

Meeting of Minds in Melbourne!

MELBOURNE



20th Australian Turfgrass Conference Review



ATM Editor Brett Robinson reviews the hugely successful 20th Australian Turfgrass Conference in Melbourne.

A touch of the Olympics came to Melbourne in late June and it wasn't the Olympic flame that touched down en route to Athens for the start of this month's global sporting spectacle in Greece.

We're talking about the 20th Australian Turfgrass Conference. Or at least that's how Bonnie Doon Golf Club superintendent David Scaife chose to sum the week-long conference which attracted record numbers.

The New South Welshman commented during the AGCSA's annual general meeting that it was like an Olympic year for the turf industry whenever the conference was held in Melbourne. Not a comment to be sneezed at from someone north of the border, given the inclement weather which greeted delegates.

And the statistics are there to back Scaife up. In what is being touted as the biggest turfgrass industry gathering ever to be held in the Southern Hemisphere, over 840 delegates gathered for the conference, while 1000 visitors attended the two-day, 7500m² tradeshow which contained over 80 of the turf industry's leading companies.

Across the Yarra River in the Melbourne Convention Centre, a who's who in turf was assembled with six keynote speakers headlining the education component for 2004.

Despite battling a recent brush with poison ivy, a streamlined version of Jim Moore made a welcome return to Australia and in his typical entertaining southern drawl outlined the recent changes made in the USGA's greens construction

specifications (*turn to Tech Talk on page 26 for more on these changes*).

With water issues and salinity an increasing issue for superintendents and turf managers, the lead-off talks from Professor Ron Duncan and Dr Bob Carrow proved to be a highlight for many delegates. Their subsequent workshops were also extremely well attended and outside of the lecture theatres they could be seen on numerous occasions conducting impromptu discussions with superintendents and turf managers keen to bend the ears of the experts.

With the near-unplayable greens of Shinnecock Hills foremost in many minds, plant pathologist Dr Bruce Clarke took to the stage to talk about the influence management practices have on turfgrass diseases, before the John Batman Theatre fell silent as Terry Muir gave an insight into the environmental management minefield the industry currently has to tread through.

Aside from the golf course management stream, the 2004 conference boasted education streams for turf mechanics, bowling greenkeepers and sportsfield curators.

Upwards of 250 turf managers turned out for the sportsfield management stream and according to TGAA Vic president Anthony Uhr-Henry the feedback was very positive and upbeat.

"Everyone was very happy with the speakers and the topics and there was plenty of discussion," says Uhr-Henry. "It was also great to network and socialise with those guys from out of state and from other countries."

After the keynote presentations, the turf management stream kicked off with talks from David Aldous and John Neylan on sportsfield surfaces which generated plenty of debate.

Wednesday proved the big talking point, however, with the day-long cricket wicket seminar. Highlights from the seminar included Ron Makin's talk on preparing wickets for the World Cup in South Africa and the very candid comments from English Cricket Board pitch inspector Chris Wood.

Wood gave an overview of his role, the practices employed to prepare wickets in England and some of the issues facing county and international cricket venues. He also made some very interesting comments about the ability of English curators and finished by saying



A strong international line up of speakers included (from left) Dr Bruce Clarke, Dr Bob Carrow, Professor Ron Duncan and the USGA's Jim Moore



The two-day tradeshow at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre was one of the biggest ever and covered an impressive 7500m² of floorspace

that Australian curators led the way in cricket wicket preparation worldwide, and that the quality of the Australian pitches was a real credit to the curators' abilities.

Across at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre, around 50 mechanics, including one all the way

from the Hong Kong Golf Club, converged for the turf mechanics stream.

Australian Turf Equipment Technicians Association president John Haines (*Kew Golf Club*) said the conference was a great hit for delegates and the tradeshow gave them

the chance to check out the latest in turf equipment technology.

"The guys were well pleased and the lectures from the likes of the big three - Toro, John Deere and Power Turf (*Jacobsen*) - were well attended," says Haines.

Around 30 delegates took part in the post conference turf tour which took in the RAAF Museum at Point Cook, a barbecue lunch at the Silvan factory, followed by a tour of the MCG to view construction work.

One of the highlights of the conference was the excellent attendance of overseas delegates. Without the clash of dates experienced last year, around 50 turf managers and agronomists came across from New Zealand, including New Zealand Golf Course Superintendents Association president Brad Burgess.

A group of Kiwi students, lead by Otago Polytechnic lecturer Gary Smith, actually hit the fundraising trail in order to attend the conference. From all reports, the group had an enjoyable week and gleaned plenty of information to take back across the Tasman.

As well, there were representatives from Bali, including Yulius Wododo from Bali Nirwana Golf Club, and representatives from as far away as China, The United Arab Emirates and India.

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The conference also saw the final launch of the Certificate III Horticulture Delivery and Assessment Guides by the National Turfgrass Education Committee as part of its remit to formulate a consistent national turf education pathway.

Just as the education working group was formed during last year's Adelaide conference, Melbourne also saw the formation of another working group.

The AGCSA, in conjunction with the AGU, held the first meeting of the Environmental Management Working Group.

The group has been charged with developing a long term strategy that not only increases environmental management within the industry, but boosts awareness of the golfing public and the general public about the advances made on golf courses and the positive environmental impacts.

The group includes AGCSA representatives Steven Potts, John Neylan and outgoing president Mark Couchman, state presidents Michael Picken, Craig Easton and Peter Harfield, Terry Muir, Ross Perrett and trade company representatives including Cameron Russell (*Toro*), Kevin Harris (*Bayer Environmental Science*) and John Matheson (*Simplot*).

The social functions were again well attended with punters getting in on the footy theme of the Welcoming Cocktail Reception. A couple of Tasmanians, one resplendent in Essendon garb and the other dressed as a white maggot, walked away with the best dressed honours.

Roy Masters and The Falcons kept those at the conference dinner entertained, while the numerous functions put on by the trade during the week were well attended given the number of rather jaded delegates that turned up for the early morning education sessions.

Gambin Takes The Reins

The AGCSA will head into the next two-year period with a new president after Gold Coast Burleigh Golf Club superintendent Jeff Gambin was elected unopposed as the association's new president.

Gambin, an AGCSA Board member for the past five years, takes over from Mark Couchman (*Cromer Golf Club*) who steps down from the Board after seven years service.

Gambin's position on the Board has been filled by Queensland stalwart Jon Penberthy, who joins existing members Martyn Black (*Castle Hill Country Club*) and Martin Greenwood (*Kingston Heath Golf Club*).

Gambin, who combined has over 20 years involvement at both state and national level, says he is looking forward to confronting some of the big issues over the next couple of years, and paid special tribute to former AGCSA president Doug Robinson for his influence and support.

And The Winners Were...

The 2004 AGCSA Awards took on special significance this year with the Distinguished Service Award given posthumously to five golf turf industry legends – Mick and Vernon Morcom, Claude Crockford, George Rüb and Rupert 'Rube' Walkerden. For a full review, turn to page six.

As well, four others were honoured at this year's awards function, including Victorian stalwart Ray Keane who received the Distinguished Service Award.

Two New South Welshmen and former AGCSA board members won two of the most eagerly sought after awards.

Elanora Golf Club superintendent Peter Schumacher won the Excellence in Golf Course Management Award, while David Warwick deservedly won the Claude Crockford Environmental Award for his environmental achievements at Avondale Golf Club.

The Western Australian contingent had cause to celebrate after Craig Webley became the first ever Graduate of the Year recipient to hail from WA.

ATM has a full profile of the 2004 winners starting on page 22.



New AGCSA president Jeff Gambin (right) and AGCSA Board member Jon Penberthy



History in the Making - AGCSA Golf Championships

As South African Retief Goosen was putting the finishing touches to his second US Open triumph on the glass top greens of Shinnecock Hills, 90 well-rugged up superintendents converged on famous sand belt course Metropolitan Golf Club for the annual Toro-sponsored AGCSA Golf Championships.

While the US Open made the headlines for all the wrong reasons, the 2004 AGCSA Golf Championships created history as Trevor Ridge (*Sawtell Golf Club*) and Anthony Toogood (*Albury Golf Club*) both fired four-over rounds of 76 to tie for the top prize.

For Ridge, the win was a long time coming. A regular contender for the trophy, the moustachioed master of the greens had finished there or thereabouts in recent years, and at the Brisbane conference in 2002 shot a sub-par round at Royal Queensland only to be pipped by defending champion Daryl Sellar.

At Metropolitan, Ridge, starting on the fourth hole, quickly dropped three shots in the first three holes, but with back-to-back birdies on eight and nine managed to claw back to be

one over by the turn. Three bogeys on the back nine saw him finish on 76.

Teeing off on the first, Toogood was also one over after nine and teed off on the 15th still looking good at one over. Three bogeys on 15, 16 and 17 however, saw him blow out to four over.

One of those bogeys came as a result of his ball lodging in an ant hill. The incident prompted Toogood to ask for a ruling back at the clubhouse and after a call to the Victorian Golf Association for an official verdict, Toogood had to record the bogey.

While Toogood was cursing his run home, three times defending champion Daryl Sellar was cursing the entire course. The Glenelg Golf Club superintendent, a hot favourite to make it four in a row, was subdued by the Metropolitan greens and finished with a disappointing 83.

While Sellar's performance caused an immediate inquiry in South Australia, his state compatriots Ivan Swinstead (*Tee Tree Gully Golf Club*), Kym Traeger (*Berri Golf Club*), Stephen Newell and Richard James (*both Kooyonga Golf Club*) created a little bit of history by winning the state teams title for the first time ever.



AGCSA Golf Championship winners Trevor Ridge (left) and Anthony Toogood

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The quartet (with scores of 31, 30, 36 and 30 respectively) scored 127 points for SA and in doing so turned the tables on their Victorian counterparts who collected the honour at Royal



Mark Couchman (Cromer Golf Club) blasts out of a bunker

Adelaide. Victoria scored 125 to finish second ahead of NSW (119), WA (117) and Tasmania (108), while Queensland finished a distant last with 101.

As Ridge and Toogood battled it out for the main prize, the rest of the field was content with trundling around the immaculately prepared course, with a number of players more interested in taking photographs and examining superintendent Richard Forsyth's pristine putting surfaces.

Freeway Golf Club superintendent Glenn Davie managed to concentrate on his game, however, flying the Victorian flag as he collected the stableford trophy.

Davie, playing off a nine handicap, shot 80 (37 points) and finished a single point ahead of Stephen Newell (*Kooyonga Golf Club*) and Merv Hayward (*Cypress Lakes Golf Club*).

Speaking of Hunter Valley's finest, the presentation ceremony afterwards produced the sledge of the week after Hayward failed to show when he was called up to receive the stableford runner's up prize. When it was asked where he was, the ever-reliable Peter Foggarty quipped, "He's in quarantine".

Back to the golf, and nearest the pins went to Trevor Strachan (*Lake Karrinyup Country Club*) on the 2nd and Stuart Moore (*Southport Golf Club*) on the 11th.



Trevor Ridge tracks his tee shot on the 2nd at Metropolitan

Shaun Probert (*Camden Lakeside Country Club*) crushed the longest drive on the 18th.

Shot of the day, however, had to go to AGCSA Board member Martyn Black. The Castle Hill Country Club superintendent, who finished with a very respectable 79, drained a 100 foot-plus putt for birdie on the par 4 15th, the hardest hole on the course. On the same hole two groups later Andy Hugill (*Mona Vale Golf Club*) scored a great up and down, sinking a 40 footer from the fringe for par after blasting out of a bunker.

Avondale Golf Club superintendent David Warwick also deserves special mention after he blew his round out of the water by five-putting on his first hole.

Across at Commonwealth Golf Club, Wayne de Fraga scored 34 points to walk away with the AGCSA Corporate Cup.

Power Turf's Greg Clark finished runner-up with 33 after a countback.

Can't Touch 'Em

Melbourne saw the return of the Scotts Touch Challenge with 30 punters braving polar conditions to take the field at Olympic Park, home turf of the Melbourne Storm.

After a rousing rendition of the national anthem, the teams took to the turf and before the first whistle was even blown the claret was flowing. Unfortunately it had nothing to do with foul play, rather Richard Hooton (*Kangaroo Valley Country Club*) managed to slice his face with his fingernails while attempting a fancy pass.

Despite some shocking hospital passes and blatant cheating, the matches were played in great spirit and even NSWGCSA president Craig Easton managed to find his way across the tryline.

Merv Hayward endeared himself on Scotts boss Martin Morgan by smashing him into the turf, while AGCSA business development manager Scott Petersen, who put together the bumper tradeshow during conference week, was clearly the Achilles heel of the composite trade team, costing them a number of tries with his bungling efforts.

David Westall's 50m intercept try will be long remembered, but at the end of the evening it was the NSW Legends team, not surprisingly led by Hayward, that finished on top.

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Post Conference Turf Tours

While the fickle Melbourne weather held off for most of conference week, it unleashed its fury on delegates who braved the two turf tours on the Friday.

One busload headed to the sand belt courses of Huntingdale, Metropolitan and Royal Melbourne, while another headed to the Mornington Peninsula to take in the home of last year's Australian Open, Moonah Links, next door neighbour The Dunes, before finishing in torrential rain at Michael Riordan's Patterson River.

At Huntingdale, superintendent Mike Freeman took delegates, which included an eager Jim Moore, around the course, explaining the club's current program of converting greens, extending championship tees and hole reconstruction.

Across the road at Metropolitan, superintendent Richard Forsyth kicked off with a tour through the maintenance shed before heading out to the 2nd where discussions centred around the course's greens and bunker maintenance. Delegates also got the chance to

examine the VGA's trial plots and the 1st fairway where Forsyth has both Wintergreen and Santa ana growing side by side.

Final stop was at Australia's perennially No.1 ranked course Royal Melbourne, a fitting place to conclude the tour considering the posthumous Distinguished Service Awards handed out earlier in the week to former Royal Melbourne superintendents Mick Morcom and Claude Crockford.

Over a roast lunch, current superintendent Jim Porter explained that in recent years with the development of pure couch fairways, Royal Melbourne is still maintaining its two grass policy (common couch and *Poa*) as the preferred method of having good playing conditions for 12 months of the year.

Porter described how in 1988 work began on replacing the old Suttons mix with Penncross on the composite course greens, and how after the tournament greens were completed, the program was suspended while the newer varieties of bents were assessed and research carried out on the re-creation of the Suttons mix.

In 1996 the 12th East was sown with a new Suttons mix and Spring 1999 saw six greens of the tournament course (*Penncross*) replaced. Since then, Porter and his staff have converted 35 greens to the new Suttons mix with the final green on the 6th East being done in conjunction with the relocation of the hole over this winter.

The subsequent walk around the course had many delegates, particularly the large contingent of New Zealanders, in awe and most probably missed a lot of what Porter was saying on account of taking too many photographs. 📷

See you in 2005

During the Melbourne conference it was announced that the 21st Australian Turfgrass Conference would be held at the Moama Bowling Club, Moama on the border of NSW and Victoria. The conference will be held over four days from 6-9 June, 2005.



Royal Melbourne superintendent Jim Porter takes delegates around the course during the post conference turf tour