

Tony lives life to the full and anyone who visits Teesside Golf Club can see that it has benefited from the energy that he brings to his day job.



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# NEW FRIENDS AND NEW KNOWLEDGE

*By Daniel Lightfoot*

**When the letter came through the door to tell myself and the other nine successful applicants that we had been chosen to represent BIGGA and Bernhards at the GIS conference in Orlando, I don't think any of us quite realised what we had signed up for. It all started at Harrogate Week, our own show that we can all be very proud of. We were invited to a presentation at the Majestic Hotel which gave all the new delegates a chance to meet and talk to those who had had been on the trip before. I was a little surprised that 10 greenkeepers were given their plane tickets at a free drinks gathering at Harrogate, but the selection committee must have had confidence in their delegates. It also helped me to know who to look out for at a crowded Gatwick airport.**

Everyone made it to the airport and with no delays we were soon on our way. The flight landed on time but we were nearly reduced to nine, as Alan Walker was detained at Orlando airport, suspected of being an International Terrorist. After some expert negotiation by Kim - and Alan threatening to put his kilt on again - they let him in and we set off for the short trip to the hotel.

Sunday evening was enjoyed acclimatising to the weather, finding our bearings and getting to know the other delegates over dinner. Unfortunately, there were two restaurants with Fridays in the title, which caused a little confusion, but it wasn't long before the night was over and the trip

really began. Bernhards had organised a fantastic schedule of events for us which began with one of the most impressive.

## **MONDAY**

The first trip of the day was to Isleworth Country Club. A Steve Smyers designed golf course, where the fusion of sport and art created some impressive and radical images. We were met by the Equipment Manager, Chris Langley, who gave us a tour of the "shop", as they called it in the US. It was very impressive and the attention to detail was second to none. I tried to justify whether 36 hand mowers were necessary for 18 holes but I decided it was best not to think about it.

The impressive machinery shed and the even more impressive Kerry Jones!

After a tour of the maintenance facility we went for a drive around the property. Similar to many courses in the US, a large community of houses surrounds the golf course, one of which belonged to Tiger Woods. The golf course is set up to accommodate the touring pros that live on the site and in March they compete in The Tavistock Cup against the pros from Isleworth's sister course, Lake Nona, which we had the privilege of visiting in the afternoon.

At Lake Nona, we were met by Murray Russell, the Superintendent, who gave us a tour of the "shop" before we ventured out on to the golf

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course. The course was in excellent condition and the chance to ask the Superintendent about the course and find out a little more about warm season grasses was great. My favourite answer to why it was so quiet was that the course was closed on Mondays for maintenance. I don't think that will go down well with the General Manager back at home. Murray was great fun and I would like to thank him again for the time he gave us on a memorable trip. There was little time to relax though. Soon we were back to the hotel, quick change and out for dinner and a few beers. Not too many though as we had to be ready for lectures at 8am.

## TUESDAY

Tuesday was spent at the Conference Centre for a day's lecture on tournament preparation by John Millar CGCS, agronomist for the LPGA tour. It was an informative talk, but it did remind me that we do things pretty well in the UK. There was nothing new or groundbreaking, but just a reminder to stick to sound greenkeeping principles, as well as making sure no one drives a stake in to your irrigation pipework before an event. The evening was spent having dinner, a few beers and a chance to meet our new Chairman, Kenny Mackay. It was also a wonderful opportunity for some of the guys to show off their karaoke skills, apart from Ian and Mike who shamefully refused to get up.

## WEDNESDAY

Wednesday was another highlight with an all day field trip. It began with a trip to Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club and Lodge. The Superintendent, Matt Beaver, gave us a tour of the maintenance facility followed by a trip to the turf nursery where we looked at six turf grass trials. They were also working on a sub-air type system to manipulate the temperature of the root zone to enable them to grow one type of grass all year round. It is amazing how some areas of greenkeeping have changed over the last 20 years.

We all got back on the bus for a short trip to Shingle Creek Golf Club where we were met by Superintendent, Rickey Craig. He was a very impressive individual. The "shop" was spotless and he seemed very much in control of the operation. It was a shame with so many in the group we could not see more of the course and with a quick look at a green we were back in the bus for a trip to Orange County Golf Club and driving range.

The driving range was outstanding. All turf and bigger than most golf courses in the UK. A quick lunch was organised with an opportunity to hit some balls before a looking at the maintenance facility and a few holes.

Next up was Disney's World of Sports. It was great to see something different and to witness how baseball parks and soccer pitches are prepared. In many ways it was no different to home, too much play and



not enough time to rest pitches between games. Disney is a very profit orientated facility and the Turf Manager, Preston Courtney, seemed to be under a lot of pressure to get pitches turned around quickly for the next game. Even on the turf tour we were taken past the Disney shop before getting back on the bus!

No sooner were we back at the hotel, it was suit on and off to the Rosen Centre for the official opening of the show and a poolside reception. The evening was spent on International Drive and at a bar called Howl at the Moon. A wonderful venue with live music and lots of laughs.

## THURSDAY - THE SHOW BEGINS

Thursday's highlight was being invited to the GCSAA Opening Ceremony where Greg Norman was honoured with the Old Tom Morris Award. He spoke openly and passionately about his views on golf course management. His comment that "you can't beat a bit of brown!" went down well with those following the sustainable path! The rest of the day was spent looking round the show. It was big, but in all honesty no better than our own show at Harrogate. This was a pleasant surprise and made you very proud as a visiting UK greenkeeper. There was a still lot to see, many people to meet and an informative day was had by all.

In the evening we were invited to the Prestige Dinner hosted by Bernhards. The guest list read like a who's who of golf and greenkeeping with illustrious names such as Turgeon, Vargas and Dye. The security of sitting next to a fellow delegate was gone as we were all put on different tables but it was a great opportunity to meet some new faces. Another trip to Howl at the Moon in the evening and we were suddenly over half way through.

## FRIDAY

Friday was spent having another look around the show and spending a couple of hours manning the BIGGA booth. The Master Greenkeeper Award was popular and it was great to see a lot of interest in the Association. A few book purchases, chance meetings with old friends and numerous cups of coffee in the international centre (which is a great resource for those going next year). The evening was spent at the Presidents dinner and at an out of town steakhouse, which was enjoyed by all.

## SATURDAY

Saturday was an opportunity to do a bit of sightseeing with a quick trip to Universal Studios. The evening was spent at the Ransomes Jacobsen function at City Jazz and we would all like to thank Dave Withers for his kind hospitality. The evening finished with a game of crazy golf at the Pirates Cove. My putting was awful, but the deserved winner Kerr Rowan can add this victory to his Longest Drive trophy from this year's National Championships.

## SUNDAY

Sunday was spent relaxing by the pool or doing a bit of shopping before the flight home. Alan managed to get through customs safely this time, but the Captain's message of a 2-degree, wet Gatwick airport told us our trip was nearly over. A flurry of emails when we got back confirmed everyone got home safely.

On behalf of all of the delegates I would like to thank John Pemberton and Sam McLean for selecting us and Stephen Bernhard for his support of the programme. Stephen's vision is to expand the delegation across Europe and beyond. It is a great commitment and all the delegates who have been lucky enough to be selected appreciate his generosity.

Our thanks also go the large group of lecturers and superintendents who made our journey so enjoyable and to Kim Furnell for organising such a wonderful trip. Finally my personal thanks go to all of my colleagues on the trip for making it so much fun and an experience we will all never forget.

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# DON'T JUST FERTILISE.....UTILISE!

**Richard Fry talks with Neil Mackenzie, Rigby Taylor Business Development Manager, about some important considerations to be aware of when assessing the benefits of incorporating liquid fertilisers into the turf management programme**

“Record high as UK basks in sunshine”. This was the headline as the country enjoyed the hottest February 12 on record. In Trawscoed, Wales the mercury reached 18C!

With such un-seasonal weather, player expectations will be unreasonably high over the coming months and the greenkeeper's greatest challenge will be to maintain healthy greens with good colour whilst, at the same time, producing a consistent playing surface and fast putting speeds throughout the playing season.

Controlling leaf tissue growth is essential for meeting demands for putting quality. However, lowering the mowing height to gain better ball speed and roll can compromise the turf's root systems. Achieving the right balance of leaf tissue and surface playability is also essential for retaining carbohydrate reserves, because when top growth, is removed the plant responds by trying to replace its lost photosynthetic area. This, the plant does, by drawing on valuable carbohydrate reserves stored in the roots with the result that a potential nutrient deficit situation occurs, at exactly the time of the year when these reserves are most needed.

When designing and implementing the ideal nutrition plan for turf, understanding the importance of sources of fertility and timing of application of the necessary nutrient levels is essential. For golf greens, prudent levels of nitrogen should be used so that soft growth is not encouraged. This will result in finer leaves and slower production of thatch, which ultimately should reach a position where build-up of organic matter is compensated by decomposition.

It means taking control of the nutrient inputs and not letting them control you!

Today's maintenance standards eclipse those of just a few years ago. The conventional ways of looking at soil fertility and plant nutrition are no longer adequate. Phrases like “soluble nitrogen,” “available phosphorus,” “chelated” and “essential” have been the unquestioned basis of defining, registering, and comparing fertilisers for many, many years. However, this has never been an adequate way to consistently explain or understand a plant's response to a given fertiliser.

For example, all granular and most liquid fertilisers that are designed for root uptake rely completely on a set of conditions such as soil moisture, temperature and microbiological activity to control their release and availability, all outside the control of the turf manager.

This is not a criticism of either granular or liquid root uptake fertilisers; however, prudent professionals need to be aware of some of the inherent limitations, particularly under adverse climatic conditions and under circumstances that cause plant stress. So, if you're managing intensively maintained turfgrasses and your fertilisation program is solely dependent on root uptake, consideration should be given to the enormous potential offered by foliar applied nutrition.

Today's modern, forward thinking turf professionals have gone far beyond the agriculturally biased view of plant nutrition where the emphasis was on the application of solids and kgs/ha and units/acre defined their view of fertiliser inputs. Density not excessive growth, consistency of playing surfaces (all year round) and natural, not artificial colour are now the watchwords for managers of fine turf.

From a technical point of view, liquid formulation chemistry has advanced out of all recognition to what was available in the past. Many of the

drawbacks associated with liquid applications such as high scorch potential, high water volumes, limited product ranges and short intervals between applications have been eliminated.

Research by Rigby Taylor into advanced formulation chemistry has developed liquids that offer controlled nutrient release, are easy and accurate to apply and the nutrients are absorbed both through the leaves and roots of the grass plant. Some products even offer eight-week application intervals.



Easy of application, speed of spraying, no surface residue and tank mixing are clear features of a liquid fertiliser selection

### COMBINING PRODUCTS HAS BENEFITS:

Another major benefit to using liquids compared to solids is the ability to tank mix different products. With labour often at a premium, particularly during the busy spring and summer, any opportunity to combine treatments will be beneficial. Tank mixing is however a potential minefield and operators should consult with their suppliers as to the work that has been undertaken on product compatibility. Comprehensive and published compatibility charts are the operators assurance that they are dealing with a reputable company and can use their products with confidence.

A further reason to consider the use liquid nutrition is the option of combining trace elements and other ingredient such as amino acids, humates and, even simple plant sugars that provide an energy source for mycorrhizal fungi. In exchange for this energy supply, the fungi, in return, provides the plant with a supply of nitrate and phosphate.

Efficiency is the critical factor because root uptake of fertiliser takes energy. A well-designed foliar, applied in relatively low water volumes, will have a high proportion of its nutrient content remaining on the leaf tissue until its absorbed.

The faster a foliar is absorbed through the leaf tissue and, the faster it translocates within the plant, the more efficient it is and therefore, the better it is.

This has a two-fold benefit: 1. Ensures a more reliable and controlled feeding of the plant. 2. Allows the plant to conserve energy that it can better use to tolerate stress.

Turf managers also need to look beyond N.P.K. fertiliser and consider

products that include ingredients with an activity that is relative to root growth. There are several such products both in granular and liquid formulations that are equally successful so the choice is up to the individual depending on the application equipment available. An example would be products that include amino acids to help alleviate growth problems associated with shade.

Products containing humic acid can also be considered but it is essential that the source is identified and the product selected contains potassium humate. Many soil tests indicate high levels of phosphate derived from a mineral source but it is questionable how available this is to grass plants, so it may also be worth considering the use of organic phosphate

Whilst there are, quite rightly, greenkeepers that concentrate on the maintenance of greens, the tees are also very important; they are of course the first surfaces the golfer experiences when playing each hole and provide that 'first impression' of the course.

Sophisticated slow release fertiliser is very suitable for tees and in some cases may only need to be applied once in the spring and once in the autumn. An example would be a product containing at least 50% methylene urea together with an appropriate percentage of fraction two and three, long chain polymers.

What you feed you turf, when you feed it and how, all have a great impact on its photosynthetic capacity, physiological fitness, root mass and carbohydrate reserves, stress and disease tolerance, colour, quality and consistency.

What you feed you turf (the source of nutrients) matters greatly. Not all seasons are the same, so not all fertility plans are created equal, nor do they produce equal results.

For optimal turf quality, emphasis should be placed on complete and balanced nutrition involving organic complexes, chelated nutrients, proteins, seaweed extract and other beneficial supplements such as amino acids, vitamins and fulvic acid.

When you feed your turf (the distribution of nutrient loading during the year) has a great effect on the carbohydrate storage and leaf tissue growth. Planning the distribution of nutrient loading is important as it maximises root mass and carbohydrate storage and minimises leaf tissue growth. Research has demonstrated that approximately 50% of the fertility applied to turf should be undertaken in the 2-3 months prior to dormancy to maximise carbohydrate storage – that means autumn applications and hopefully, as the spring approached, this plan has already been implemented.

How you feed your turf (how it processes nutrients) should be directly related to mowing height. When heights are low, root mass potential is diminished. Root mass is diminished naturally in the summer due to ambient and soil temperature changes. When root mass is weakened and or roots are under stress, it's vitally important to feed the turf directly through the leaf tissue.

### MAJOR FORCES YOU CAN'T CONTROL

At the end of the day the choice will lie with what works best given the specific situation, however there are forces that operate over which the turf professional has no control. For example, player requirement for tournament-type playing conditions will continue to increase and public demand for environmental controls will intensify.

Given these realities, greenkeepers will be expected to do more with less and produce better, more competitive playing conditions with fewer traditional fertilizers and synthetic pesticides. To achieve these goals, products will be required that are based on science and built upon a firm foundation of facts not fiction.