



WHAT DO THEY WANT & HOW DO WE ACHIEVE IT

David Weston writes about the Regional Seminar at Cannington College.

Secretary At Work: January 2004 *(reviewed December 2011)*

BIGGA South West & South Wales Regional Seminar at Cannington College held on Wednesday, November 19, 2003

Keith Lloyd

Following the usual welcome and introductory speech from the Chairman, the first speaker was our own GCMA Chief Executive, Keith Lloyd. The thrust of his PowerPoint presentation was that a high playing standard of the golf course is a result of planning and cooperation between Club Management, Secretary and Course Manager. The Secretary, with the backing of the Association and our ever increasing "Information Library", was there to assist the Course Manager in whatever way he or she could, to achieve Management's aims.

In discussion with the Secretary, the Course Manager would find that there was a readily available source for sample Course Policy Documents, Course Health and Safety and other course-related issues through the GCMA. He invited the Course Managers to avail themselves of the expertise of their Secretary. Keith was warmly applauded and presented with a Radio Controlled Alarm Clock, the significance of which escapes me.

Jack McMillan

There then followed an illustrated talk by Jack McMillan on the setting-up of those courses used for PGA Tour events. He explained how events were now played at the Clubs with sufficient financial backing to be able to use the tour events to promote themselves, not always those with the highest standard of Course presentation.

It was his task to assist each Course Manager to achieve the standards the Pro's preferred. He detailed each area in turn. Tees were expected to be firm and cut on the diagonal. Surprisingly, markers were often not placed at the back of the tee as that area tended to be soft as it was seldom used.

Pros detest soft wet fairways. It did not matter if they were cut as stripes, checkered or "half and half", but all 18 fairways had to be cut in the light available each morning, before the start of the tournament. The Club was expected to have the men and machines to complete fairway cutting in 4 hours. Target width was 20 to 25 yards and grass quality on fairways was expected to be good. Greenkeepers had always carried out fairway aeration, but now more were scarifying and

top-dressing them. He fully appreciated the cost and time factors involved for an ordinary club. Fairway irrigation should be used sparingly; fast-running fairways were preferable to lush ones.

Semi-Rough was expected to be penal, cut for the tournament at 30-35 mm, with the rough more severe at 80 mm. His view was that bunkers should not be a pleasant experience. They are becoming too easy for the pros. The bunker edges should be clearly defined, with a base of 100 mm firm packed, and 50 mm loosely packed on top. The back of the bunkers should not give a “hanging” lie. Many bunkers he encountered were far too soft and their condition was the major source for complaint by the Pros.

The first requirement of the green is playing quality. Pace is secondary. Jack McMillan expected a run of about 10 feet on the stimpmeter. Greens that are too fast can be a headache for the Referees, particularly if it is windy and the ball could oscillate at address. On tournament days the cut was usually 3 mm. He was aware of the difficulties that the greenkeepers had in timing their fertilizer application.

Hungry greens gave a more consistent speed throughout the day. One poor greenkeeper had put slow release fertilizer on prior to the tournament but nothing had happened. In desperation, he applied a liquid fertilizer and both then kicked in together. The lush soft growth had produced excellent silage! Pace had been achieved only by rolling the green.

The Putting Green should always be the first green cut each day, as all Pros practice putting before they play. In his lifetime’s experience, he had never met a pure sown green that had remained in that state for more than 5 years. Courses chosen for the Tournaments at the start of the season were of particular concern. A late or cold spring could give the Greenkeeper no chance of producing a good putting surface without the necessary soil temperature. Although he did not expect greens to be hollow tined shortly before the tournament, a light top dressing, if correctly timed, improves both trueness and speed. It was left to the Course Manager to decide if he preferred to verticut, groom or brush prior to cutting. Rolling seals the surface and should be used only as a last resort if pace cannot be produced by any other method. Irrigation should be sensible. In the build up to the tournament the areas round the “good” pin positions should not be used by the Club. Pros do not like having to putt over poorly replaced hole plugs. He checked the weather forecast each day before the holes were cut to ensure that if heavy rain was expected, none were positioned in hollows that might flood.

Then Jack McMillan concluded by thanking Course Managers for accepting the inconvenience caused by the Tour Events. In addition to having to produce the course to a high standard for the tournament week itself, they had the long term problems caused by spectator traffic, as well as erection and removal of spectator facilities. In particular the excellent presentation on television of each course for each Tour event, gave the ordinary Club members an unreasonably high expectation for their own course that no Course Manager could hope to fulfil. Once the Tour had moved on, normal greenkeeping practices would swing back into action. Cutters would be raised, aeration would be needed, less staff would be available, the standard of course presentation would drop, and the members would - surprise, surprise - whinge. It was apparent from the applause that he had struck a familiar note with his audience.

Nick Ashman

The final morning speaker was Nick Ashman of John Deere Limited. His presentation was about the desire of his company to produce the machinery that a Course Manager needs, to provide the high standards that modern golf requires. By the use of questionnaires and feedback from greenkeepers using his company's equipment, they had attempted to identify problems associated with the cutting of fine turf areas on the golf course. Reliability had been their first concern and they were hopeful that that had been achieved. The attention to detail, in identifying and the technical innovation used in attempting to solve those problems was most impressive. The development of a ratchet system for adjusting height of cut on greens units without the need for setting bar, a facility for making the cutting action more or less aggressive, and the introduction of a ball and socket system to allow the units to "float" freely were used to illustrate his companies commitment to improved quality.

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