

Edition 1 • 2022

The Approach

Australia & New Zealand Edition



JOHN DEERE

It's all in the design with Tom Doak

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Tara Iti Golf
Course

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Kyle Wilson, Moonah Links Course Manager.

Rising to the challenge: Course managers rapidly adapt to evolving industry

Maintaining a golf course is the most critical element of any club.

But like so many other industries, finding skilled staff has become an immense challenge and Turf Managers around the world are struggling to find the people they need to help maintain courses and stadiums to a premium level.

This human resource challenge has been compounded in the golf sector, as players are flocking to the sport in unprecedented numbers, meaning managers have never been busier, which has led to the expansion of their role.

Course Manager at Moonah Links, one of Australia's most unique leisure resorts located at Victoria's picturesque Mornington Peninsula, Kyle Wilson, said he had experienced this firsthand.

"It was not long ago my primary role was course conditioning and maintaining facilities. However, my responsibilities have drastically evolved over the past 10 years," Mr Wilson said.

"The role of course manager now also includes human resources, workplace health and safety and, in recent times, managing the necessary COVID-19 requirements."

Mr Wilson said one way he was combatting the labour issue was by ensuring Moonah Links' two PGA-grade 18-hole championship golf courses were serviced by the right



"Modern turf managers are known for their work ethic and their ability to wear multiple hats on any given day..."

Mark Unwin

Moonah Links consists of two PGA-grade 18-hole championship golf courses.

equipment, which eases the burden of limited staff and reduces input costs.

"For example, wide-area mowers that save time and labour have never been more required. With increasing fuel costs, the improvement in hybrid and electric equipment is another development that has improved and may assist with the increasing costs of maintaining our courses," he said.

"That also brings us into the discussion of GPS equipment and, as managers, we are talking to committees, boards or owners about adopting this approach."

Despite the unprecedented times the industry has faced, Mr Wilson remains upbeat about the future and feels superintendents are rising to the challenge.

"All course managers should be congratulated by all within the industry for how they have responded to this difficult time," he said.

Australian Sports Turf Managers Association (ASTMA) Chief Executive Officer, Mark Unwin, agreed turf managers across Australia were proving to be rapidly adaptive to overcoming industry hurdles.

"Modern turf managers are known for their work ethic and their ability to wear multiple hats on any given day, be that an agronomist, mechanic, biologist, plumber, coach and mentor, leader, arborist, meteorologist and many others," Mr Unwin said.

"While wearing these many hats, they also face an added pressure to deliver, or exceed expectations, on courses up

the road, or in the next suburb or another state that someone recently played. Feedback of both a positive and negative nature from committees, members and guests is constant.

With this in mind, Mr Unwin said there had never been a more important time to bring a renewed focus to those who work around the clock to ensure greens are maintained.

"The industry as a whole needs to do more to attract course management staff," Mr Unwin said.

"Access to labour is a challenge for the sector at the moment, however we're not alone in that situation. Regional facilities, especially, are regularly looking to find staff who are willing or able to re-locate, as often these courses have a smaller population to draw from compared to metropolitan facilities."

Mr Unwin agreed securing the correct turf technology was an effective stopgap solution.

"Advancements in machinery can assist course management staff greatly in the ability to perform their roles," he said.

"Take spray units as one example. The ability for a turf manager to know within centimetres which areas have been sprayed and which haven't is a great way to ensure consistency in application, and at the same time delivering both time and cost savings to the course." ■



Wanaka Golf Club is located in New Zealand's South Island town of Queenstown.



Wanaka Golf Club, Greenkeeper, David Mahoney.

I Queenstown Lakes' best kept secret

It's easy to take your eye off the ball when you play a round at Wanaka Golf Club.

The picturesque layout sits between towering mountains featuring two of New Zealand's best ski fields, with the course overlooking the serene Lake Wanaka.

In a region recognised for high-octane adrenaline sport, Wanaka Golf Club Course Superintendent, David Mahoney, said it was where many tourists escaped to slow down the pace.

"The ski fields attract a lot of tourists to the area, which is great for us as well. We have a lot of skiers that take a day off and come play the course," Mr Mahoney said.

"The course has two contrasting nines. The front nine is shorter with undulating terrain and has beautiful views of the mountains and lake, which make it hard for most visitors to concentrate on their game, while the back nine is longer and flatter with tree-lined fairways that put a premium on straight drives."

The Queenstown Lakes area has a plethora of outstanding golfing options, with neighbouring courses including Jacks Point, Millbrook and The Hills also considered must-play layouts.

Mr Mahoney said the point of difference offered at Wanaka Golf Club was its warm, community atmosphere.

"What started off as a small country course has grown to have 1,185 members and around 40,000 rounds per year," he said.

"While our membership has grown to be one of the largest in the country, the club has retained its small-town feel."

Mr Mahoney said presenting the course at a consistently high standard had been prioritised, and this included the rejuvenation of the club's fleet of equipment.

"We are located in a very dry area of the South Island so anything that isn't irrigated burns off during summer," he said.

"This gives the course a uniquely Central Otago look with green tees, fairways and greens, with anything outside of the irrigation zone yellowing off and going dormant."

"We run a predominantly John Deere fleet and we've been very proactive with regularly updating our equipment and trying new products."

John Deere's hybrid technology has helped the caretakers of the near 100-year-old course achieve efficiencies across equipment fuel usage and labour hours.

"Over the last few years, we have started to bring in the hybrid mowers, which has reduced our fuel usage noticeably. Currently we have the 2500 E-Cut™ Hybrid Triplex Mower and 7500 E-Cut™ Hybrid Fairway Mower and will look to expand this as more hybrid mowers come to market," Mr Mahoney said.

"While our membership has grown to be one of the largest in the country, the club has retained its small-town feel." David Mahoney

"We recently purchased a 4066R Tractor and have cut the labour hours spent mowing rough significantly, given this machine pulls the mower effortlessly while climbing all the hills that used to bog down our old unit."

Mr Mahoney said when Wanaka Golf Club was looking to upgrade or renew its turf maintenance fleet, he looked for a balance between price and service.

"We don't have the luxury of having a mechanic on staff, so we need to have access to a technician when we get in a pinch," he said.

"We always go out to all manufacturers when looking for machinery, and the guys that we deal with at Drummond & Etheridge keep ticking all the boxes."

With borders open and ski-starved tourists expected to flock to the region over the winter months, Wanaka Golf Club will be ready to welcome an influx of players.

"Our region runs on tourism, so whether its golf, skiing or one of the other many world-class activities that attract visitors – it benefits us all," Mr Mahoney said.

"We work hard to keep the course in good shape year-round for our members, so when tourists return, we will be ready to welcome visitors and provide a memorable day out." ■



“It’s a tough golf course, it is long, and it offers a range of shots, but you really have to think your way around if you want to post a good score.”

Ryan Stores

Royal Canberra Golf Club, Australian Capital Territory.

A course worthy of the challenge

It’s the jewel in the golfing crown of the nation’s capital, but play a round at Royal Canberra Golf Club and you could be forgiven for thinking you’ve been transported abroad.

Royal Canberra Golf Club Superintendent Ryan Stores said the course’s arboretum made the club a standout.

“You’ve got tree-lined corridors on every single fairway, and it almost feels like you are in a different country on some holes. It is a unique site,” Mr Stores said.

“It’s like no other in the country.”

Set to mark 100 years as a club in 2026, Royal Canberra’s history is as interesting as the course is challenging.

“When the Lake Burley Griffin was established, the club was resumed and it had to move to the current location in 1962,” Mr Stores explained.

“The current site is the original arboretum for the ACT. You stand around and look at these 130-year-old trees that surround you and it’s picturesque.

“Because of the arboretum, the golf course is a heritage-listed site, and we have in excess of 6000 trees on the property, making maintaining turf quite difficult at times.”

Predominantly bent grass, the 126-hectare site can be a challenge to caretake in the unique ACT climate.

“It’s all cool-season grass, there is no warm-season grass, and when we get into the heart of summer, we are pretty much in survival mode to keep grass alive through that period,” Mr Stores said.

“We get up to 100 frosts a year, and in winter can dip down to as cold as minus 10, so it is a tricky place to maintain.

“However, moving into the summer is where the real challenge is because bent grass wants to die in temperatures above 23 degrees, and we have weeks of temperatures above 40 degrees.

“It is a little bit of a juggling act, and it is labour-intensive with a lot of hand watering, but it is also just being smart in how we maintain the golf course.

“We are the only ones in the country that maintain grass like this.”

“It was a decision we made as a club. We want to be innovative and on the front foot of technology not just for now but into the future..”

Ryan Stores

Mr Stores’ extensive turf management background equips him well for the job, as he has gained experience in preparing courses for PGA tour events, in addition to completing stints at Quail Hollow Club in North Carolina, USA, and The Australian Golf Club in Sydney.

He is also supported by a turf management staff of 12 and a fleet of John Deere equipment.

“We had a lot of John Deere machinery at Quail Hollow and because of that I was really familiar with the equipment and really comfortable with the decision to move from the competitor to the John Deere, knowing full well what the machinery is capable of,” Mr Stores said.

“It was a decision we made as a club. We want to be innovative and on the front foot of technology not just for now but into the future.

“Our local dealer representative, Steve, is a turf guy just like us and it was great having that relationship with someone who understood what we were after and what we were trying to achieve.”

The GPS technology used in the John Deere equipment is crucial to the sustainability of the course’s upkeep.

“We make upwards of 150 applications a year, so having the GPS sprayer was a big one for us.

“We can save time and we can save money on product – and I just thought it was a no-brainer.

“I’ve used just about every piece of equipment you can use on a golf course and in my opinion the John Deere product comes out in front.”

When reconstructed in 2014 by Ogilvy, Clayton and Mead, Royal Canberra was significantly widened to create a challenge for high and low handicap golfers and be more suited to today’s game.

“It’s a tough golf course, it is long, and it offers a range of shots, but you really have to think your way around if you want to post a good score,” Mr Stores said.

“It is definitely one that people should come and play.” ■



Ryan Stores, Royal Canberra Golf Club Superintendent.



Royal Canberra Golf Course is considered the jewel in the golfing crown of the nation’s capital.



John Deere 2750 PrecisionCut™ Triplex Mower.

Precision turf pays for Gold Coast school

With around 10 hectares of sports playing fields across two campuses, The Southport School (TSS) on the Gold Coast is considered one of Queensland's premier sporting institutions.

The school boasts former students including US Masters Champion Adam Scott, former Wallabies captain Nathan Sharpe and AFL premiership winner Clark Keating, along with multiple Olympic and Commonwealth Games athletes.

However, while TSS students were performing over and above on-field, the equipment the school's turf managers were using was struggling to keep up with the demands placed on the fields.

"A lot of our gear was ageing. Some of our mowers were 15-plus years old and on their last legs," TSS Head of Grounds, Nicholas Newman, said.

"We came up with a shopping list of the equipment we needed, and the school threw their support behind the team and said yes, we will do that.

"We got a John Deere 7700A PrecisionCut™ Fairway Mower which we just think is absolutely amazing. We've tried various other brands, but we just really like everything about this machine.

"And the 4066R Tractor is an absolute powerhouse, eating up everything we have thrown at it."

"We are thrilled, especially with the load and carrying capacity of our John Deere Gator™, and we've also got a couple of ZTrak™ Zero-Turn mowers, the combination of which is allowing us to get through a lot more work with the power we now have. Plus, the equipment is just a lot better."

While excited to chat about each of his new purchases, Mr Newman is perhaps most animated when talking about the John Deere ProGator™ GPS PrecisionSprayer.

"This is going to be an amazing unit for us," he said.

With budget considerations around fertiliser and chemicals, he said the sprayer will not only save the school money, but also cut down on labour and time.

"The precision of the unit, in applying product, whatever it may be, is obviously just going to pay dividends for us in the long run by reducing the overspray and missed spots you'd normally see with the old marking systems," he said.



The Southport School, Gold Coast, Queensland.

"The precision of the unit is obviously going to pay dividends for us in the long run by reducing the overspray and missed spots you'd normally see with the old marking systems."

Nicholas Newman

"We'll also benefit from improved record-keeping capabilities, with the data that we are getting back from the unit allowing us to see how well it has actually sprayed and where we are still not quite hitting our desired application rates.

"We can then change what we are doing and work on our technique so that we can improve, which might be as simple as changing our spray application speed."

With around 1,500 students from pre-school to Year 12, the school's sporting facilities are high-traffic areas. Fields are in constant use right across the year, meaning maintenance time can be limited.

Mr Newman said the ProGator 2030A GPS PrecisionSprayer had also helped save his team time, which was vital when working under such tight windows to spray. This includes reducing the time spent spraying fields from two to three days, to covering the grounds in just one.

"The other thing we've found operating it is you don't get the same driver fatigue as sitting behind a spray unit. You can just set it and then it's happy days.

"I don't see it replacing anybody in terms of labour, but it's allowing us to get the job done more efficiently and then move on to the next thing.

"It's creating more time for us, which allows us to get a lot of other things done with a limited amount of resources."

With a year-round sporting program that takes in rugby, cricket and soccer, Mr Newman is confident he now has the right tools at his disposal to ensure the next generation of athletes will play on some of the best facilities in the region. ■



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It's all in the design with Tom Doak



“To me, a good course is one that’s fun to play, but challenging enough to make you want to tackle it again and try to do better.”

Tom Doak

Tara Iti Golf Course, Te Arai coast, North Island.

It's all in the design with Tom Doak

Tom Doak knows what makes a good golf course.

The renowned architect and course designer has set foot on more than 1,600 courses and said there were simple ways to assess whether a course is a success.

"Whenever I see something that feels different or unusual that works for golf, it will get the highest marks from me," Mr Doak said.

"If you think about it, Pine Valley and The Old Course at St Andrews really couldn't be more different from each other, but they are clearly two of the greatest courses of all."

It is this mentality that Mr Doak takes into his course design.

While many courses are adding length to accommodate for modern big hitters, Mr Doak said the key was ensuring the layout provided a memorable experience for the majority, rather than the minority.

"Many designers have become pre-occupied with how far the game's best players hit the ball, but those aren't the guys who pay green fees," Mr Doak said.

"The average golfer hasn't improved dramatically, so we have to be careful not to make the course too hard for them — or too long of a walk!"

"We also have to be mindful that young, strong golfers can hit the ball further off line than ever before."

Mr Doak's design fingerprints can be found across some of Australia and New Zealand's most picturesque and challenging courses.

He had a hand in designing Barnbougale Dunes in Tasmania and St Andrews Beach in Victoria, while also working on the spectacular Tara Iti course in New Zealand.

His latest project is Te Arai Links, positioned on pristine coastline, just 15 kilometres south of Tara Iti.

"We had worked with Ric Kayne previously just up the beach at Tara Iti, and that course turned out beyond even my expectations, so it wasn't too hard to want to work in the neighbourhood again," Mr Doak said.

"Bill Coore, one of Te Arai's course designers, got the first choice of the property for routing this time, so my north course has to 'settle' for an ocean view from about half the holes. It's sandy and hilly and reminds me a little bit of Pine Valley, although we couldn't make it that severe for resort guests."

Mr Coore and former major champion Ben Crenshaw designed one of the two links courses on the Te Arai site, with Mr Doak responsible for the other.

"I think Bill Coore said it best when he said, 'at the end of the day, when you are remembering all of the holes you played at Te Arai and Tara Iti, they are so different that you won't have any trouble remembering which course was which,'" Mr. Doak said.

"After the first two holes along the ocean, you head inland through a valley, and at the fourth green you wind up in a bowl of sand dunes that host the next several holes, overlooked by a Māori pā [or fortress] on the highest dune by the sixth tee.

"Better yet, I shaped both the fourth and seventh greens myself; the first time I've done that on a project in years."

Mr Doak said his design inspiration began with the beautiful natural terrain he had to work with. Harnessing the unique topography, the leading designer then creates holes that best complement nature.

"There are lots of projects where the land is fairly plain and maybe you can apply a concept you've been thinking about to transform it; I have a project like that in Florida right now," he said.

"Generally, though, I'd rather be finding golf holes than having to invent them.

"It's almost impossible for human beings to create contours as varied as what nature provides us on a true links, so we try not to disturb those more than we have to.



Tara Iti Golf Course, Te Arai coast, North Island.



US-based Tom Doak designed Tara Iti Golf Course using the natural terrain.

"We always have to remember that the combination of wind and contour can be so challenging that you don't need a lot of other features to back them up."

Mr Doak said he looked to John Deere excavators and bulldozers to ensure he had the best possible equipment available for the construction of the course.

He also turns to GPS technology to assist the construction process.

"When you are walking through big sand dunes, it's lovely to have GPS showing you just where you are on your potential routing," he said.

"During construction, it's more commonly used for restoration projects, where you are trying to build a bunker exactly in a historic location. It can even be used to guide the bulldozer, if you have a detailed 3D map of what you are trying to build.

"On a new design, though, we tend to work by eye, because it's hard to draw a map as precisely as you would want for the dozer to follow."

So, how do you judge whether the design has made for a good course? It's not about looking at lists rating the top

"When you are walking through big sand dunes, it's lovely to have GPS showing you just where you are on your potential routing."

Tom Doak

courses; Mr Doak said there was a simple way to decide whether the design of the course was a hit.

"You should only really judge courses comparatively to one another; having set ideas in your head about the ideal course would be ignorant of the possibilities each provides," he said.

"To me, a good course is one that's fun to play, but challenging enough to make you want to tackle it again and try to do better.

"When the guests at Bandon Dunes were booking their rooms for next year as they checked out, you know you've done something special." ■

Turf talk: Get to know your dealers



Stephen Foster

Role: Golf and Sports Turf Accounts Manager

Dealership: LandHQ

Location: Sydney, NSW, Australia

Background: Stephen is a keen golfer himself. He has worked in turf management positions for more than a decade and is passionate about his role as a trusted advisor on John Deere's superior cutting equipment.

Favourite equipment: Stephen has a "soft spot" for the 7500A E-Cut™ Hybrid and believes it will become a staple on courses with high-end fairways.

Golfing highlight: Stephen nominates playing at Barnbogle Dunes as a favourite, claiming "you could have a hundred out there and still walk off with a smile!" He also enjoys the Royal Canberra Golf Club, where the team impresses on the only golf course in Australia made entirely of bent grass.



Neil Tombs

Role: John Deere Golf and Turf Sales Representative

Dealership: Agrowquip Golf

Location: Lower North Island, New Zealand

Background: Neil has been involved in the golf industry across the United Kingdom and New Zealand for more than 23 years, having worked in both golf construction and maintenance. Neil prides himself on providing the highest level of service and reliability to all customers and offering John Deere's wide range of exceptional equipment.

Golfing highlight: Playing off a handicap of six, Neil loves all aspects of the game of golf and enjoys soaking up the beautiful environments that surround quality courses. He has been lucky to play many courses around the world, nominating New Zealand's Tara Iti as his highlight.



Ash Duncan

Role: Turf and Commercial Product Manager Australia and New Zealand Dealer

Dealership: Brandt

Location: Geelong, Victoria, Australia

Background: Ash joined the turf industry as an apprentice and loves spending time on golf courses, especially his favourite: The Old Course at The National Golf Club on the Mornington Peninsula. Ash joined John Deere supplier Cervus Equipment (now Brandt) in 2021 and is excited to be given the opportunity to grow with a group that is new to the turf and commercial side of the golfing industry. Golfing highlight: Ash admires the beauty of Europe's largest golf complex, St Andrew's in Scotland, and the surrounding towns.

Favourite piece of equipment: Ash is "very excited" about John Deere's GPS PrecisionSprayer, and says the reliability and reputation of all John Deere equipment helps keep them out in front for turf management.



Joshua Morris

Role: Business Development Specialist Golf and Turf

Dealership: RDO Equipment Australia

Location: Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Background: Joshua brings more than 20 years' experience in the industry and is a self-described recovering golfer – turf managers and superintendents will understand what that means! John Deere's cutting-edge technology has kept him passionate and motivated about the industry he joined as an apprentice greenkeeper.

Golfing highlight: Some of the greatest moments of Joshua's life have been while working as a turf manager and his top three courses include Barnbogle

Lost Farm, Bonville Golf Resort and the Glades Golf Club.

Favourite equipment: Joshua is excited about the technological advancements in the sector and enjoys witnessing the next generation making their mark. Joshua nominates the ProGator™ 2030A as his favourite piece of John Deere golfing equipment, which he says has unmatched versatility and is one of the many John Deere machines that stands out for its reliability and ability to stand up to any challenge.



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