

Sustainable Turfgrass Management, The R&A and Asia

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1. Thank you. It's a great pleasure to be here in Thailand on behalf of The R&A and to have this opportunity to attend and participate in this Seminar. I would first like to thank and acknowledge the great work of Micah Woods in bringing this seminar together.

2. Today, I would like to give you a bit of an insight into The R&A, The Open Championship, our role in Asia and in regard to sustainable Turf Grass Management. The R&A is also involved in the development of golf throughout the world and we annually spend around £5million a year of Open Championship generated income on golf development activities.

In addition, The R&A sees the Asia-Pacific region as probably the most significant area for the growth of golf and has made a commitment to the region with my appointment as Director – Asia-Pacific, the first and only full time position based outside St Andrews.

3. The R&A does a great deal for golf but our fundamentals are:

The Rules – the cornerstone of our activities.

The Open – which provides all our income and much of our profile.

And Development and Support work.

4. We've been a leader in our sport for some time now – 256 years.....

And our founding club, started in 1754, still has its roots in St Andrews on the east coast of Scotland.

Rules of Golf responsibility followed in 1897 and we have been responsible ever since.

And we became responsible for The Open in 1920 although it started in 1860 at Prestwick and 2010 in St Andrews will therefore mark 150 years since the Championship was first played.

The early Opens were run by the host clubs – who all lost money apparently – which is why we were asked to take it over – they might be regretting that decision today!

5. 2004 was a significant year for The R&A which was our 250th anniversary. This was celebrated in some style with a series of functions and dinners all held in this huge marquee.

In the same year, our Club handed over control of The Rules, The Open and all our golf development activities to three new R&A Companies. Why?

Well – the major reason was to give The Open added freedom to grow and to allow this growth to be protected legally through corporate ownership

6. And so, six years on, The R&A today is a powerful set of companies with its roots still set in the founding club, The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews.

And, with the United States Golf Association, it is one of two governing authorities in our sport.

7. More specifically on governance – there are 130 organisations affiliated to The R&A in 120 countries – shown here in blue and representing around half the world's estimated 66 million golfers.

In the Asia-Pacific region our affiliates include China and India at one end of the size scale and at the other end, Bhutan and the Cook Islands.

8. Responsibility for the Rules of Golf – please don't get technical with me here – means printing them in over 30 languages, including Mandarin, and consulting widely over each four-year cycle in the build up to a fresh issue – the latest one having come into effect two years ago.

Over the last 20 years we've travelled extensively promoting the Rules and Etiquette and running Referees' Schools all over the world.

9. And of course, the equipment rules are also our joint responsibility with the USGA.

On this we've made huge strides in recent years and now employ a sizeable team in St Andrews – it's all highly technical – just like this fellow pictured here who plays all his golf in our new centre opened in St Andrews in 2006 – he cost over £100,000 but I wonder how well his game travels?

We continue to debate the golf equipment technology question and believe we are making progress and this facility at the home of golf, our home, certainly enhances our credibility as a regulator in this topical and often contentious aspect of the game.

The introduction of the new groove regulations on 1st January this year shows we are serious about maintaining skill as the single most important factor in the playing of golf. We are also now looking into the issue of lofted wedges.

10. So, summing – I've tried to convey The R&A's position as a global leader in our game.

Its standing and influence can be traced back centuries but it is right up-to-date as a corporate entity and in its application of technology.

And if Rule making is a source of power and respect and influence – then organising The Open annually delivers a global audience for the game played at the very highest level and, as we all know, television is the medium which enables this to happen and which produces the great bulk of our surplus.

11. So let's look at some parameters. Prize money for example over the past 100 years or so – 1905 = £50, 1955 = £1000, 1995 £125,000 and in 2009 saw Stewart Cink take home a first prize of £750,000 out of £4.2m - you can see there has been a huge jump in the last decade or so and certainly between John Daly's win in St Andrews in 1995 and Stewart Cink.

12. And crowds – another barometer of growth – 1926 saw the first admission or entry charges, less than 100 years ago.

13. Some of the crowds at St Andrews in the early days!

14. 1968 was a significant year as the crowd exceeds 50,000 for the first time.

15. A look at the final green of the 1968 championship.

16. Other milestones include - 1978 saw 125,000 watch The Open at St Andrews and in 2005 over 223,000 saw Tiger win and Jack Nicklaus retire from competitive golf.

17. One of the great moments in recent golfing history - Jack's farewell to The Open in 2005.

18. In 2006 record crowds for an Open in England and in 2008 over 20,000 grandstand seats are erected at Royal Birkdale.

19. One of the grandstands at Royal Birkdale two years ago.

20. Today we engage 84 broadcasters and The Open reaches 581 million households in 162 territories. Nearly 2,200 hours of coverage are broadcast worldwide.

In China alone, the championship reaches 233 million homes through two channels which last year broadcast over 81 hours of coverage.

21. On to venues, unlike the USGA we don't use many, we visit nine, but we always play on links...this is the complete list.

So let's go through these individually;

St Andrews – 1 in 5 and again in 2010 – a public course and very unusually, the Old Course is still not played on Sundays except during major events

Carnoustie – 2007 venue not far from St Andrews – also a public course

Royal Birkdale – 2008 venue – previously visited 10 years ago and in the golfing town of Southport

Royal St Georges – most southerly venue – last visited in 2003 when Ben Curtis won, now a Ryder Cup player of course, and the venue again in 2011

Turnberry – last year's venue after a 15 year gap – a course which has undergone significant changes

Royal Troon – also in Ayrshire on Scotland's west coast – 2004 – Todd Hamilton, a player perhaps better known in Asia than in his native US, beat Ernie Els in a play-off

Royal Liverpool – venue in 2006 and a huge success

Royal Lytham and St Annes – always popular with a great atmosphere and will play host again in 2012 – the same year in which London stages the Olympic Games

Muirfield – very traditional club and a great course near Scotland's capital city of Edinburgh

22. Whilst television is our major source of revenue we also have lucrative contracts with six patrons.

They are - Lexus

23. Marsh and McLennan Companies

24. Nikon

25. Rolex

26. Royal Bank of Scotland

27. Unysis with the famous Open Championship scoreboard always constructed on the 18th fairway, a tradition that has remained for many years.

28. Rather like Wimbledon and Junior Wimbledon, we now run a biennial Junior Open which was won in 2008 by a 13 year old girl from Thailand called Moriya Jutanugarn.

She was one of 19 entrants from Asia-Pacific countries who played at Hesketh back in July out of a total entry of 105 boys and girls from 67 countries.

We hope to see many more countries in this region sending players to our next Junior Open which will be played at Lundin near St Andrews from 12-14 July 2010.

This growing event is starting to tell us something about the future – previous competitors include Sergio Garcia, Paula Creamer and last year’s Amateur Champion, Reinier Saxton along with Patrick Reed, the 2006 Junior Open winner, and a semi finalist in the 2008 US Amateur Championship.

As you will sense, this event has quite a pedigree.

29. I touched upon affiliates earlier and want to say that we work closely with this family group on all matters and it’s an ambition of ours to continue to see this family grow – it now includes Mongolia and Vietnam with other emerging countries set to follow – and these national governing bodies are really the conduit through which our support, financial or moral or both, tends to be channelled. Indeed, we have now established a very positive relationship with the Thailand Golf Association which we believe has enabled us to help the game in this country and we believe the TGA feel the same way.

We also enjoy an excellent relationship with the umbrella body, the Asia-Pacific Golf Confederation.

30. One big success for us in offering support to affiliates – free service – course management best practice guidelines.

Launched in 2004, 2,488 courses are now registered in 108 countries.

More specifically, in the Asia-Pacific region, 240 courses are registered in 18 countries.

It is now highly active in all aspects of course management with sustainability very much the current theme.

31. The website is highly sophisticated but help of a lesser more practical nature is also given and this is Gargaresh in Libya – basic – and as you can see, unlike the nearby Thai Country Club, not quite ready to stage the World Cup – but playable nonetheless and a club we helped by simply providing at little cost.

When our Chief Executive Peter Dawson was told about this he said, well at least it’s a links course.

32. And returning to free services offered, not so long ago we launched the first ever men’s WAGR which we believe will become the benchmark in the amateur game and ultimately help with field and international team selection. This picture shows New Zealand’s Danny Lee, the 2008 winner of the Mark H McCormack Medal, who won the Johnnie Walker Classic in the same year – a great achievement for an amateur. For information, the highest ranked Thai player in the WAGR in January this year was Thanyakon Khrongpha in 356th position.

I am also pleased to announce that we are soon to launch the Women's World Amateur Rankings.

33. I should also mention that the Inaugural Asian Amateur Championship to held at Mission Hills Golf Club, China last October. This is a partnership between The R&A, Augusta National Golf Club and the Asia-Pacific Golf Confederation. We are covering the expenses for all 120 players in the field including flights and accommodation and the winner annually receives an invitation to The Masters and the International Final Qualifying for The Open.

34. One of the things badly needed in some countries we visit is playing equipment particularly for juniors and, through an arrangement with TaylorMade, we now send over 1,000 sets of junior clubs all over the world each year. But equipment is of little good without coaching, for which we've earmarked £1 million for worldwide projects, and are proud to say that this year we've sent qualified teaching professionals to work with children, leading amateurs and native golf professionals in 15 countries and can safely say we have placed coaches somewhere in the world for 8 months out of 12 – all of course funded by The Open.

35. Then of course people need places to play and this is Japeri in Brazil – outskirts of Rio – first public course in a huge country of massive potential towards which we've contributed £200,000 – somebody said – facetiously I hope – they must have spent it all on the clubhouse!

Basic – as you can see doesn't really apply a dress code – but does provide an opportunity to play golf.

We are also funding projects in Czech Republic, Argentina, Bolivia and even Scotland to name a few and would welcome the opportunity to do more elsewhere and are currently looking at public course openings in Hungary, Italy and Kenya.

36. Golfers often – these little guys in Bhutan in the foothills of the Himalayas certainly do – we've helped golf start there too and – amazingly, it is the country's fastest growing participation sport.

37. It's perhaps early days to expect a young Bhutanese golfer to make the starting field for The Open Championship but the introduction of IFQ in Asia and Australasia has certainly made it easier for players based in this region to try to qualify.

We are at the IFQ Asia Saujana in Malaysia later this week and since 2004 this has resulted in 22 players from seven countries gaining starting places in The Open Championship.

Sustainability and the golf course

38. The R&A has defined golf course sustainability as:

“Optimising the playing quality of the golf course in harmony with the conservation of its natural environment under economically sound and socially responsible management.”

39. Developing and maintaining golf courses has many challenges and all of these can be considered under the four parameters of our definition.

- Social responsibility
- Environmental stewardship
- Economic performance
- Playing quality

40. The land grab can bring golf into conflict with the needs of society and environmental stewardship. There are already instances of conflict between golf course development and other land use needs. The recent publicity over a Vietnamese government review of licenses for golf courses demonstrated this conflict in the social context.

41. Similar difficulties with regard to protection of rare habitats

42. And Wildlife

43. And the demand for resources such as water, have prevented or delayed course development around the world. Golf needs to realise its place in the social and environmental context and the game’s reputation will suffer if its development is seen to be against these needs.

In addition to showing which parts of the world suffer most from water stress. Water is going to be an increasing cost to golf courses over time.

44. For the game to grow it needs to be accessible and affordable to the masses. There will be a role for the exclusive and expensive, but there must be opportunities for those not in a position to be able to afford such facilities. The cost of development and management has clear implications for this. Building large, maintenance-intensive courses with a high input requirement is not the way forward if golf is to be a truly inclusive game.

You can’t expect this...

45. Or this...

46. Is this simply a case of pandering to the designer’s ego? Is it right to attribute 20% or more of your staff’s time to managing a hazard?

47. Controlling the cost of course development and management will have obvious economic benefits for the game and the golfer. We are not only talking about the financial cost but also that in energy and carbon terms.
48. We must not be drawn into over-stating golf's value, e.g. the potential of carbon sequestration, but continually look to reduce the game's environmental impact.
49. Environmental pressures mean that we need to produce courses that require relatively little water.
50. Of the costs for materials, water is likely to become increasingly expensive.
51. As has the cost of pesticides and fertilisers. So it makes financial, as well as environmental, sense to minimise their use.
52. Technology must be employed to achieve this, e.g. through appropriate grass selection.
53. Good water management, which means quantity and quality and we may need to see significant investment by clubs and government in storm water collection and cleansing schemes, such as this project at three clubs around Adelaide in Australia, if courses are going to secure adequate supplies. Good cultural management will also address turf conditions that create serious problems, e.g. inferior drainage and excessive thatch.
54. This takes storm water through a series of reed bed filters to water bodies on the course. The net outcome will be a zero draw on the aquifer, cleaner water for irrigation and export from the course out to sea or even back into the aquifer.
55. Accessibility to the course and presenting the course in good health is paramount to a positive economic performance.
56. And thatch can have a major impact on your costs and revenue.
57. The weather plays a significant role in course performance and the climatic extremes that we see these days, be they torrential downpours and golf must plan for the impact of climate change.
58. Or periods of drought, will impact on how we care for our courses and how much it costs. We need to be aware of this and this factor suggests that monitoring of performance is now more important than ever.
59. Developing a broader range of habitat than other land uses, as demonstrated here at the Golf National course near Paris, can reduce the amount of land requiring regular mowing. Golf must also be aware of its responsibility to conserve biodiversity, in line with the United Nations' convention on biological diversity.

It is not enough for golf to consider itself to be sustainable. The game has to demonstrate this to the outside world to ensure it is seen as a socially and politically acceptable form of land use – making a real and positive contribution to issues of importance.

60. Auditing the performance of our courses will be important to provide the evidence to demonstrate golf's sustainability and The R&A is currently working on a system for recording and reporting on a golf facilities key performance indicators.

The benchmarking service enables data entry for over 350 categories, but we encourage a more selective approach, looking at key performance indicators for your finances, environmental impact and playing quality.

61. This, together with guidance on how your course can become more sustainable, can be found on our websites, randa.org

62. And bestcourseforgolf.org

63. In closing, can I thank you for being such an attentive audience – this has been a great opportunity to tell you a little bit more about The R&A, our role in helping make golf sustainable and how we believe we may be able to help shape golf's growth in the years ahead.

I am now based in Hong Kong so The R&A is a bit closer and I look forward to helping golf grow over the years ahead.