

Maleny makes its mark

Maleny Golf Club has been operating a full 18-hole layout for over a year now and the small community-based club is thriving, with golfing numbers the strongest they have ever been. This photo of the 11th hole certainly explains why



People power. A band of Maleny volunteers plants the 4th green with Tidwarf stolons which were harvested during front nine greens renovations

In 2016, Mick McCombe and the Maleny Golf Club won the ASTMA's Excellence in Golf Course Management Award. In the years since the Sunshine Coast hinterland course has expanded to a full 18-hole layout and is quickly making a name for itself, not only for the course but the role that the community has played in its development and ongoing management.

In 1995 the Sunshine Coast Council, along with a small group of like-minded individuals, had a vision and purchased the land on which the Maleny Golf Course now resides. In 2000 the Maleny Golf Club was incorporated, however, it wasn't until 2008 that the council fully endorsed a master plan for the Maleny Sport and Recreation precinct. Finally, in June 2014, dirt was moved and construction began on the first nine holes of the Graham Papworth-designed course.

A few months into the construction, current day superintendent Mick McCombe was appointed and oversaw the remaining construction, grow-in and opening of the first nine. For his efforts, and those of the

many volunteers at the club who pitched in, McCombe and the club were bestowed the 2016 ASTMA Excellence in Golf Course Management Award, with the subsequent article 'Paddocks to Pars', which appeared in ATM Volume 18.4, chronicling the initial phase of the course's development.

Since the official opening of the initial nine holes in June 2015, the final nine holes, along with an upgraded irrigation system and new maintenance facility, have been completed. A full 18-hole layout had always been planned for the site, however, there was never a timeline in which this would be achieved as it was all subject to funding. Council committed \$450,000 towards the completion of the back

nine, but substantial irrigation upgrades were needed and thus further funding was required.

Former club president and now vice president Dr. Max Whitten was instrumental in securing further grants which would see this project fast-tracked. The club secured a Sports Australia grant of \$200,000 as well as a 'Get in the Game' grant of \$100,000. This was a fantastic boon for the club, however, it brought with it challenging construction deadlines in order to secure the funding.

With deadlines looming, the realisation came that the mainline irrigation system installed on the first nine holes would not be adequate to service the additional nine holes, so the club engaged David Hanby to design

a new mainline irrigation system. A new, more suitable location for the pump shed was agreed on and a new Rain Bird IC system with a Stratus II controller was also commissioned.

FROM 9 TO 12

In early 2017 the club decided to push ahead and complete three additional holes, to

make a 12-hole format, after a parcel of land adjacent to the course became available. June 2017 saw the welcome addition of an additional greenkeeper to complement the club's apprentice and comprehensive team of volunteers which allowed McCombe to concentrate on construction. The shape of the additional parcel of land provided design constraints which Papworth integrated seamlessly into the overall plan by way of two par fours and a par three.

The project of installing a new 150mm PVC mainline and repositioning the pump shed was then undertaken by McCombe and his loyal band of volunteers. They were able to install almost 300 metres per day of rubber O-ringed pipe and maxi cable. The pump shed and two effluent water holding tanks were then moved to the new position, connected to the mainline and the club's volunteer electrician, the late Stan Toleman, connected the three-phase power.

Time was of the essence as the original nine would be without water until the new pumps were operational and while it turned out to be a logistical nightmare, after a few

sleepless nights the course made it through without turf health being compromised.

With the new maintenance facility still in the planning stages at this point, the Rain Bird controller had to be installed in a temporary shipping container near the new shed site, which involved installing power and running maxi cable to the container.

After construction of the first nine holes, McCombe championed the decision made by the management committee to contract David Burrup and his team to oversee the shaping and construction of the additional three holes, which started in June 2017. A band of Maleny volunteers, under the supervision of Burrup and McCombe, helped with the drainage and irrigation installation, which was instrumental in keeping the cost of this project down. Contracting professional shapers was a huge step forward in realising Papworth's designs.

Major differences in the construction methods of these three holes was the use of topsoil, professional shaping and choice of drainage. The top 300mm of topsoil was removed and stockpiled and later used as capping over the final shape to ensure the

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kikuyu aprons and surrounds would be at their best. Shaping of the new holes utilised natural stormwater channels and tied seamlessly into the existing landscape.

A tough decision was made by McCombe and the Greens committee to move away from the flat pipe drainage system used on the initial nine holes. Due to Maleny's high annual rainfall (2000mm), it was decided that the trenching method would be more suitable for the high and prolonged rainfall periods in order to maintain turf health.

With the mainline complete, the new three holes shaped and rubber-stamped by Papworth, a 100mm layer of 5-7mm drainage aggregate was placed, followed by 150mm of an approved construction sand and 150mm of an amended growing medium. All holes utilised the same amended growing blend which comprised of four per cent granular humic acid, two per cent composted organics,

one per cent Gyp Sand, 7.5 per cent zeolite with the remainder construction sand. This blend has proven to perform really well under Maleny's conditions and has been providing firm healthy playing surfaces. After another visit from Papworth to approve green contours, the club was then able to commence planting.

During renovations of the first nine holes, Tidwarf stolons were harvested which gave the volunteers ample product to uniformly cover the three new greens. As there was no rush to get the three new holes into play, it was decided not to use hessian to cover the stolons. Retrospectively, this was a poor decision as a lot more water was needed in order to keep the stolons damp in windy conditions. Light rolling was performed several times before hand mowing started. The outcome the club wanted was achieved, however, proved to be more challenging than it needed to be.



Due to Maleny's high annual rainfall, it was decided that trenching the drainage, as opposed to installing flat pipe which had been used on the front nine greens, would be more suitable for the new greens

Burrup's team shaped the bunkers and eventually Maleny volunteers would construct the revetted walls to fit in with the links style designed by Papworth. Long-term greens director and now life member Rob Bailo sourced an extensive supply of second-hand synthetic tennis court material which he and fellow volunteers cut into 300 x 300mm squares and tirelessly layered them along bunker walls to create the revetted bunkers which create a huge point of difference for the club. The revetted bunkers are low maintenance and the sand stays in place during rain events, thus reducing the need to push up bunkers and subsequently saving on labour.

DREAM DIGS

The official opening of the three new holes in January 2018 came around the same time as construction was to start on the new maintenance facility, a project that would challenge McCombe in new ways. The new maintenance facility was to service the club's existing infrastructure along with any future growth.

With a blank canvas, the opportunity to build a dream maintenance shed was an exciting prospect, with McCombe and the Greens committee visiting surrounding golf courses and conversing with other superintendents to determine what worked and, more importantly, what didn't.

A conceptual drawing was drafted with epar commissioned to design the maintenance facility in accordance with relevant environmental legislation and council planning schemes. This subsequently expedited the council approval process and once plans were approved, the club engaged a local builder to construct the main shed, undercover washdown area and chemical and irrigation storage sheds.

In April 2018 the external shell of the maintenance shed was completed and handed over for internal fit out by McCombe and his team of dedicated volunteers. Re-routing of power, the maxi cable and irrigation computer from the temporary shipping container to the new maintenance facility was first to be completed. The shed finally had power and internal fit out of the office, lunch room, toilet and shower began in earnest.

To reduce costs, all tasks were performed by volunteers which comprised builders, plumbers, electricians, tilers and painters.

Club life member Rob Bailo sourced second-hand synthetic tennis court material which was used to revet the Maleny bunkers

By August 2018 the bulk of the maintenance shed project was complete and the old shed dismantled. In July 2020, fuel bowsers were installed and council kindly arranged for the access road and surrounds of the maintenance shed to be sealed.

"The new maintenance facility has improved our operations immensely," says McCombe. "We are now able to store machinery inside and work on equipment when it is raining. All of our tools and equipment have their own pride of place and we take good care in keeping everything neat and tidy. We are now able to purchase and safely store more fertiliser and chemicals so what we need is always on hand."

FROM 12 TO 18

In January 2019 Papworth began to finalise the design of the remaining six holes, which proved to be quite a challenge as they needed to weave into the existing 12 holes. Additional land was acquired, however, the terrain proved quite challenging and it was decided that the majority of the initial nine holes would comprise the back nine.

Due to existing commitments, David Burrup was unavailable to construct the remaining six holes, however, he assisted the club in securing Nathan Bradbury, owner of Spectrum Golf. Bradbury came with a wealth of experience and the right equipment to bring the final new holes to life. He was also willing to work closely with McCombe and his volunteers to complete the work inside the allocated budget.

In June 2019, construction of the new 1st hole started on challenging and steep terrain (see photo this page of the finished product). Dry stone rock walls behind the tees and on the left-hand side of the green, as well as a 12m timber bridge, were required all of which was completed by volunteers. Simultaneously, another band of volunteers were installing an additional 2.5km of 150mm mainline pipe around the southern wetland to irrigate the remaining holes.



Maleny's par three 1st, the first hole of the final six constructed in 2019 and opened in early 2020

Bradbury and his team arrived in May 2019 and quickly started shaping the final six holes. Everything was going well until they struck rock cutting into the bank on the first green. Due to budget and time constraints, shaping around the rocks was decided rather than removal. Papworth had scheduled visits for each phase of green construction and given Bradbury had previously performed shaping for him he understood his requirements.

With shaping of just greens and tees needed, the project moved quite fast. McCombe and his volunteers all knew what they had to do, thus installation of drainage and ring main irrigation all happened when and as required. The final shaping of the greens was completed in September in preparation for the October course renovations. Stolons were collected from the 12 holes already in play and this time hessian covers were used to protect the transplanted stolons. In February 2020 the 18-hole format was officially opened

and after a year of play McCombe says the club, together with Papworth, have created something quite special and unique.

"The new greens have settled in well and there are only a few remaining bare patches left in the roughs, so the course is really taking shape," says McCombe. "We are endeavouring to even out playing surfaces during renovations by scarifying the new greens in four directions in order to build up a small thatch layer, compared to six or eight directions on the older greens. In addition, the newer greens are rolled less frequently as they are still quite firm and fast.

"Now that the 18 holes are complete our focus has shifted from construction to ongoing maintenance. Last January we welcomed assistant superintendent Nik Smith from Pelican Waters. Nik's passion and experience at top tier golf courses has contributed immensely to the continual improvement of our playing surfaces and afforded me the ability to

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Keeping the Maleny surfaces in trim are volunteers (from right) Chris Pottinger, Rob Bailo, Ron Smith, Barry Retchlag and Don Lemmon. Fellow mowing crew member Richard Clayton is absent

take some much-needed holidays. Apprentice Sam Treloar and groundsman Geoff Warwick, along with countless volunteers, help us to keep the course in pristine condition."

FINE-TUNING AND MOVING FORWARD

The Maleny Golf Course development is very much a community-driven one, with McCombe relying heavily on a hard-working team of volunteers which is very rewarding but does come with its challenges. Communication is key as is keeping an eye on their work.

Communication needs to be adapted for each volunteer to ensure instructions are received clearly, with any room for interpretation by a volunteer causing confusion or frustration when a job is not completed as required. McCombe and his staff work hand in hand with the volunteers and all agree that the course wouldn't be where it is today without them and are thus always adjusting and refining practices.

"The biggest change in the maintenance of our course has been the increase in inputs on greens due to budget increases," says

McCombe. "Previously the budget would define our inputs, which were always lean, whereas now it is under our control and we can increase our inputs as required. Dollar spot control is our main issue and we have had to embark on a preventative programme year round as it an ongoing issue in our climate. A few of our greens are affected by ERI, however, it is not a major issue."

To cater for the new holes, the club invested in a machinery package from Toro to increase the ability to produce quality surfaces. The purchase of a new spray unit, 5010H fairway unit, 4500-D rough mower, 3400 greens mower, HDX utility vehicle, Pro Core and Pro Force blower has resulted in greater efficiencies and less downtime on old machinery.

To show off that improved level of presentation, to date the club has been fortunate to hold three Pro Ams with the quality of the Maleny greens and course highly praised. The first two Pro Ams were on the original nine holes, while the third was a 12-hole format which was very well received by the professional golfers.

Perhaps the biggest impact to Maleny Golf Club since opening was Adam Scott's visit in 2020. Scott came up for a social round with Maleny club professional, former touring pro and friend Wayne Perske, and thoroughly enjoyed the course. He and Wayne decided to livestream on Instagram 'Nine holes with a mate' which went on to have over 100,000 views. During the round Scott chatted about the course and its development as well as provided an insight into his game and life on the PGA Tour.

Scott then returned with his dad and kindly introduced himself to a number of the club's loyal volunteers and chatted about the course and the works undertaken. Scott was very vocal on the impressive quality of the course and it was a real feather in the cap to see him taking photos as he played. Since his visit the club has seen a significant increase in social groups and competition play.

Moving forward, at the time of writing, construction of a new larger practice putting green, to accommodate more golfers, is underway. Five new tees are also being constructed to cater for increased traffic, with one of the new tees turning the par four 9th into a par five, bringing the course up to a par 69. A new golf cart storage shed will also start construction shortly on the site of the old practice green.

A business proposition is being presented to Unity Water to secure fairway irrigation funding in addition to current negotiations for an ongoing water supply to fill the southern wetland and diversify the course's water storage. A new clubhouse is still on the wish list as well.

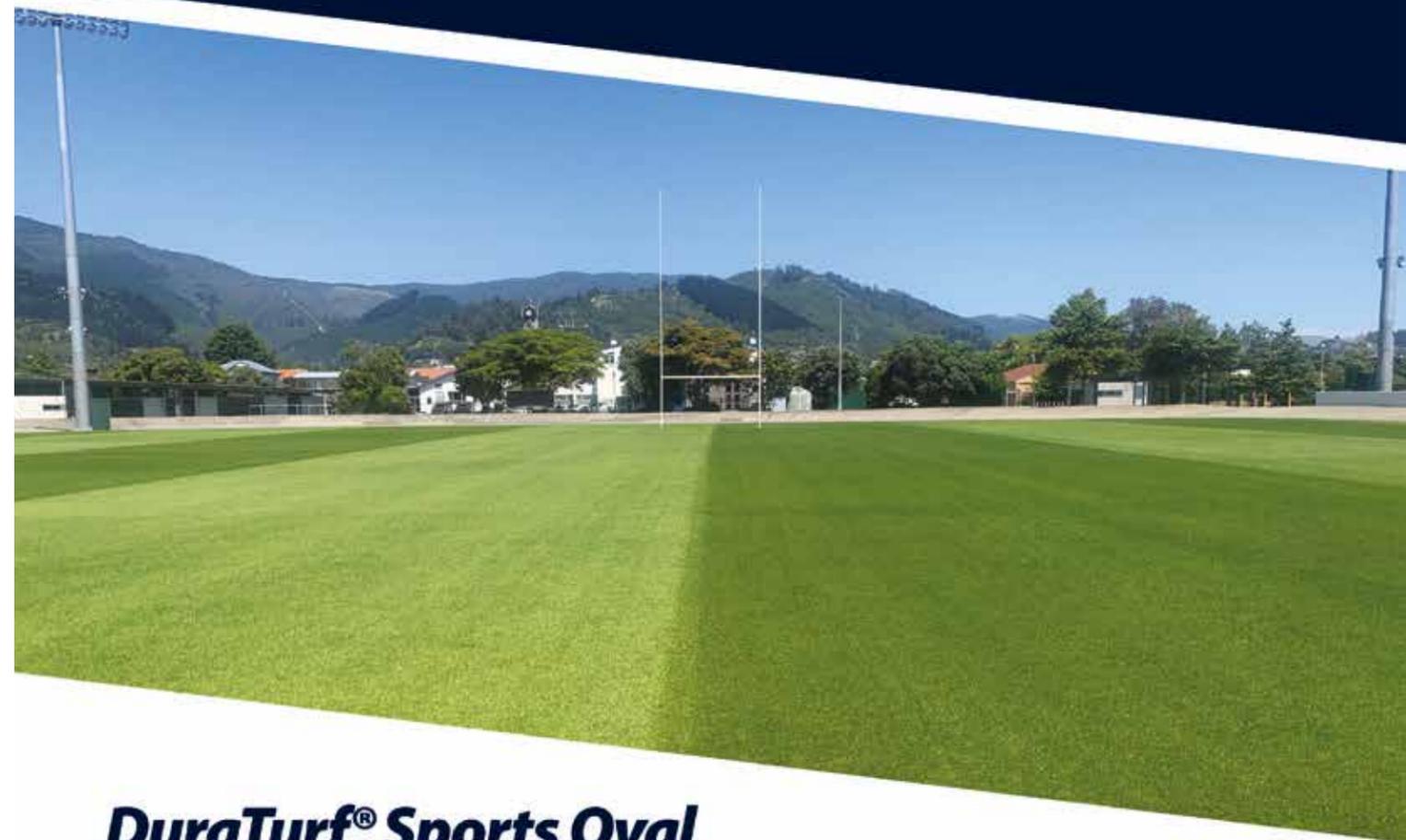
"Personally, after everything that we have been through here at Maleny, the most rewarding aspect of this journey is seeing golfers (and non-golfers) from near and far enjoying our course and returning time and time again," says McCombe. "The sense of community is unlike anywhere I have experienced and I would like to say a special thanks to everyone involved, particularly my beautiful partner Sarah." 🙏



Adam Scott has developed an affinity for the course and its story, live streaming a round of golf with Maleny club pro Wayne Perske last year. Here he is pictured with volunteers inspecting the newly turfed 2nd tee



Hessian was used to cover the newly-stolonised greens to help protect them during establishment



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