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Adam Matthews

Finding yourself being made redundant in the middle of winter, along with ten other qualified greenkeepers, is no one's career progression 'ideal'. But that is exactly what happened to Adam Matthews who, at the time, was working at Flaxby Golf Club in his native Yorkshire, where the new owners were building a flagship, five-star resort hotel. "On 14th November 2014, we were suddenly, and by complete surprise, served notice of redundancy and course closure, to take effect on the 31st March 2015," explains Adam. "As you can imagine, it was a very difficult and nervy winter for everyone involved! What was even more disappointing was that we found out in the local press before the club's owners told us!"

So, for eleven greenkeepers, the search was on to find a new position. Adam was fortunate to be offered a job at Moor

Allerton Golf Club, at Wike, just outside Leeds, starting on 1st April; he's no fool though! It's a course he knows well, having been brought up "just around the corner."

In fact, Flaxby was the furthest he had worked away from his home as his career had begun as an apprentice at Yorkshire County Cricket Club after being recommended by his good friend Ryan Golding, who is the current Head Groundsman at Leeds Rhinos who occupy the stadium on the other side of the "football" stand at Headingley Carnegie.

"Ryan was good to me. At a time when I needed help, he went out of his way to get me a foot in the door. I've never let that opportunity slip. Christian Dunkerley, who was the deputy head groundsman at the cricket ground at the time, was a huge role model for me when I was starting out. I once got told by a former colleague/manager; 'if

Moor Allerton Golf Club is the only UK course designed by Robert Trent Jones Snr. Situated on high ground above Leeds, the course was once a regular stop on the European Tour and 2015 saw the PGA return to host a EuroPro event. The man charged with bringing the course back to its former glory, and much more besides, is Course Manager Adam Matthews, and he has a clear vision of exactly what he wants to achieve

Moor Allerton Golf Club

Moor's the merrier ...

you want my advice, I'd go and find yourself another career. I don't think you are cut out for this'. I think about that comment every single day when I'm driving into work."

"By the time I was ready to leave Yorkshire County Cricket Club, I had worked my way up to assistant groundsman, before leaving to take on a role at Flaxby Golf Club as part of Troon Golf's new venture."

On 20th July last year, Adam was promoted to Course Manager at Moor Allerton and, out of adversity, had come an opportunity that he rates as one of the highlight of his career thus far.

Moor Allerton Golf Club was founded in 1923 on a course designed by Dr. Alastair Mackenzie and members continued to play golf on the original site, Nursery Lane in the Moor Allerton district of Leeds, until 1970. High demand for membership saw the club relocate to its current home near the village

of Wike in North Leeds, ten minutes drive from the original site. The new course was designed by the renowned golf course architect Robert Trent Jones Senior, and remains his first, and only, design in the UK. It opened for play in 1971.

The course design blends beautifully with the surrounding Yorkshire landscape and, unlike neighbouring clubs, is regarded as 'modern and American' with large contoured greens, large teeing areas, long, boldly shaped bunkers and plenty of water hazards. Many famous players walked the fairways in the days when it was a PGA European Tour venue; Seve Ballesteros, Nick Faldo, Greg Norman, Tom Weiskopf and Tony Jacklin, amongst others.

For a number of years, Ryder Cup player Howard Clark was attached to the club as the playing professional, whilst Peter Alliss, who was the head professional in the early

seventies, reckons that; "Moor Allerton is a golfing experience larger than life".

The course comprises twenty-seven holes laid out on 230 acres of undulating Yorkshire countryside in three distinct loops of nine that all start and end at the clubhouse. There is also a practice area and driving range. The course was built on old farmland - a mixture of clay and sandstone - on one of the highest points in Leeds. "The winters up here can be very harsh, and the snowfalls quite severe," Adam confirms, "and, whilst it can also be quite windy, the course is sheltered by heavy tree lines; but we do struggle with very heavy and long lasting morning dew as a result."

"We are looking to purchase a large fairway brush that will allow us to dew wipe and get out to cut fairways and semi rough a lot earlier in the day. We currently stagger starting times so, in the summer, some of



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The greenkeeping team l-r: Gary Hudson, Jonny Platt, Phil Hudson, Adam Matthews, Andy Ivel, Adam Cheetham and James Hudson



Weather patterns in the UK are unique at the best of times, which is why our industry can claim to have some of the best and well respected greenkeepers in the business

the team will come in at lunchtime and cut fairways into the evening."

Adam currently has a team of six for the twenty-seven holes which, he says, is a challenge. "We will be adding to the team next season, with the club's backing."

Forty-three year old Andrew Ivel is the team's longest serving member with twenty-three years service. "Andy came with the furniture," jokes Adam. "He's been here longer than even he can remember, so his course and site knowledge is invaluable, as is his passion for the course."

"Adam Cheetham [thirty and with ten years service] came to us from neighbouring Sandmoor Golf Club, and heads the mechanics side for us, as well as performing all the other greenkeeping operations."

Jonny Platt (35/11), Phil Stanton (34/18), Gary Hudson (33/15) and James Walton (23/4) complete the team.

"With two lads who are very good technically, they tend to share the mechanical duties, and we carry out servicing and machinery maintenance in-house."

"We have a close relationship with a number of contractors who I will bring in to give us quotes on any work that we can't do in-house, or don't have the time or resources to carry out. I'm also lucky to have a number of friends in the industry whom I can call upon if I'm not sure about something or need some advice."

The large contoured greens are sand based with a soil rootzone; they were originally the first bent grass greens to be constructed in the UK. "A number of them are shaded due to thick tree plantations and we now have a programme in place to address this," Adam explains.

"When I took over, it was with the express purpose of getting the greens up to speed for a PGA EuroPro Tour event and dealing with issues such as high thatch content, black layer, soft, spongy etc. - and then creating a plan to fully resolve the problems as quickly as possible to get the club back to where it

belongs. One of the first things I did was to raise the cutting height on the greens to 4mm. Additionally, I changed our dressing and infill material to a straight sand product and increased the frequency of topdressing. I prefer a little and often approach to dressing and, in ideal circumstances, I aim to dust the greens every seven to ten days. I also introduced the more frequent use of a turf iron."

"I had just seven weeks to prepare for the event which was being played at the end of August 2015," exclaims Adam. "It was the first four day event the club had ever hosted and, with highlights being aired on Sky Sports, there was some pressure to ensure the course looked at its best."

"We double verticut (up and down the same line to eliminate grain), deep solid tined to 9" and carried out four back to back topdressing applications up until twelve days before the start of the event, giving us time to prepare a good surface. I must have done something right," says a delighted Adam, "as we secured the event for another three years, which was great news, both for the club and the greenkeeping team, whose hard work had been rewarded."

"It was the biggest field the EuroPro had ever had; 160 players for the first two days, with a two tee start at 7.30am. The lads were in at 4.00am each day to cut and iron greens, cut approaches, rake bunkers and change holes. They came back in again at 5.00pm to cut tees and fairways for as long as the light allowed."

"Andrew Snodin (tournament director) and the PGA team were fantastic to work alongside. Matchroom Sports, who do the filming for Sky, were great and the drone footage they provided me of the course is superb and a great tool now for showcasing what we produced and also identifying areas that we need to work on for next year."

"Weather patterns in the UK are unique at the best of times, which is why our industry can claim to have some of the best and well respected greenkeepers in the business. Up



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here, when it rains it pours, and often just when you don't need it, Adam bemoans. "For example, two days before the EuroPro event, we had 65mm of rain in the space of six hours. We then had to deal with getting the bunkers and paths back fit, on top of all the other course preparation work. One thing I learned from my time at Headingley was that you just have to get on with it and not let it worry or stress you out. You cannot

control the weather. Sometimes, the hardest part of this job is knowing when to do nothing at all."

"Once the tour had passed successfully, I was quick to start working on a plan to improve the greens further and prepare us for next season. We solid tined again, with the key being to keep them open and draining as much as possible without disrupting too much play. We then started

our renovation work on Sunday 13th September at 5.00pm and, by 8.00pm the following Tuesday, we had completed all twenty-nine greens."

The work comprised:

- vertidrain to 11" with our Charterhouse models
- applying three tonnes of Mansfield MM45 using a Toro Propass/John Deere Gator

I will always look to help add skillsets and support them in furthering their education and career if they are so motivated



- microtining to 5" using a John Deere Aercore 1500
- filling the holes with a Sweep 'n' Fill III

"We now have a clear plan in place to mechanically reduce organic matter content in the greens and increase the sand content within the profile. We have an ongoing, frequent aeration programme using our own equipment, but also hired in an Air2G2 in November to help us with this through the winter. My aim is to purchase a machine of our own in the spring," confirms Adam.

"Everything to do with the maintenance of the course is affected by budgets. Renovations next year will be the main priority; therefore, it will be other areas that may be affected if there is ever to be a trade off. I'm very lucky to have a very supportive and understanding greens committee and board and we've worked closely together over the last few months to create a clear vision and plan for the future of the course."

"Having a small team it's been easier and more efficient to let the guys carry out tasks high in their skill set, so we have tended to stick to specific tasks up until now. As things start to settle down, we are going to give every member of the team the opportunity to improve by carrying out tasks in all areas so they will become qualified to do so."

"I have a training budget. Staff development and support is very important to me. All the team are compliant with current legislation, but I will always look to help add skillsets and support them in furthering their education and career if they are so motivated."

"As an example, everyone is required to be first aid competent so, in November, we ran a course that all staff took part in together."

"I have the go ahead to increase the team in the new year. Ideally, I would like two qualified greenkeepers and two apprentices - one in 2016 and one the following year."

Adam is keen to stress that he requires his team to interact with all sections of the golf club. "I have a fantastic relationship with our club professional, James Whittaker. It was really important, to both of us, that we got our departments working closely together and rubbishing the theory of a divide between greenkeepers and other employees. His drive and vision for the club is very similar to mine and having everyone pulling in the same direction for the club has been of great benefit. James is helping a lot in improving the look of our department through his contacts in the golfing world."

The club sends out a weekly newsletter to all members. There is a greens section where

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the Greens Chairman will highlight anything we need to get out to the members. I also write a monthly head greenkeepers report which goes out on the last Wednesday of every month as its own article. This a great way of keeping members informed about what we are doing and, more importantly, why we are doing it. A picture paints a thousand words, as they say; for example, its amazing how many people who play on a weekend have said 'where's all that sand gone?' after seeing the photos of the renovation work."

Additional projects are ongoing, as Adam explains. "Until recently, there were four unused tennis courts that have now been taken up by a new greenkeepers' facility, which was completed in March. Having only recently moved in, we'll be developing the yard area this winter. A wash down area needs to be installed as soon as possible and, to that end, I've had productive meetings with a number of suppliers. We also have a full size bowling green that is currently being looked at with a view to constructing a new, state of the art short game area."

"A Rain Bird Stratus II irrigation system was recently installed, and the fairway drainage on the first nine holes is quite new. Unfortunately, there has been an issue with

the sprinkler head solenoids. Rain Bird have passed a full recall, and we are awaiting these to be installed."

"Over this winter, we are closing the first nine holes with the aim of doing a run through of each hole, removing and limbing trees, renovating a number of ditches and improving tees drainage and access. There is a lot of tree work to be done over the entire course. We are also going to reinstate the lake in front of our 27th green."

"There are some fantastic woodland areas on the site that have been somewhat ignored and I am very keen to tidy these up and present them as the features they deserve to be. We have some superb tree specimens that need showcasing. This will be done in accordance with our winter plans."

"All the tree work is done in-house, with some consultation and guidance from tree specialist Paul Forrest of Preserve Landscapes, whom I worked with at Flaxby."

"We have three large badger sets in one of our woodland areas. They used to cause us massive problems until we addressed the issue by making the area more habitable for them, and we now have a feeding programme which has stopped them wanting to hunt for food and tearing up the course. One of our members has a hide in



GETTING *Personal...*

Adam Matthews - nothing changes under the duvet ... apparently!

Who are you? Adam Matthews, Course Manager at Moor Allerton Golf Club.

Family status? Engaged to Ella Steel and have a beautiful daughter Evie-Rose who was three in December.

Who's your hero and why?

My brother Scott; he's served out in Afghanistan with the RAF. I think anyone who has the courage to do what those guys do, especially out there, is amazing.

What would you change about yourself? Height and bank balance!

What's your guilty pleasure? Ben and Jerry's Chocolate Fudge Brownie Ice Cream!

What's been the highlights of your career so far? Producing an award winning Test match cricket pitch and, of course, being given the opportunity as course manager at Moor Allerton Golf Club.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? George Best, Pablo Escobar, Dan Bilzerian ... I don't think that needs too much explaining really!

If you could be anyone for a day, who would it be and why? My treasurer - for obvious reasons!

Do you have any bad habits? Forgetful, and an inability to hang washing out.

... or any good ones? Spending money on the Mrs! Or should that be above?

Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload? Never. Thinking about it, yes, but not worrying. You can't change anything from under your duvet, so it's a waste of time worrying.

What are you reading at the moment? 'Sins of my Father' by Sebastian Marroquin (born Juan Pablo Escobar).

What are your pet peeves? People who don't listen to instructions or don't do what they've said they will!

If you could go anywhere right now, where would it be? On a private island; sun, beach, no kids or phones!

What's the best part of your job? Passing on good feedback and compliments to the lads.

... and the worst? Waiting for decisions and responses.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To be comfortable enough to do anything without worrying about money.

Favourite record, and why? Danny Daze - Your Everything. Good memories of the days when hangovers didn't matter.



Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with? Obviously it'd be the Mrs but, if she was busy, I'd be quite happy to give Michelle Keegan a call.

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do? Euro Millions - buy Massimo Cellino out of Leeds United and sell 49% back to the fans! Lotto - take the family and the lads to Vegas.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? If you don't ask, you don't get.

What's your favourite smell? A French bakery first thing in the morning.

What do you do in your spare time? Big sportsman, play a lot of football and golf and spend time with the family.

What's the daftest work related question you have ever been asked?

Morning of a county championship match in April, the coach comes out, bends down and puts his hands on the pitch and looks to us; "It's cold isn't it; how come it's so cold?" My boss at the time replied brilliantly; "you'd be effing cold if you'd been left out all night!"

What's your favourite piece of kit? Toro Propass Topdresser.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Fair, organised and impatient.

What talent would you like to have? I'd love to play the electric guitar fluently.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? All lieu time must be classed as paid overtime! That Leeds United buy out might be on the cards then!

the area. He feeds them with food scraps and waste from a local restaurant. It's worked extremely well and the close up photographs he has of them are fantastic. But the rabbits are an ongoing concern and still cause daily disruption to the bunkers."

Adam says that the local ecology and environment needs to become a priority and, to that end, he will be preparing an environmental policy next year, whilst also encouraging the team to research and come up with ideas themselves.

"We have already carried out a site evaluation and have a plan of areas that we are going to transform into wildflower meadows. This will not only reduce the cutting area, but also cut down on machine wear and, importantly, save some of our valuable time. It will also add some colour and attract wildlife. We have a fantastic bird box and feeding area with a watching hut in one of our woodlands, which members are always welcome to use."

It is clear that Adam is putting in achievable plans to return Moor Allerton Golf Club to its former glories and, indeed, further

enhance other areas of the site; the successful staging and subsequent extension of the PGA EuroPro event is testament to that.

He also believes that he is working in an industry that is second to none. "I think the associations and magazines like Pitchcare are doing a great job in helping to raise our profile. It allows us and, more importantly, others to see what's going on in all different types of clubs and environments."

"The turfcare industry has never been stronger. The amount of guys from the UK now working abroad and taking up management positions shows the calibre of the groundsman and greenkeepers we are producing. The technology is getting better, the science and education is becoming more easily accessible and the fact I can pick up the phone or go online and speak to lots of other course managers and get advice is very rare in any industry. I doubt you would find a guy from Pepsi ringing a guy at Coca Cola for advice!"

"Are we undervalued? This is a difficult one and I think it comes down to where and who you are

What's in the shed?

Toro 3250 greens mower x 3
Toro 6500 fairway mower
Toro 6700 fairway mower
Toro 4700 rough mower x 2
Toro 3100 Sidewinder x 2
Toro Sandpro x 2
Toro Propass Topdresser
Toro GR1000 pedestrian greens mower x 5
Toro GR1600 pedestrian tees mower x 3
Toro Workman
John Deere 2500E tees mower
John Deere - 2030A sprayer
John Deere Pro Gator x 2
John Deere Gator HPX
John Deere Aercore 1500
Charterhouse 7316 Verti-Drain
Charterhouse 7521 Verti-Drain
Gambetti greens iron
TruTurf greens iron
Gambetti 6001 tractor mounted sprayer
Kawasaki Mule

Kubota RTV 900 MW
Kubota B2530 tractor
Kubota Grand L5040 tractor
New Holland TD90D tractor
Amazone fertiliser spreader
Imants RotoBlast tractor mounted blower
Stihl chainsaws x 3 sizes, plus blowers, trimmers etc.
Wessex Leaf Sweeper

"We are currently negotiating a full fleet replacement. As of April we will enter into a five-year replacement deal with one of the manufacturers. I have invited all dealers in and have let the lads demo lots of different machinery as, ultimately, they are the ones who will be using it every day.

We have been fair to everyone and have trialed a lot of equipment from Toro, John Deere, Jacobsen and Baroness over recent weeks. I'm keen on letting the team use as much new equipment as possible, and then relay any feedback from them into



working for. Ultimately, without us, the game couldn't be played and, subsequently, clubs wouldn't have a product. These days, as a course manager, you are required to be a financial manager, a fleet manager, an HR and man manager, an agronomist, a training manager and, with the way social media has taken off in our industry, a communications manager also. Those individual skills would demand high respect and value in any other industry, and that is the message we need to get across."

"It would be helpful if Sky Sport, BT Sport and other broadcasters showed exactly what goes into the course or

ground preparations for an event, especially the science and technology required. My detailed blog and report, that goes out once a month to all our members, has helped massively to raise my team's profile in-house, but that needs to be rolled out nationwide so that youngsters can see our industry in its true light and not just as grass cutters."

Course images © Magic Hour Media



Moor Allerton Golf Club Ltd

Balmers GM

the decision making process.

Our local Toro dealer is Russell Groundcare. I have a great relationship with Paul Nichols from my time at Flaxby; the support we receive from them is first class. Our John Deere dealer has recently changed to Balmers GM. I was lucky enough to be invited on a trip to the Solheim Cup with them, and some other course managers, last September. It was great to see a working factory and what goes into making some of their kit. It was also a fantastic opportunity for me to rub shoulders with some of the other guys, and swap info.

At the moment, we have a somewhat mixed fleet. Moor Allerton is a very hard working golf course due to its layout and how the land lies. Toro have stated, in the past, that if they can get a machine doing its job up here, it will work anywhere.

I think the greens iron has been a massive game changer for many golf clubs and the Air2G2 reviews speak for themselves.

I booked the Air2G2 for a winter

aeration programme. Greener Grounds came and did the job for us, which took the pressure of our small team, especially with a busy winter work schedule coming up. I'm excited to see the results. The fact it doesn't disrupt playability at all is fantastic for a course as busy as ours.

Vertidrainning was also outsourced in the past, but now we are doing it in-house.

What would my wish list include? An Imants Sandcat, Salsco Transformer ... and a fast Verti-Drain!"

