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GUARDIAN OF GOLF'S





The countenance of John Campbell, links supervisor, reflects the tradition and pride that is St. Andrews.

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An exclusive interview with John Campbell, St. Andrews' links supervisor, reveals some traditional and not-so-traditional views about course maintenance

Five hundred acres of tradition. This is St. Andrews, as envisioned and experienced by the incalculable number of golfers the world over who relish the thought of having personal contact with the sport's cherished history.

To John Campbell, St. Andrews stretches beyond normal inspirational and communal boundaries. "It is the Holy Land, the Vatican . . . my own true version of Valhalla," states the 50-year-old Scot, whose job is to keep the four courses of St. Andrews in saintly, sparkling condition.

Campbell's position as links supervisor is a lofty one. His predecessors at St. Andrews were called course managers, superintendents, greenkeepers or foremen. When Campbell was lured to the celestial grounds nine years ago, the R & A took special pride in its catch; and so was established the rank of links supervisor.

He is also the first of his breed to be knighted by the Royal and Ancient.

The baldish Campbell, who seems to beam with every breath, recently completed a whirlwind 10-day tour of New England and Canada during which he served as guest lecturer for a series of turf conferences. He brought with him such warmth and infectious charm that he enchanted audiences wherever he spoke. "For a moment I thought the British had sent him over to recapture the Massachusetts Bay Colony," quipped Dr. Joseph Troll, who was instrumental in landing Campbell for a spot on his University of Massachusetts Fine Turf Conference program.

Naturally, Campbell reciprocated with a first-class chamber of commerce description of his reception in the United States. "I am thrilled by the hospitality

of America," choosing his words flawlessly, "I have learned that the problems of the golf course superintendent are universal. Hopefully, this exchange of ideas will drive us closer to the profession's international goal . . . that of making available to golfers the best possible playing conditions. We all strive for perfection, even though our methods vary."

There is a bit of the old and new in Campbell's approach to putting a spit and a shine on the four layouts under his supervision at St. Andrews. "I am not against progress," he declares. "However, sometimes the old or ancient method is the sound method. I integrate the established form with the modern. It seems to work out most satisfactorily."

For instance, Campbell still relies on the hand method of fertilizing greens. He directs three- or

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four-man crews in this intricate operation during which his workers wear holstered baskets in a dusting maneuver designed to give the huge putting surfaces a uniform application.

Campbell also is a devout disciple of Mother Nature. "I am over fearful of introducing man-made remedies for the grass's ills," he reveals. "There is always in my mind the horrible feeling that perhaps I will put too much fertilizer on a green. Maybe that's why I'm so careful and use the hand method. I guess I just don't trust a machine."

The machine age, which has caught up most of the superintendents in the United States, has barely touched Campbell. Although he is aware of the advantages of mechanical aids in aerating greens, he refuses to use the machine for the job. "Anyway, I am not overly impressed with aerating. I do as little as possible. I don't like to stir up trouble. And aerating can lead to new problems. When that ground is laid wide open, it's an introduction to turf disease. Maybe I'm old-fashioned in my thinking on this matter, but I have to have faith in my convictions."

As a seaside links, St. Andrews poses many different problems than those on inland courses. For example, wind erosion is the special monster as far as Campbell is concerned. "The winds raise havoc with the sand," he tells. "Sometimes an entire fairway gets covered during a storm. There is little we can do about it, other than to plant sea-lyme grass along the borders of the troubled areas. This is a thick, high-rise type of growth. It serves as a barrier and is very effective. However, there is only so much one can do. If I don't watch myself, I could end up planting sea-lyme all over the place. This would detract from the natural setting. This is what we are dedicated to avoid."

Natural topography is the hallmark of St. Andrews' darling of the four playing areas—the Old Course. "She is untouched by human hands in a manner of

speaking," Campbell bursts proudly. "Mother Nature is her architect along with the animals that used to graze on her grasses. Our records go back to the 15th century and there's nothing to reveal any occurrence of man-made design. Even the bunkers are a product of the elements. The sheep, huddled together, burrowed themselves into the sand for shelter from the winds. In a matter of time these were her bunkers."

Right now Campbell is in the midst of preparing the Old Course for England's version of the World Series and Super Bowl—the British Open, which will be played there in 1970. In Campbell's case, the task is simply one of conditioning and arranging spectator sites.

"We are very much against doctoring a course for a championship," John raves. "I know this is not so in the United States where some of your Open courses go through a series of glaring

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changes. For the British Open we do nothing to make the course play more difficult. Gary Player uses the same championship tees as a visiting American in the middle of our tourist season. We don't allow the rough to grow any higher, nor do we tighten the fairways. The Old Course never changeth."

The British Open has a permanent call on Campbell's services. Although it is switched around to different course, like the United States Golf Assn. Open, all the equipment—scoreboards, bleachers and fencing—is stored at St. Andrews where Campbell is in charge of refurbishing it and transporting it to the British Open site of the moment.

The people of St. Andrews (there are 10,000 residents) are just as dedicated to the propagation of the golf shrine's reputation as is Campbell and the captain or president of the Royal and Ancient Club. "There is a great respect

for the links," Campbell glows. "We don't have any vandalism on the course. I guess you might say the links are as sacred to the St. Andrews populace as the Vatican is to the people of Rome."

While the St. Andrews residents reek of reverence at the very mention of the Old Course and her sisters—the New, Eden and Jubilee—oftentimes they are just as demanding as the country club extremist in the United States.

"We have our complainers," Campbell laughs. "Doesn't everyone? Most of ours are the old Scots. Frankly speaking, they are somewhat spoiled. Their reaction is typical. If they're putting well, the greens are pronounced fit. If they're missing putts, we haven't done our job. I guess we are very much alike in this area of our work, and I'm afraid the situation never will change. But it does tend to keep us on our toes. Right?"

Campbell, who has a 30-man work force making the rounds of the 72 holes, is a born son of the turf. His father was in the profession, and John followed in his footsteps. He held several positions before his reputation spread to St. Andrews where the R & A engaged his services for what is perhaps the world's most famous superintendent's berth.

Being the charmer that he is and an avowed enemy of inviting flattering reaction, Campbell must be verbally set upon to unglue the personal facts of his life which raise him above the crowd. For example, he survived the terrible ordeal of being a prisoner of war for five years during the last great world confrontation. Then, he is a well-known cartoonist whose works often appear in the British publication, "Golf Illustrated." On top of this, John carries an eight-handicap to the first tee . . . "with no questions asked."

"I couldn't be happier anywhere than I am at St. Andrews," he bubbles. "It is a wonderful life when you are doing something you like. At St. Andrews the feeling grows deeper. As far as my ambitions go, I feel there are no more mountains to climb." □