

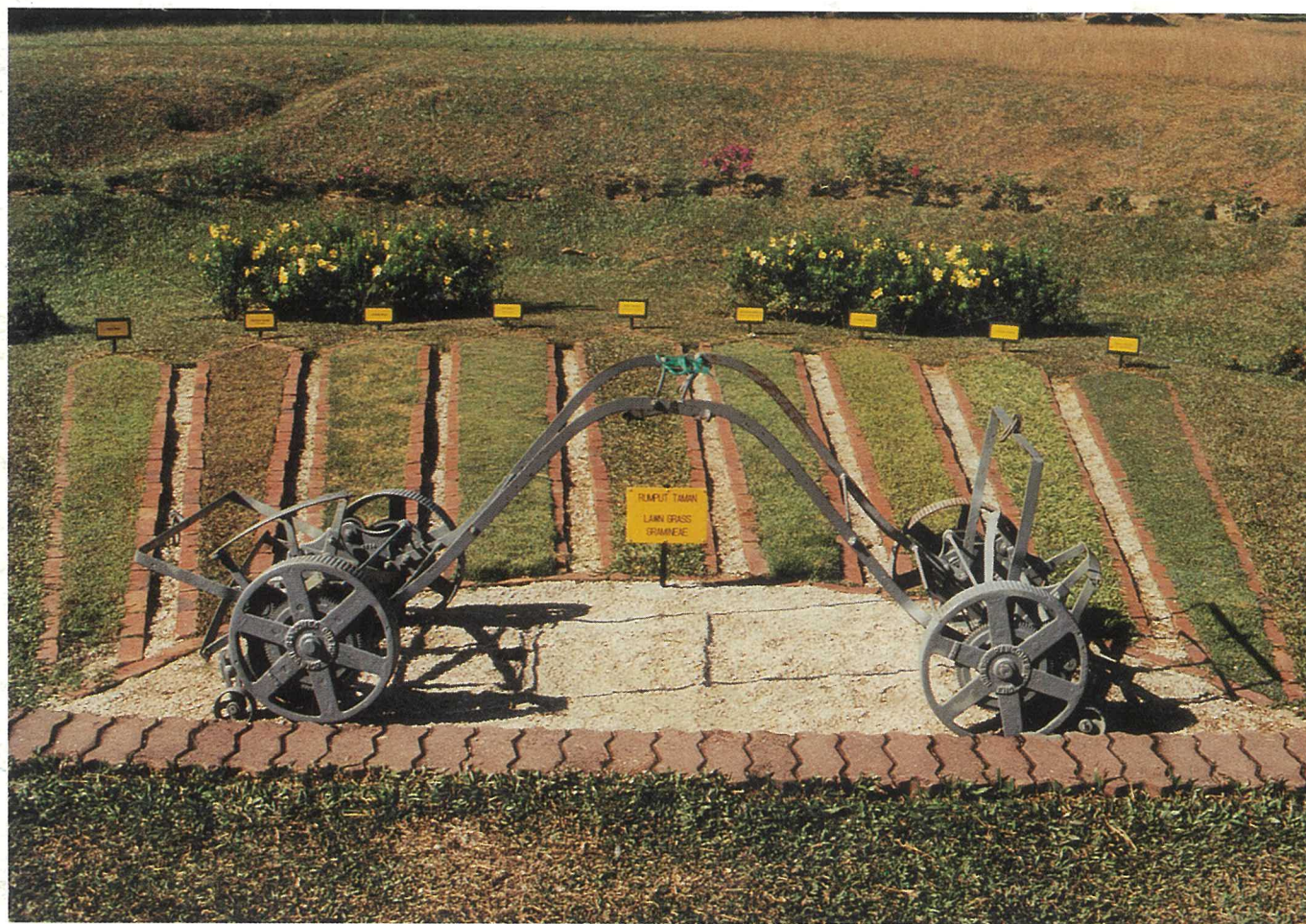
DEDICATED TO THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CARE OF SPORTING AND RECREATIONAL TURF

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# TURFCRAFT AUST.

Incorporating the official journal of The Australian Golf Course Superintendents Association



## Encouraging public interest in turf an example of the possible from the Botanical Gardens, Penang, Malaysia

(Keraj Aan, Keraj Aan Nегren Jabatan, Kebun Bunga)  
the horse drawn Ransome mower was imported over a century ago  
and was the first "powered" machine to be used in that area.



# Award winning Superintendent & club

Because the inaugural AGCSA Fellowship Award, funded by John Deere, and won by Greg Smith of Pambula-Merimbula Golf Club late last year, created wide interest amongst superintendents, Turf Craft decided to visit the winner at his course on the South Coast of NSW. This report then attempts to project a profile of the man, his background and working environment.

It was quite apparent at the black tie dinner prelude to the 1990 Australian Open, held at the ritzy Sheraton Wentworth Hotel last November, that the crinkly curly haired young fellow in the white tuxedo was not an over-awed bundle of nerves. The presence of golf's demigods — Norman and Faldo — and the galaxy of those silver haired stalwarts of the game's establishment (who look the same the world over) seemed not to daunt the superintendent from the country golf club, who would shortly be called upon to receive the award, and to respond.

His composure was in marked contrast to the demeanour of the John Deere people, who as sponsors were bravely attempting to hide their anxiety. And even the experienced and usually composed AGCSA President Doug Robinson, was finding some discomfort with his stiff shirt and black tie.

So we thought, this is perhaps, evidence of why the judges thought that the former Penrith apprentice would make "a good ambassador for the AGCSA and the Australian industry". (The criteria upon which the judgement was made, included potential for representation. It also demanded of applicants "quality of personal and written presentation"). Greg Smith's performance on that historic evening of November 27, left little room for doubt, that to the extent of their assessment of his personality and social graces, the judges had got it right. He made no pretence of false modesty by declaring himself to be an unworthy winner. He gives the impression of possessing total self confidence without the slightest suspicion of arrogance or conceit.

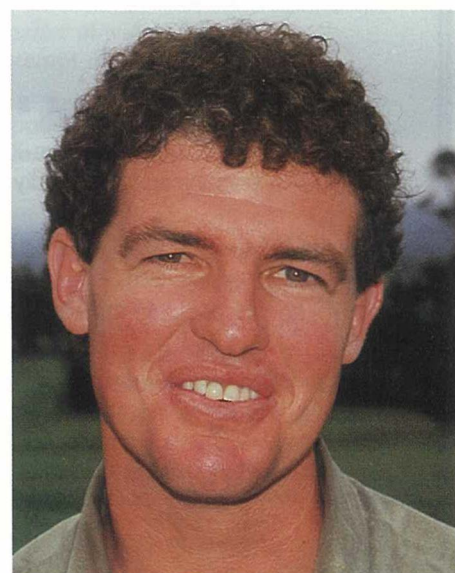
The other aspects upon which the judging panel (McIvor of ATRI, Woodcock of Turf Technology, and Phillips of the AGU) were required to deliver their verdict were:

- "excellence in turf management"

- "potential for future contribution to the industry" (as distinct from past achievements so as to preclude distinguished ancients)
- "previous contributions to the industry through involvement in education and state association".

We journeyed from Melbourne to Pambula-Merimbula (the distinction between the two holiday resort townships becomes necessary because of the aerodrome which separates them), and arrived on January 23. Greg Smith gave credit to Turf Craft for breaking the drought — they hadn't had rain worth measuring on the gauge for months. Until our arrival on that Wednesday. And when it started, it bucketed down and didn't stop all day. (We declined to accept responsibility for breaking the drought. Although the concurrency of our arrival with the rain was obviously not attributable to mere coincidence, it seems imprudent to encourage belief that Turf Craft's services include rain making. The potential demand from this vast arid continent could be such that we'd never have time to produce the magazine!)

He greeted us in khaki shorts and matching shirt at the door of the maintenance shed (which incorporates the residue of the original clubhouse — apparently a modest timber affair in stark contrast to the vast and opulent monument to tourism and pokies, which now caters for the 4,000 members and umpteen annual visitors). His team of seven wore the uniform with pride, and the spirit of relaxed industry in the shed, where we met David Thomson, and Robin Gordon (Smith's second in charge and mechanic respectively) suggested a happy team. Neither the building nor the equipment it housed were over flash. If anything, it seemed rather incongruous when compared



Greg Smith — Pambula-Merimbula

to the initial impressions gained from the clubhouse. But that disparity is not unusual in golf clubs, and Smith told us that Pambula-Merimbula had committed itself to a planned machinery replacement programme, by allocating \$3,000 a month to an account for that purpose.

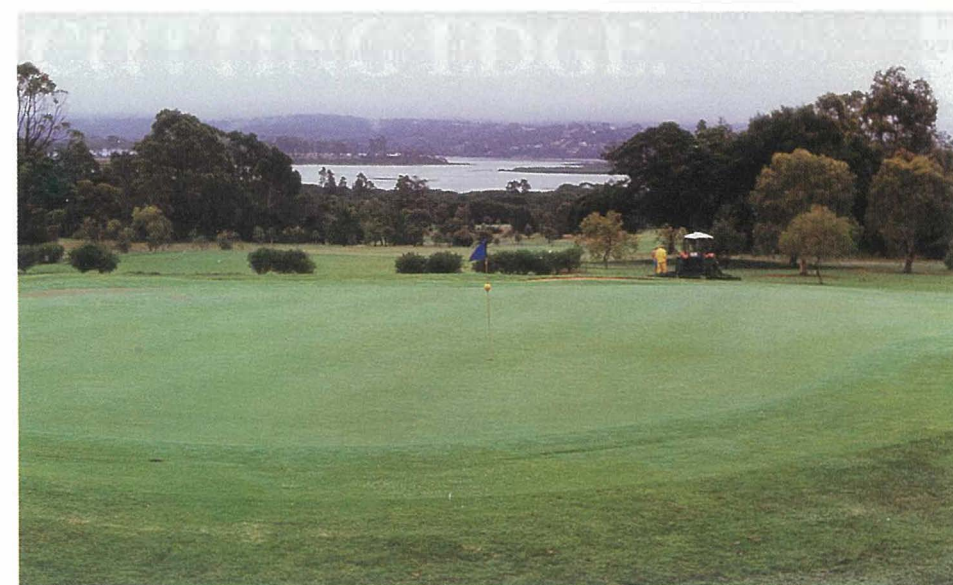
When a mate on the ground staff at metropolitan Sydney's Roseville GC drew Smith's attention to the advertisement for the job at Pambula, it was the reference to the requirement for involvement in planned construction, and "someone young to grow with the position" which attracted the newly married 26 year old. After four years on the far South Coast, Smith recalls that "although I had a good job as Assistant (to Mark O'Sullivan) at Roseville, I wanted a better living environment for our intended family. It then seemed that Pambula offered something better than Sydney's traffic with its air and noise pollution, rat race tempo and dirty beaches". He emphatically confirmed that, after four years, those reasons for swapping what most would see as status for a healthier life style have been well and truly

# highlights importance of country golf

vindicated. They now have a relaxed and wholesome existence, security and ironically, "status" from local recognition enjoyed by a few superintendents in the big cities. And the winning of the AGCSA John Deere Fellowship extends that recognition from the parochial basis of Pambula to the national horizon. It is probably true to say that if Greg Smith had stayed at Roseville (or at any other Sydney club) the qualities which earned him the award would have remained, but his chances of attracting notice would have been reduced. (One of the most pleasing aspects of the inaugural Fellowship Award, at least to this observer's mind, is that it was won by a worthy individual, who works for a country golf club. It represented a most welcome relief to the game's apparent elitism and almost mesmeric fascination with fashionable names — of both courses, players and reputations.)

The situation prevailing at Pambula at the time of Smith's interview for the job could be described as "dynamic". Members of the greens committee, (headed by Keith Kennett — a retired grazier from beyond Benalla in Victoria, and cousin to former foot and mouth disease prone Liberal opposition leader Jeff of the same ilk) retained fresh memories of their battles with the immediate past superintendent. They, and the members, were less than enamoured with the state of the 18 hole course, and it is safe to say that they would be regarding prospective applicants with cynicism — the health of which probably exceeded the prevailing level in their greens. And to further complicate the scenario they were planning an 18 hole extension subject to land availability. The applicants would need to be convincing.

This potentially adversarial battle of wills (at the initial interview) was meat and drink to Gritty Greg. He wasn't appointed captain of Penrith Rugby League team (in the state competition for under 21's) because of his curly hair, and he didn't win the AGCSA Championship at Lake Karringup in 1988, just because he could hit a golf ball. He is an intensely competitive bugger, and combines that characteristic with what his wife



View of the lake taken from the club-house.

Linda, describes as a tendency to "over analyse". He got the job, but only after "a lot of questions", one of which was — "why would a smart young fellow from Sydney be interested?". Smith, with typical realism, told us that "the fact that I was an A Grade Pennant player off four at Long Reef, and had been a greenkeeper for eight or nine years probably helped". The opportunity of acquiring a talented player and an experienced turf craftsman obviously was attractive.

Despite resistance from both local greenies and the representatives of aboriginal interests the club had definitely decided on the nine hole extension. A tentative design had been submitted for a new 18 (subject to land availability) — and imminent approval was expected (at the time of his appointment) for nine of those. Smith's initial brief then was to design and construct the nine holes, and as an equal priority to reconstruct four of the original greens. The

second part of that plan has yet to be implemented — extensions to the club house were seen to be a priority.

Knowing that some quite senior and experienced superintendents, see course designing as being outside of their legitimate area of expertise, we put it to Greg Smith how he viewed the prospect of design and construction. Again with typical quiet confidence he replied — "no problem, and the Club asked me to do it anyway". His tactical skills were demonstrated by his admission that "I put up two propositions for design — one fanciful and the other more practical". In so doing the committee had the luxury of indulgence in dreams, but inevitably then settled for pragmatism.

For completely mutual reasons it was vital for the new man, from the outset, to gain clear definition of his areas of authority. Smith sees the "superintendent's job as running the outside affairs" (meaning the grounds and everything that goes with

**Bottom centre: A little pixie from Melbourne in the undisturbed retention of natural beauty (commended by one of the judges) and (below) use of by-product from local wood chipping mill on paths.**



The presentation — Sheraton Wentworth Hotel, Sydney, November 27. Left to right: Doug Robinson, the winner, John Deere's team (sponsors) Allen Heil, David Willey and Peter Anstee.





them). He inferred that previous problems were caused by "course management by the office and committees". The fact that the Club was adjudged the "Most improved club" by the Registered Clubs Association of NSW in 1989 may relate to the new regime.

Construction of the new nine was completed (with only a 10% over-run of the \$400,000 budget — despite two floods which devastated the ground works), and opened for play in October 1989. The fact that Smith and his team of seven completed construction in 15 months, by dint of each working 70 hours per week, gives the AGCSA Fellowship Award winner obvious satisfaction. It cost the Club about \$30,000 in over-time which would be a fraction of what it would have had to pay outside contractors.

The achievement of construction is in itself, evidence of the "excellence in turf management" sought by the conditions of the award. Radical improvement of the bent greens and Kikuyu fairways on the original 18, came as a welcome (and surprising) bonus to the incidental task of building the new holes.

To correct the problems with the greens, which were "very wet in winter and dry in summer" (because of insufficient root development), Smith reduced the water. (The previous intentions in over-watering were to help the many ordinary golfers, expected on a holiday course, to get "stop" on approach shots. As a golfer the new superintendent understood the difficulty in getting back spin from Kikuyu.)

The corrective maintenance practices deployed were to quote the man himself — "geared to lowering the pH 8.5 (brought about by the effluent water — the supply of which is happily increased by the involuntary contributions of the thousands of holiday makers who vastly inflate the usual population of the area during the hot dry summers) with acidic fertilisers such as sulphates of ammonia, iron and potash. The soil, which is very low in natural nutrients is around the pH 7.5 on average, and far from ideal for bent. Smith says that the turn-around on the greens took 18 months, and "now presents no problems".

When it comes to the contentious matter of Kikuyu fairways, Greg cheerfully accepts the fact that "the Club wants Kikuyu — it provides good colour, and the desirable impression of being a tropical paradise. Whilst he admits that it would be nice to have couch, he sees Kikuyu "for this Club, this course, this climate and this type of traffic (in terms of heaviness and golfer types, who are mostly elderly or holiday players) the Kike is the best option". He says that the local variety of that vigorous grass is finer because of the more temperate climate — compared for example to Sydney. They can maintain it to an acceptable level, and because it doesn't grow as quickly (as it does further north) thatch becomes less of a problem. And if any further argument is needed, the Kikuyu repairs and knits well, with minimal maintenance cost. For a course subjected to the stresses induced by

## What the judges did and said about the AGCSA Fellowship Award

Terry Woodcock of Turfgrass Technology explained that entrants sent their applications, usually supported by a letter from their employing clubs attesting to improvements effected by GCS, to the Secretary of the AGCSA. The 16 or so applications were sent to the AGU which sent copies to the judges. No attempts to screen by applications were made, and the judges had no voice in deciding the criteria for the award.

The three judges each arrived at an independent short list and then discussed their findings in a three way phone hook-up. Apparently they had decided upon the same three finalists, and these were interviewed in Sydney. Woodcock said that they (McIvor of ATRI, Phillips of the AGU and Woodcock) spent a morning in discussion on the known factors as relating to each applicant. They organised questions to be directed by each judge to test different facets of the three finalists' turf knowledge.

As the inaugural award was a new institution, it would be surprising if some scope for improvement or variation was not identified through the initial experience. As spokesman for the judges Terry Woodcock suggested the following:-

- Longer time scale for applications.
- More specific guide-lines for applicants (those for the first were to quote him — "too long and irrelevant".
- The criteria "should leave room for individual flare" — or "the encouragement of individual style".
- Responsibilities of the winner after the award — not adequately explained. Specifically the judges thought they should include:-
  1. A presentation to the AGCSA Conference
  2. Writing of an article for publication in Turf Craft
  3. Submission of a report on the trip to USA (part of the winner's prize) to the sponsors John Deere.

### Comments from the panel

Colin Phillips of the AGU said that the winner "had interviewed very impressively, and that his achievements at Pambula, for a fairly young man, were outstanding". He also noted with approval, the concern shown by the winner with matters relating to conservation, and how that concern had been reflected in the design of Pambula's new holes.

Ian McIvor said of the award that "I am very tickled by the fact that John Deere were prepared to put up the money, and that their sponsorship of an educational thing like this will help the industry a lot".

Terry Woodcock was impressed by John Deere's insistence that consideration of applicants as potential finalists was not to be influenced by factors of cost. As sponsors John Deere wanted to ensure that "the tyranny of distance" (as reflected in the cost of travel and accommodation) would not disadvantage worthy candidates who lived in locations remote from the city of interview.

100,000 rounds a year, which would include a fair percentage of hackers, that aspect appears to be relevant.

Sport, and golf in particular was in the Smith blood. Both his grandfather and father were members at St Michael's GC Maroubra, and the third generation — in the person of Master Gregory — pulled the buggy as caddy. As the eldest of six, he pulled his weight at home, by pushing the family mower.

He played Junior Pennant for Penrith off seven at the age of 16, and exhibited scholastic ability by passing HSC at St Dominic's as the youngest in the class.

After what sounded like perfunctory consideration of playing golf professionally (he sees his former contemporary Anthony Gilligan on TV and has no regrets or sense of envy), he "lined up" an apprenticeship at Penrith. At the time the prospect of doing a job involving physical work appealed to the athlete, who could also see scope for exercise of grey matter.

But in 1979 when he started what was then the new three year trade course in green-keeping his first year's results were only average. His teachers at the time, Paul Cashell, Ken Smith and Frank Dempsey at Ryde College of TAFE reported that "he showed promise and was capable of achieving better results". Improved application in the second and third stages vindicated the teachers' opinion and his results were above average.

Greg Smith will long remember the year of 1990. Winning of the first AGCSA Fellowship Award, he said — "it was a great honour — it means a hell of a lot to me and I can only hope that I can live up to the expectations of the people who put it in place". He was aware of the advantages that the honour would bestow upon the club, and the town which benefits economically from local golf. He was very pleased by "the very positive response" from his colleagues in the NSWGCSA from whom he received many congratulatory telephone calls.

Concludes on page 50

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from page 27 — "small country shire"

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The scoreboard, which is a model of functional simplicity (remotely controlled from the new grandstand) was the work of both Doug Anderson, a life member electrician and builder member Jeff Horgan.

It is floodlit and although they don't plan to hold trotting meetings, the ground has been designed to withstand the stresses imposed by equestrian events, which is a nice way of recognising and maintaining the tradition of the ground as a showground. But above all the North Ballarat Oval is now a showplace — a living testimony to the importance of disciplinary integration, team work, and dedication. ■

from page 22 — "Award winner"

And to top off the dramatic year, his wife Linda presented him with a son as a wonderful Christmas present — (we understand that Greg may have suggested to Linda — "let's call him John dear", but the nice little idea of tribute to the sponsor was over-ruled in favour of Kirk!).

The last word comes from Keith Kennett, Chairman for and on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Pambula-Merimbula Golf Club Limited — "This club was very pleased and proud that Greg was selected to be the inaugural winner of the AGCSA Fellowship Award and we wish him a pleasant and productive trip to America where we feel sure that he will prove to be an excellent ambassador for all golf clubs in Australia. We look forward to his return with interest as I am certain he will bring back many ideas and suggestions that will be of great benefit to this and other Australian golf clubs". ■

#### GMA of WA from page 36

Industry and Associate members sides are most welcome to put up a challenge. Most private schools and campuses can provide tennis courts. Combined sides also welcome, e.g. Penrhos and Trinity or Deveson Jahn and John Deere or a Bowling Greenkeepers Association side or a Golf Course Supers side.

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