

# INTERNATIONAL GREENKEEPERS GAZETTE

April 2024 Issue #8

## MEET THE MEMBERS BEN CORBY & DAVID NEWELL

Read this issue's member interviews with Ben Corby, Sports Turf Manager at Desert Group, Dubai, and David Newell, Deputy Head Groundsman at Reading Football Club, UK. Pages 06-09, 14-15

## NAVIGATING TRANSFORMATIVE TIMES: BIGGA

How BIGGA is strategically adapting to challenges in pay equity, embracing social media, and navigating industry shifts. Pages 16-20

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# EDITOR'S WORD



"Believe it or not, April 2024 marks 5 years of International Greenkeepers. I'm not sure where the time has gone either, that means this October it will be 5 years since I left for Australia.

Between moving to Aus and back, renting a flat, buying a house, living through several lockdowns, and everything in between, we've continued to grow IGFH.

Daryl Davidson came to me with this idea and group he'd created on Facebook with a couple of hundred members. Now we have a website, magazine, podcast, educational videos, and the reason why we started it all, the Turf Passport program.

A few notable things to take from the last few months, #GroundsWeek2024, our attendance at Melksham Oak School, and providing mock interviews for the students. BIGGA's road shows and BTME, Get Golfing's adaptive golf training, and Scotts Turf Show just to name a few.

It's been wild to see IGFH grow into the recognised name it is today, and it wouldn't have been possible without the support of our sponsors and members.

Howardson Group is home to companies such as Dennis and SISIS who have backed us from the start, and now Mountain View Seeds and Kersten UK. We've created great relationships and there's a lot more to look forward to in 2024, so keep your eyes on us!

## Bradley Tennant

"Bradley Tennant

Founding Member of International Greenkeepers for Hire & Editor  
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## INTERNATIONAL GREENKEEPERS FOR HIRE

### ABOUT US

The International hub for greenkeepers, groundstaff and volunteers. To unite greenkeepers, promote the industry, and help share the art of greenkeeping with others. The organisation is made by greenkeepers, for greenkeepers.

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# Meet the Member: Ben Corby



Standing proud in the Sevens Stadium

Our first Meet the Members interview of this issue is with Ben Corby, Sports Turf Manager at Desert Group, Dubai, UAE. Ben made the move to Dubai after craving a warmer outdoor working environment and has shared his fascinating insight into what it's like to work in a country where camels invade the pitch, outdoor work isn't permitted from 12:30-3 pm in the summer months, and machinery and products for turf management are much harder to come by.

## What inspired you to pursue a career in turf?

Golf—I started playing and got quite good. I was interested in the teaching/pro shop side but ended up doing work experience in both the shop and greenkeeping and fell in love with being outdoors and driving machinery.

I've since transitioned into managing multiple sports turf surfaces so I'm always learning.

## How did you first hear about International Greenkeepers For Hire, and what motivated you to explore job opportunities overseas?

I saw Bradley's/Daryl's posts about IGFH. I was lucky enough to study full-time turf grass science and golf course management at Myerscough (college, based in Lancashire, UK), and to be honest, I just wanted a better climate (sun) to be working outdoors.

There was an opportunity to work in the USA via an intern program through Ohio State University which I took, and I managed to get my warm season/transitional experience. After finishing my studies, I decided I wanted to move abroad again ASAP.

## How did your friends and family react to hear that you were moving overseas?

I guess it was a shock and also a hard choice for us, but they were all supportive and they all came and visited in the first couple of years.

## Share a funny or unexpected moment that happened while working at Desert Group.

There's a few, and some of them not funny at the time, but you can laugh now. There is a bit of a language barrier here, so there are quite a few more mistakes than normal, but ultimately our groundsman decided

to follow the literal timings sent to him for watering at half-time and didn't check the match scenario from the pump room. The game ran over, so as you can guess, the irrigation system came on while they were still playing.

Another one I will always remember: we had a FIFA event on and it rained heavily for 2 days, all the pitches were flooded with surface water and teams were due to start practicing. A few calls were made and we ended up with a helicopter hovering over the surface trying to blow off surface water.

One more: I was doing some pitch inspections and then camels started to turn up on the field all kitted up with seats. It ended up being a trial to see if camel polo could be played on the sports pitches without much damage, so I had my first game of camel polo, haha.

## Are there any unique situations that you've encountered while working abroad, and did they pose any challenges to your job?

Im sure it's the same in most places, but in this region they expect everything can be done in an instant, especially when money can be thrown at it. Machinery/products are not always available within the country so we have to think outside the box to get the job done/results required.

## What's the most rewarding aspect of your current job role?

I love being able to assess different sports surfaces all over the Middle East. We normally get called in when there's an issue and I really enjoy visualizing the final product from the work we can perform to complete the renovation job and seeing it through to the final results.

## What's one piece of greenkeeping equipment you couldn't live without, and how does it make your job easier or more enjoyable?

A cylinder mower has to be number one on the list, but managing warm-season turf, a verticutter

**'I would say do a little research, and if you're still thinking about it, then just go for it. You're only a plane/boat/car ride home and there's not much to lose in giving it a go!'**





Working hard with new equipment



Laying new turf

is a necessity to keep a good performance/healthy surface.

**Are there any quirky traditions or habits in your job that you've had to adjust to?**

We have a 3-month summer working hour rule from the ministry that doesn't permit outside work from 12.30-3 pm. It certainly helps our team but as you can expect, productivity is down as it's still pretty brutal outside these hours. Anything pedestrian is a big ask during these months.

**What advice would you give to other greenkeepers who are considering a similar international career move?**

If you're considering it I would say do a little research, and if you're still thinking about it, then just go for it. You're only a plane/boat/car ride home and there's not much to lose in giving it a go!

**What inspiring words would you say to young greenkeepers?**

Work smarter, not harder! Try and get a good mentor/job to learn from and see what they are doing and think of ideas that could potentially make it easier or improve on.



Just another day in the office...





# EXPLORING ADAPTIVE GOLF AT EDGA D3 WITH GET GOLFING

Bradley Tennant of IGFH recently participated in February's EDGA (European Disabled Golf Association) D3 coaching session hosted by Get Golfing. The event, held at Mill Green Golf Club, aimed to raise awareness, provide training, and educate attendees on the adaptability of golf for individuals with diverse disabilities.



Top: The day started with a series of inspiring talks  
Bottom: Wheelchair golf



The day kicked off with insightful introductions from key figures, including Emma Robinson, the Charities, Communities, and Apprenticeships Director at Get Golfing. These leaders shared personal stories and backgrounds, setting the tone for a day focused on breaking down barriers and redefining perceptions of disability in golf.

The outdoor exercise at the driving range was a highlight of the day, featuring 6-8 stations that showcased the versatility of golf for individuals with various disabilities.

From blindfold golf to wheelchair challenges, balance balls, one-legged exercises, and activities for those with impaired hearing, participants were immersed in a range of experiences that extended beyond the physical aspects of the sport.

The aim was not only to demonstrate the adaptability of the game but also to foster understanding of how individuals with disabilities might feel when entering golf clubs that may not explicitly promote inclusivity.

Bradley gained insights into the adaptability of golf

and explored ways to effectively communicate the message of inclusivity. The ultimate goal remained simple: getting the ball into or to a target, irrespective of physical abilities.

Commenting on the session, Bradley said:

'I came to this training event because of my position as a lecturer and also because I have worked in and around the golf game, visiting sites across the world. It opened my mind. Think about it: most golf courses are built for cart access, so nine out of 10 are the accessibility criteria met.

'There are completions out there and a growing number of clubs are now advertising as disability golfer-friendly. Whether it's the requirement for a caddy to help find the ball or help hold you while you take a shot, there's not much if any alteration that needs to be carried out to the course or rules to have a fun and fair game.

'Food for thought, it makes sense. We did have a good day—but in reality, this is someone's every day. Let's make golf more accessible.'



Trying out blindfold golf



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# THE CAVERSHAM INSPIRES NEXT GENERATION OF TURF PROFESSIONALS IN EXCLUSIVE MASTERCLASS

*“We’re planting seeds to inspire the next generation; being open to change is key to delivering this qualification.”*



**In late January of this year, Bradley Tennant of IGFH accompanied Wiltshire College & University Centre in conducting its first Masterclass for Level 2 Sports Turf Operative (Lantra) students at The Caversham – Home of Reading Golf Club. The day unfolded into a fantastic blend of education and hands-on experiences, providing invaluable insights for the students.**

The Masterclass covered key aspects of golf course management, including the importance of bunkers and water features, and understanding game rules and hazards.

Practical sessions included bunker and hazard maintenance, different practices including maintaining smooth-faced bunkers, and varied techniques for bunker raking.

In the afternoon session, students were educated on pre-start checks, machine

washing, and post-operative checks, with a practical demonstration.

The day concluded with insights into repairing ball marks and removing dew and debris from turf surfaces, followed by another opportunity for the students to get hands-on with tools.

During the practical sessions, the students had the opportunity to take photos and collect evidence for their portfolios, making sure they were hitting their Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviors.

The students left the masterclass equipped with not only new knowledge and skills, but also a deep appreciation for the artistry behind maintaining top-tier sports turf. Bradley is certain that the lessons learned on the fairways of The Caversham will undoubtedly shape their future careers in the sports turf industry.

On behalf of the College, Bradley extended a heartfelt thank you to the Caversham Golf Club and its dedicated staff for generously giving their time and expertise, noting that their their commitment to imparting knowledge and nurturing the next generation in the sports turf industry is “truly commendable”.

Commenting on the importance of learning opportunities such as these, Bradley said:

*“Golf isn’t covered within the Level 2 sports turf operative qualification; however, having worked in golf, I understand the importance of learning golf course maintenance and etiquette of golf. We’re planting seeds to inspire the next generation; being open to change is key to delivering this qualification.”*

Bradley issued a shout-out to Jon Scoones, Head Greenkeeper, for sharing insights on

STIMP meters and data collection, and shared his gratitude to Katy Castle and James Castle for their impactful bunker maintenance demonstrations. He also thanked Gary Stangoe and the whole team for hosting the college.

Bradley was keen to encourage clubs and facilities to provide their own learning opportunities for students, commenting:

*“The masterclass at Caversham Golf Club stands as a testament to the power of hands-on learning and industry collaboration.*

*“We encourage other golf clubs and sports facilities to consider the impact they can have on the next generation. Creating collaborative initiatives, masterclasses, and internship programs not only contributes to the development of skilled professionals but also fosters a sense of community and shared passion within the industry.”*



# MEET THE MEMBER: David Newell

Also featured in this issue's Meet the Members is our interview with David Newell, Deputy Head Groundsman at Reading Football Club, UK. Here, David explains how he worked up to his current job role, his future plans to work with warm-season grasses overseas, and which "old-school bangers" he'd have on his ideal work playlist.

**What inspired you to pursue a career in turf?**

To be quite honest, I couldn't tell you. I knew I'd like to work in agriculture or in football, luckily I sort of found a middle ground for both! A job that wasn't 100% office-based was my preference.

**How did you find your current job at Reading F.C.?**

I was working on the matchday team at the time, then the current head groundsman asked if I wanted to apply, so I did, and managed to get the job. I then worked my way up to the position I am now in.

**Would you ever consider working overseas?**

In my 10-year plan, my aim is to work with warm weather grass, either in South America, Southern Europe, or in North Africa. England is far too cold for me in the winter. So yes, I would love to work abroad.

**What's the most surprising thing you've learned about yourself since starting your groundskeeping journey?**

How much I've learned in relation to

the industry. I do most of the spraying here at Reading, so learning about what products do what and why they affect the leaf or soil has been amazing.

This industry will continue to try



IMAGE: David Newell of Reading F.C.

new things in relation to chemical processes to meet EU law or new sustainability plans so there is always something new to learn.

**If you could create the perfect playlist for a day on the job, what songs would be on it?**

Would be a mixture of what I class

as "old-school bangers", songs like In Da Club by 50 Cent and Angel by Shaggy. But would probably have some country songs in too.

**What's one piece of equipment you couldn't live without, and how does it make your job easier or more enjoyable?**

My Tech-neat sprayer, it's an absolute lifesaver if the pitch isn't quite where we want it health- or colour-wise. It's so quick to get liquid and soluble product out. Spraying the stadium pitch is the most satisfying job to complete.

**What's the most challenging weather condition you've faced while working in the stadium, and how did you handle it?**

In our stadium, we can reach temperatures of 40°C. Last summer, a disease called Grey Leaf Spot appeared.

Trying to navigate a disease that doesn't have a recognised fungicide that can shut it down was a challenge. Learning how the disease spreads due to conditions was certainly a learning curve, but has made me more aware for next summer and knowledge for my future job endeavours.



IMAGE L&R: The more unusual pitch maintenance jobs!

**What goals and aspirations do you have for your career in turf for the long term, and how has this opportunity brought you closer to achieving them?**

My long-term goal is to become a Head/Grounds Manager at a football ground abroad.

**'The harder you work and the more you apply yourself to learn, the higher the chance of success in what you want to achieve in your career.'**

Working at a football club like Reading has been/would be a massive challenge for anyone I believe, mainly due to financial constraints, so to do it here makes me believe I could do it anywhere.

**What would you say keeps you in the industry?**

Definitely not money! I would say working for the football club I support would play a big factor.

Also, the job satisfaction when you produce a surface that plays and looks good, there is no better feeling. Also, our industry is one that continues to change and evolve, so it really is a job like no other.

**What inspiring words would you say to young greenkeepers who are just starting out in the industry?**

I would say that the harder you work and the more you apply yourself to learn, the higher the chance of success in what you want to achieve as your career goes on.

IGFH Members,  
We'd Love to  
Hear From You!

Interested in being interviewed for our Meet the Members feature? We interview turf professionals based all over the world, with a special interest in those who have travelled overseas for work.

Email Laura at editor@internationalgreenkeepers.com with a brief introduction to yourself, your experience, and your current job role.

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# NAVIGATING TRANSFORMATIVE TIMES WITH BIGGA

## *Adapting to Pay Equity, Social Media, and Industry Shifts*

**As the greenkeeping and grounds sector undergoes transformative changes, we reached out to BIGGA to see how this association is strategically adapting to challenges in pay equity, embracing social media, and navigating industry shifts.**

In the ever-evolving landscape of greenkeeping and grounds management, the industry is experiencing a paradigm shift fueled by technological advancements, changing workforce dynamics, and the omnipresence of social media.

As greenkeepers and groundspeople navigate through these transformative times, we feel it's all the more imperative for associations to not only keep pace but also proactively adapt to the emerging trends that shape the profession.

We've sought out the strategies employed by some of the best-known grounds and greenkeeping associations to stay relevant and responsive as the industry continues to evolve. We contacted the and the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association (BIGGA) to learn more about how they're navigating and adapting to the demands of social media, addressing staffing shortages, advocating for fair compensation within the industry, and more.

**Q: What do you see as the most significant challenges currently facing the greenkeeping and grounds industry?**

Two major shifts that we can mention are the impact of climate change and the availability of resources. The warming climate is creating more extreme weather events and these cause difficulties such as increased flooding, erosion and extreme drought.

We are already seeing golf courses that could be considered victims of climate change, such as Renishaw Park in South Yorkshire, which closed in part due to loss of revenue caused by flooding.

Warmer weather in winter means golfers expect to play all year round and whereas winter maintenance was commonplace as playing levels reduced, today's greenkeepers must be able to produce playing surfaces all year round and be able to adjust their plans at short notice to overcome whatever nature throws at them.

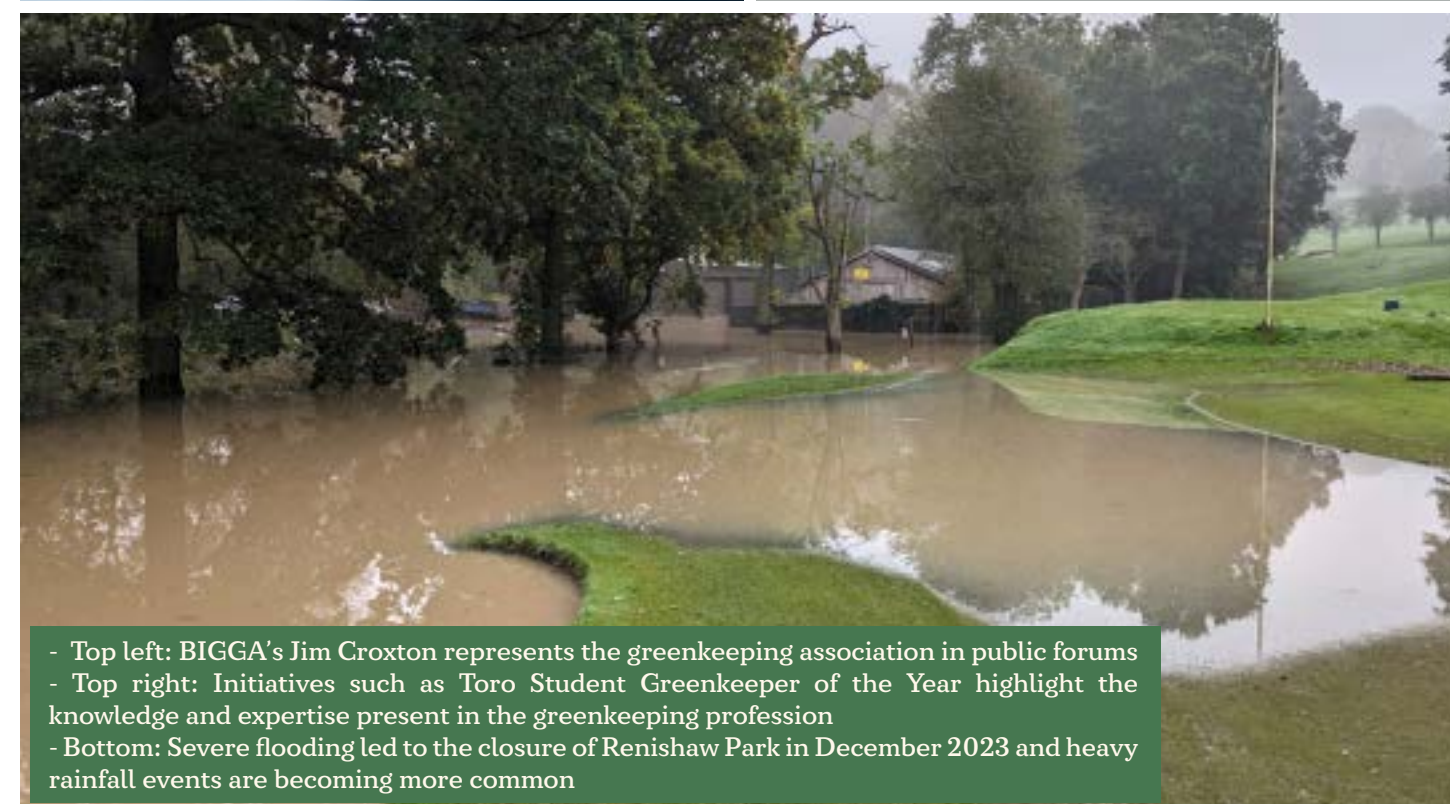
With regards resources – whether it be the availability of aggregates, water, machinery, products or staff – greenkeepers are having to do more with less. Global supply chains remain affected by Brexit and the pandemic and costs have increased dramatically. Water sources are becoming more expensive or unavailable, sand for bunkers and topdressing isn't always freely available and changing legislation has limited the products that are available. The availability of staff and adequate remuneration is another challenge that BIGGA is addressing head-on.

**Q: How has the closure of forums, like the recently closed Pitchcare forum, impacted the industry's information-sharing landscape? Do you think there is still a need for forums?**

The BIGGA website previously had an active forum, where members exchanged ideas and best practice, but the onset of social media removed much of the appetite for this. Online conversations now take place on social media and we're keen to engage and promote these whenever possible. While digital platforms are hugely important, what remains key to the wider health of the industry is that organisations like BIGGA continue to provide in-person opportunities for turf professionals to meet and exchange ideas. Our programme of regular events helps facilitate this.

**Q: In light of the increasing use of social media, how is your association leveraging online platforms to connect with members and share valuable information?**

BIGGA is undertaking a digital transformation, albeit with an appreciation that many members still value



- Top left: BIGGA's Jim Croxton represents the greenkeeping association in public forums
- Top right: Initiatives such as Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year highlight the knowledge and expertise present in the greenkeeping profession
- Bottom: Severe flooding led to the closure of Renishaw Park in December 2023 and heavy rainfall events are becoming more common



our print offerings. In recent years the association has invested in a new smartphone app, an improved website and our social media offering is increasing daily.

The BIGGA website features thousands of digital resources for members to access at no additional cost, with many Continue to Learn education sessions recorded and made available for members to revisit.

We contact our members regularly via a fortnightly email newsletter, app updates and a recently-launched WhatsApp channel. We have a growing YouTube channel and are exploring opportunities to reintroduce a podcast offering.

Key to successful communication is being everywhere your audience is, and that means our communications team is working harder than ever before. Supported by the wider BIGGA team, we are communicating with our members online, in print, over the phone, in person and countless other ways.

**Q: How are you adapting to social media groups being formed that provide new spaces for groundstaff to post job listings for free, connect with other groundstaff, and share their experiences in different job roles?**

BIGGA was created out of a desire for greenkeepers to build a community of likeminded professionals where ideas and knowledge could be shared. The rise of social media is the latest incarnation of that, so we believe well-intentioned groups are a force for good. Closed social media groups are useful for sharing ideas and tips on how to find new entrants to the industry, but BIGGA's recruitment offering remains the most comprehensive approach to finding senior and qualified staff.

**Q: With the evolving demands in the industry, how is your association addressing concerns related to pay and compensation for greenkeepers and grounds professionals?**

A look through the BIGGA archives tells you this is a longstanding concern among greenkeepers and while everyone would like to be paid more, the burden of proving your worth largely rests on the individual. That's why BIGGA works so hard to provide our members with education opportunities that enable them to demonstrate their value and equip them with the tools to communicate their achievements and skills, which in turn helps when they go to the negotiating table.

But we appreciate that official guidance by leading



Education events such as Continue to Learn provide greenkeepers with the knowledge required to overcome many challenges

industries bodies assists in these conversations and that is why BIGGA is one of the most vocal representatives on the Committee for Golf Club Salaries. That body produces recommended salaries for golf club staff.

We work to raise awareness of these guides among the club management structure, encouraging industry leaders to be aware of and adopt them, and there is evidence that these recommendations are increasingly playing a role as golf clubs set their teams' salary levels.

Furthermore, BIGGA has also undertaken extensive research with regards salary and workforce matters and we use this data to advocate for better wages and benefits in the industry. BIGGA representatives sit on the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Golf, the Golf Forum and other influential bodies and the information we have gathered is vital as we lobby these platforms.

**Q: Given the reported staffing shortages in the industry, how is your association working to help organizations attract and retain skilled professionals?**

**‘There are countless ways to promote greenkeeping to the wider public and we’re ... helping to create a strong industry not just today but also for generations to come.’**

Are there specific programs or strategies in place to address the recruitment challenges faced by the industry?

In early 2023, BIGGA recruited its first Workforce Project Manager, a permanent role that demonstrates our commitment to tackling these issues head-on. In her first year, Jenny Bledge has made great strides forwards in the introduction of the First Green initiative to the UK. First Green utilises STEM learning to showcase a career in greenkeeping to schoolchildren from through to secondary level. The easy-to-use resources

enable every golf club in the country to open their doors to the community, raising awareness of the industry and attracting new talent.

Beyond First Green, Jenny is also working alongside other organisations to promote greenkeeping as a career choice for armed forces veterans and those seeking a career change.

There are countless ways to promote greenkeeping to the wider public and we're working hard with our members to address this, helping to create a strong industry not just today but also for generations to come.

**Q: How has your association adapted its training and education programs to align with the changing needs and advancements in the greenkeeping and grounds industry?**

Continue to Learn, our flagship education programme, is truly world-renowned. Key to its success is the fact the programme is produced with

input from our members, meaning greenkeepers shape the learning on offer to their peers.

Continue to Learn is the most public facing of our education offering but at every level of the association we produce learning opportunities for our members. Whether it be local turf clubs and course walks, our regional conferences or our Learning & Development Roadshows, we provide a wide variety of educational offerings for greenkeepers at every stage of their career.

BIGGA also administers the work of the Greenkeepers Training Committee (GTC), which sets the standards for formal qualifications and apprenticeships across the UK.

**To support with any financial implications, BIGGA and our commercial supporters also provide several scholarship opportunities that can offset the cost of learning, meaning development and career progression is available to everyone, regardless of economic background.**

**Q: Are there new certifications or training modules introduced to enhance the skill set of industry professionals?**

Working with the GTC and the Greenkeeping Trailblazer Group, BIGGA has recently supported an overhaul of the apprenticeship offering for trainee greenkeepers. This has included the introduction of a Level 5 qualification for course managers, reinforcing our belief that lifelong learning is key to building a successful career.

BIGGA and The GTC host a standardisation meeting each year at BTME, ensuring the UK's training providers are aligned, and opportunities to improve training offerings is ongoing.

**Q: How do you envision the future of the greenkeeping and grounds industry, and what role does your association play in shaping that future?**

Tomorrow's greenkeepers will need to be better



trained than ever before and they're going to have to achieve things with fewer resources. Excellent communication skills and the ability to adapt at a moment's notice are going to be essential, but this pressure will mean you see more greenkeepers achieving greater positions in the wider golfing industry. Greenkeepers are going to be among the best trained members of staff within the golf club structure and they will play an increasing role in shaping the entire industry – Dan Lightfoot MG at The R&A being the most high profile example so far.

BIGGA will continue to provide opportunities such as the Future Turf Managers Initiative and we will grow and adapt to match the needs of our members. We will promote best practice and always present a professional image that is reflective of the changing greenkeeping profession.

**Q:** Are there emerging trends or innovations that your association is closely monitoring and addressing to keep members informed?

The greenkeeping industry is well placed to address the wants of Generation Z, who are looking for two key things in their careers – the use of technology and a flexible work/life balance. The first of these is already having a big impact on the industry, whether it be autonomous mowers, automated irrigation systems, the use of drones to monitor turf health, soil sensors or the plentiful other ways new technology is being used to create better surfaces.

We believe that tomorrow's greenkeepers will be

**'Tomorrow's greenkeepers will need to be better trained than ever before and they're going to have to achieve things with fewer**

technologically astute, with a wide range of tools that enable the creation of playing surfaces in an efficient and sustainable manner, and that means greenkeeping is potentially well-placed to attract new talent.

The other matter is that of time. Greenkeepers start early in the morning and are often required to work at weekends. Courses must be ready for golfers to enjoy and so it remains a challenge as to how this can be fulfilled, while attracting staff who are looking for a more routine 9-5 existence. It may be improving technology helps to facilitate this.

**Q:** How does your association gather feedback from members regarding needs, concerns, and suggestions? Have there been recent changes or adaptations based on member feedback?

The core BIGGA team is supported by a network of volunteers and regular dialogue with these, whether via our regional board structure or otherwise, provides us with a clear steer on the requirements of our members.

Our National Board comprises senior greenkeepers who volunteer their time freely to guide the association and so we believe we have a clear and close connection with the needs of our members. Our members lead us, ensuring we achieve our overarching strategy in line with their changing requirements.

**Big thanks to BIGGA for contributing to this article. You can learn more about BIGGA's work in the golf and greenkeeping industries by visiting [bigga.org.uk](http://bigga.org.uk).**



Jenny Bledge is BIGGA's first Workforce Project Manager, leading on initiatives such as the innovative First Green programme

# My Path to Wimbledon: Conrad Cavill, Groundstaff

Written by Aman Ahmed – Communications team at the All England Club. Read the full article on our website (see News)

Inspiring new recruits from all walks of life to join the sector is the critical, but concerning focus for #GroundsWeek 2024.

The main characters of sport's folklore are almost always its coaches and athletes. The set designers for those stories, however, are in short supply. Research carried out by the Grounds Management Association highlights that 40 per cent of the current workforce is over 50 years old and without an influx of new recruits, this could result in a significant employment gap within five years.

Through speaking to the All England Club's Conrad Cavill, we hope to illuminate the art of Groundsmanship and demystify the industry sport is indebted to.

Pathetic fallacy in most narratives would involve a scene with the sun smiling down bright and beaming rays. This biography, however, is not like the rest. Unique in that a summer's day shine, spurred an imminent escape:

"When I was in college, I did a week's work experience at Southampton's training ground.

"Years went by jumping around jobs. I was working in a call centre. I looked out on a day like this. It was sunny and I thought, I just don't want to do this. I want to be outside.

"I remembered my time at Southampton. That's when I looked into Grounds again. I found a Sports Turf Degree and went straight into education again."

Incredible that a throwaway week's work experience at the age of 17 years old would be the catalyst to an extraordinary Grounds career that would later cross Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Initially dropping out of a Football Business degree, Conrad's first attempt at university didn't stick. His second however, fared much better, returning to education a few years later through the University Centre Myerscough to undertake a Sportsturf degree.

This time accompanied with lived experience shaping



an unshakeable ambition:

"I wanted a degree. I wanted something. Without any experience, apart from that week at Southampton, I just went straight in and started a degree."

Recognised as one of the leading academies in the country by holding 'Category One' status in the Premier League's 'Elite Player Performance Plan', Southampton Football Club are widely renowned for the players they've platformed.

The roll call of graduates who list the Staplewood campus as their alma mater includes three time Southampton Player of the Season, Matt Le Tissier; Premier League all-time top scorer, Alan Shearer; England's youngest ever player at 17 years and 75 days old, Theo Walcott; five time UEFA Champions League Winner, Gareth Bale; and UEFA Champions League and Premier League winner, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain.

Something, clearly, is in the waters. It's a culture that permeates. Conrad explains that "people that were there at that time" during his week work experience "have gone on to be at the top of the game", listing fort leaders of the industry in Karl Standley – Wembley Stadium Grounds Manager, Andy Gray – St. George's Park Head of Grounds and Estates, and David Roberts – former Liverpool Football Club Grounds Manager.



# OSCA 3 ELEVATES SYNTHETIC MAINTENANCE AT COLLIERS PARK

James Mathewson, Head Groundsperson at Colliers Park National Football Development Centre in Wrexham, has found a game-changer in the Syn-Pro by SISIS Osca 3 for the upkeep of their synthetic pitch.

James brings a wealth of knowledge from his diverse career path, including stints at renowned clubs like Arsenal FC and West Ham United FC as well as the Honourable Artillery Company.

For the past 18 months he has been at Colliers Park, which boasts state-of-the-art facilities dedicated to football development.

Among its features is a full-sized synthetic pitch, a crucial asset for training and matches. Before James' tenure, the deep cleaning maintenance of the 3G pitch was outsourced, incurring significant monthly costs. James explains,

"Before I came here, we were contracting out the maintenance of the 3G pitch, which was a big cost every month."

The introduction of the Osca 3 marked a turning point in their synthetic maintenance strategy. James elaborates,

"We identified the Osca as a power brush that could reduce the de-compaction for us, keep the rubber crumb distributed, and keep the pitch in a good overall condition."

The Syn-Pro by SISIS Osca 3 is a tractor mounted powered oscillating brush with a 1.9 meter working width and is equally effective when used on synthetic turf with sand or rubber infill.

The two oscillating brushes stand the carpet fibres up and redistributes the infill evenly, minimising compaction on the surface and improving its performance - giving consistent playing

characteristics while also preventing pile damage caused by reduced infill levels.

One of the significant advantages James highlights is the flexibility the Osca 3 provides.

"We no longer have the monthly expenditure of bringing the contractor in. We invested in the machine, but it is already starting to pay itself back now, and we are getting a better pitch for it."

"With the Osca, we can now fit in the maintenance work around bookings and weather conditions, whereas before, when we used a contractor, we would need to take the pitch out of action for a whole day."

James further explains how the Osca's oscillating brush, a unique feature setting it apart from other models, plays a crucial role.

"The oscillating brush gives us the decompaction and redistribution, but the stiff brush keeps it nice and clean and smooth, and re-levels everything off."

In addition to the machine's performance, James praises the customer service from Syn-Pro by SISIS.

"The service from SISIS is excellent. Ben Lloyd (Field Support & Sales) comes in and is always on the phone if I need him throughout the year."



IMAGE: Osca 3 elevates synthetic maintenance at Colliers Park.

With the Syn-Pro Osca 3, James and Colliers Park have not only achieved significant cost savings but have also elevated the quality of their synthetic pitch maintenance.

The machine's innovative design and the dedicated support from Syn-Pro by SISIS have made it an indispensable tool for ensuring optimal playing conditions.

For further information or a no obligation demonstration, please contact Syn-Pro by SISIS on 01332 824 777 or visit [www.synprobysisis.com](http://www.synprobysisis.com)

For more news, reviews and insightful views, you can follow Syn-Pro on Twitter or Instagram @synprobysisis and like the company's Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/SynPro-by-SISIS>.





# FROM FAIRWAYS TO FAIR PAY: GROUNDSTAFF EQUITY IN SPORTS TURF



Bradley Tennant

Bradley Tennant of IGFH discusses the ongoing issue of subpar pay within the sports turf industry.

In the serene landscapes of golf courses, football fields, and cricket grounds, where the beauty of meticulously maintained turf meets the passion of sports enthusiasts, a contentious issue often lingers in the background: the disparity in pay within the sports turf industry.

Recently, the debate ignited on the Greenkeeping Official Facebook page, shedding light on the variances in wages for groundstaff and the need for a reevaluation of their salary structures.

The catalyst for this discussion was a job advert that, perhaps unintentionally, sparked a social media firestorm. The disabling of comments on posts with lower pay rates didn't go unnoticed by the online community. A subsequent post addressing the comment disabling led to an unexpected deluge of over 600 comments, creating a platform for groundstaff to voice their concerns.

## The Conundrum of Compensation: Dissecting Pay Disparities in Sports Turf Industries

One recurring observation that emerged from the discourse was the irony of golf clubs teetering on the edge of financial instability, yet being capable of remunerating general managers and golf pros with substantial salaries. The question echoed: How can these institutions justify paying their essential

groundstaff less than a living wage while maintaining top-heavy salary structures?

The situation is similar with football, but as we are all aware, the football industry has substantial financial resources, especially in my home country (the UK). I strongly believe that working in a high-end club should be a privilege, and groundstaff should be compensated accordingly. This would likely help clubs to secure long-term staff, rather than staff who leave to chase a better-paid position elsewhere.

There's no denying that securing an apprenticeship at a top-tier football club is an incredible opportunity for those getting started in their careers. But once you work your way in, the pathways to financial progression are limited - the only option is usually to pursue a management role, of which there are scarce opportunities. Some clubs provide the opportunity for incremental salary increases for staff members who complete additional qualifications, but pay rises aren't always guaranteed.

The key reason why I see this as an issue is that the importance of the role of turf managers in top-tier football cannot be understated. Ensuring the safety of football pitches protects the club's most valuable asset: the footballers. If a player gets injured due to poor pitch maintenance and has to take time off, their million-pound salary is money down the drain.

A turf manager's own salary should represent the significance of their position in ensuring the playing conditions are as safe as possible to greatly reduce injury risk.

## Elevating Industry Standards: The Case for Competitive Salaries

In my opinion, increasing the salaries of staff within the greenkeeping and grounds industries would not only recognize the importance of their roles, but also foster a stable and experienced workforce, as opposed to a constant turnover of staff.

But the challenge lies in finding a sustainable solution. Raising fees for golf courses is one option, but this brings the valid concern that clubs may alienate their members and decrease their facility usage, which will impact revenue and therefore deplete already limited funds. There's clearly a delicate balance between securing fair pay for groundstaff and maintaining a viable business model in this particular sector.

## What's the Solution? A Call to Action in Our Community

Let's consider the wider sports turf industry, including cricket grounds, rugby fields, and bowls. How can the entire sector elevate its profile and, in turn, the salaries of its staff? Should golf courses consider exploring sponsorships or hosting more tournaments to augment their revenue streams?

I have given a lot of thought to this topic, and I think it's evident that a collective effort is required to effect meaningful change. The greenkeepers, groundstaff, and professionals within our industry must come together to propose viable solutions and advocate for fair compensation.

Let's initiate a constructive dialogue, share ideas, and work collaboratively towards a more equitable and sustainable future for the dedicated staff who ensure our sports turfs remain a testament to excellence.

**What do you, our reader, think can be done to raise the profile of our industry and secure better salaries for the staff? Leave a comment beneath this article with your thoughts.**

## What The Stats Say: Here's What You Should be Earning As a Greenkeeper or Groundsper-son in the UK

Following research commissioned by the Grounds Management Association (GMA), the association recommends the following salary bands for 2022:

| Job role:                      | Basic Salary Per Annum (lower end) | Basic Salary Per Annum (upper end) |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Grounds Manager                | £38,230                            | £59,224                            |
| Head Groundsperson             | £32,605                            | £44,750                            |
| Deputy Head Groundsperson      | £26,675                            | £34,045                            |
| Groundsperson (Skilled)        | £24,946                            | £31,823                            |
| Groundsperson                  | £19,986                            | £25,496                            |
| Junior Groundsperson (aged 17) | £16,993                            | N/A                                |
| Junior Groundsperson (aged 16) | £14,112                            | N/A                                |

A few other key takeaways from the GMA's National Salary Framework report are:

- The GMA recommends a 3% increase in national minimum salary bands for all levels of grounds staff.
- The GMA also suggests that those with GMA qualifications who are paid 'bonus' amounts should have a 3.8% increase, extending from £675 for Level 1 accreditation to £4,050 for Level 6.

Keep in mind that this data is for 2022; the GMA typically releases a new report every 2 years and the 2024 report isn't yet available.

You can access the GMA National Salary Framework 2022 Recommendations at: [https://thegma.org.uk/system/files/documents/resources/gma\\_salary\\_survey\\_2022\\_final.pdf](https://thegma.org.uk/system/files/documents/resources/gma_salary_survey_2022_final.pdf)

Looking for information on how to ask for a pay rise in the grounds and greenkeeping industries? View our article at [internationalgreenkeepers.com/how-to-ask-for-a-pay-rise](https://internationalgreenkeepers.com/how-to-ask-for-a-pay-rise)



# PIONEERING SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT: KERSTEN UK

Biodiversity and sustainability have been a hot topic in the greenkeeping and grounds management industry for several years now, but it's never been more relevant than now. There's a rapidly growing interest in taking a sustainable approach to grounds management, which begs the question: what can be done to implement sustainable management? We spoke to Kersten UK to see how the site maintenance equipment company is taking steps towards more sustainable practices this year.

**Q: Can you provide an overview of Kersten UK's approach to sustainable land management and how it aligns with reducing pesticide use?**

At Kersten, the most fundamental principle is that Prevention is better than Cure. We have identified three core ideas that help us to best manage surfaces, whilst keeping remedial action (such as pesticide use) to a minimum. Firstly we must understand that no surface is "maintenance free". All surfaces perform a set of functions, which can be inhibited by

different factors, such as detritus build up, surface displacement and surface compaction. This can lead to flooding, potholes, weeds and all manner of other problems, which are symptoms of these primary issues. All these issues can be prevented with maintenance.

Secondly, we need to work with natural processes. Understanding processes, such as the soil cycle, and the plant life cycle, as well as seasonal changes allows us to take advantage of these processes and intervene at the most effective times to prevent weeds, with the least effort and maximum benefit.

Thirdly, we must consider not only the managed surfaces themselves, but the natural environment around them. This can help us reduce excess detritus build up, or other problems that are influenced by the surrounding environment.

Plant choices and different types of barriers can have a large impact on the maintenance of surfaces adjacent to them.

**Q: What are some of the main challenges associated with traditional pesticide-dependent weed control methods, and how**



Eco Weedkiller - Hot Water Weed Management ?

**does mechanical weed control address these challenges?**

There are several challenges with using pesticide dependent weed control methods, that can be overcome by a preventative approach and mechanical control. The first is partly a problem with defining the problem.

Plants don't grow in hard surfaces, they grow in the soil that builds up on the hard surface. Killing a weed with pesticides on a hard surface does not really help the overall situation, as the dead weed will add more soil to the surface as it decomposes, providing an ever-increasing bed of nutrients for the next weed to take hold.

This soil is a problem for several reasons. The deeper it gets, the more favourable the conditions become for stronger and more fervent types of perennial plants that can start to damage the surface with their roots.

Soil also traps moisture, preventing the surface from drying out. Over winter, this has the potential to freeze, exposing any weaknesses in the surface and often creating freeze-thaw damage. Both of these issues can be better solved by removing the soil (along with the weeds) rather than just killing the weeds.

Aside from this, many hard surfaces are designed to allow water to run off into drains and eventually often end up in our rivers, or reservoirs. It is therefore important to avoid spraying on these surfaces as much as possible, especially close to drains, as we don't want these chemicals in our water. Using a mechanical approach will prevent this.

**Q: Could you explain how Kersten UK's mechanical weed control solutions work, particularly on hard-standing surfaces?**

Kersten supply a range of tools for managing weeds on hard surfaces:

- Sweepers: By removing the detritus with sweepers, we can prevent it from decomposing into soil. This is the first line of interference we can use to prevent weeds. If they have no soil to grow in, they will not emerge.
- Weedbrushes: These can remove the soil buildup when it becomes too heavy for a sweeper. This can be more of a remedial action and allows us to clean the surface back to back.
- Thermal tools: These can also be considered mechanical. We have different options using either hot air or hot water to kill weeds.



Trevor Thorp - Weed Sweeping



Heat can be used to destroy the chloroplast in the leaves and stem of a plant, collapsing its structure and rendering it incapable of photosynthesis. Different methods will be suitable for different types of plants and on different surfaces.

**Q. What types of machinery or equipment does Kersten UK offer for mechanical weed control, and how do they differ from traditional pesticide applications in terms of effectiveness and environmental impact?**

In terms of controlling weeds, we can do this in several ways as discussed above.

My preferred option is always to remove the soil where possible with a weedbrush. This not only removes the weeds but also helps solve other problems, such as drainage, and prevents freeze-thaw damage. We offer a range of different weed brushes, either on two-wheel tractors or ride-on tractors, depending on how much soil needs to be removed.

Hot air is effective on annual plants and moss, and can be used to kill perennials with repeated applications that deplete the energy stored in the root system. They are generally much quicker to use than hot water systems, but may require more treatments.

Hot water is a more potent form of thermal weeding system because the water can penetrate the soil, allowing it to cook the roots of the plant as well as the stem and leaves. This allows fewer treatments across a year than with hot air. However, it is generally a slower process.

The environmental impact of all these methods depends on a lot of factors, especially the time in a plant's lifecycle the treatment is carried out. The earlier you treat a plant with heat, the less energy will be needed to kill the weed. The impact of the tool being used is far outweighed by the difference in the weed burden being treated.

If we can reduce the weed burden by reducing the amount of soil weeds have to occupy, and by treating as early in their lifecycle as possible, we can minimise the amount of treatment we use. This applies to pesticides too, although pesticides usually require more foliage, and therefore must be applied later in the growing season.

**Q. In what ways can mechanical weed control contribute to long-term sustainability and environmental preservation compared to**



#### **chemical-based approaches?**

Mechanical treatments contribute to the ability of the surface to perform its functions. They help to significantly extend the working life of the surface, ensure it drains properly, provides access, grip, and support for traffic and pedestrians.

Weed killing using chemical pesticides only kills the weeds and does not treat any of these problems, leaving the surface more susceptible to damage from freeze-thaw, plant roots, flooding, and other issues, costing much more to fix in the long run. The re-construction of a surface is many times more expensive to the environment than its maintenance; therefore, extending the life of the surface is paramount to sustainability.

**Q. Are there any specific industries or sectors where mechanical weed control has shown particular success, and what are some notable case studies or examples?**

A successful approach can be found for any scale of site. We have success stories in private tennis courts all the way up to cities.

A particular example I would bring to people's attention is Hull City Council, who are using our pedestrian weed brushes in conjunction with other equipment as part of their "Love Your Neighbourhood" Campaign. The project aims to make a visible improvement to what people see when they step outside their front door, focusing

on things such as:

- Litter bin repairs/replacement
- Graffiti removal
- Fly-tip clearance
- Bulky item clearance
- Verge edging
- Grass cutting
- Shrub maintenance
- Leaf removal
- Hedge cutting
- Gully cleaning
- Pothole repairs
- Street light repairs

The project was introduced in 2023 and there has been a lot of positive feedback. Councillor Mike Ross said:

"The trials we have carried out so far have been very successful, with residents telling us how happy they are with the difference the clean-ups have made."

Our machines have been utilised to great effect throughout the city for path edging and weed management.

**Q. How does the cost-effectiveness of mechanical weed control compare to traditional pesticide use, both in the short term and over time?**

In the short term, alternatives will be more expensive than using pesticides, but as we've discussed, they are doing quite different things and I would argue that simply using chemicals isn't achieving the necessary maintenance of the surface to prevent damage. The majority of the cost of the mechanical treatments is in the upfront equipment costs and in clearing years of neglected soil build-up. The following years will require far less intervention to keep the surface in good condition and with low levels of weeds.

We are starting to collaborate on some research into the longer-term costs and potential savings to be made by implementing Integrated Weed Management techniques on hard surfaces. So far, research has only shown the sustainability of a few single alternatives in isolation across a very short time scale, and without altering things like treatment timings to account for product differences.

Once the research has been done, I can offer a better answer, but for now, common sense indicates that maintaining a surface with brushes reduces the weed burden and extends the life of

the surface, greatly reducing the cost of any further applications of thermal or chemical control and spreading the cost of the surface installation over an extended period.

**Q. What kind of training or expertise is required for implementing mechanical weed control solutions effectively, and does Kersten UK offer support in this regard?**

No formal certification is required for implementing a mechanical weed control solution; however, a fundamental knowledge of Integrated Weed Management can significantly enhance your results. I would recommend Lantra's Awareness of Integrated Weed Management course, which we helped put together, but we can also assist with quite a few resources on our website to help understand the basics.

**Q. How do you see the future of weed control evolving, and what role do you envision mechanical methods playing in that future?**

The ultimate solution requires people's knowledge to be updated. The tools to do the job effectively are already here, but people tend to try and fit them into the way they currently do things instead of adapting their approach to suit the tools.

**Q. Finally, what advice would you give to businesses or organisations looking to transition away from pesticide-dependent weed control methods and embrace more sustainable alternatives like mechanical weed control?**

My best advice would be to survey your site. A survey should identify the sources of detritus, the current state of surfaces, and what needs to be done to bring it back to a suitable state that is easy to maintain.

Only then can you really create a plan and put an effective regime in place. If you simply swap chemical pesticides for another product in your current weeding regime, you will always be on the back foot and spend a lot more time and money than you need to.

We'd like to thank Sean Faulkner at Kersten UK for taking the time to discuss sustainable management in such detail, and we hope you learned something valuable from this article.

You can visit Kersten online at [kerstenuk.com](http://kerstenuk.com)



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