

BY BRETT ROBINSON

Not many golf course superintendents can claim to have prepared the outfield for World Cup cricket venue, but for Barbados Golf Club superintendent and ex-pat Australian Shaun Satterly the unique opportunity presented itself earlier this year. ATM catches up with the former Tasmanian turfie who is now enjoying a super life on what the locals affectionately call 'the rock'.



Barbados Golf Club is a public access course with around 250 members which attracts 30,000 rounds of golf annually

crew of 20 which includes three mechanics who also service the club's fleet of golf carts.

### CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT

While living on a Caribbean island would be most people's idea of a great working environment, it does bring with it numerous challenges for a turf manager. For a start everything has to be imported and that requires plenty of preplanning or else budgets can quickly blow out.

"Back home chances are you've got a distributor down the road and if you need any parts you just jump in the car or have a sales rep drop a few bags around to get you out of trouble," says Satterly.

"Over here you don't have that luxury. You have to think at least six months ahead of what you want to do and have everything brought in in advance to be ready to go. A lot of forward planning goes into simple things like aerification and topdressing greens. You soon learn to get on top of it pretty quickly otherwise you can get into a bit of trouble.

"All soil testing and disease diagnosis is sent offshore. I use a UK-based company and from their results I develop a fertiliser programme and then get a year's worth of supplies shipped in.

"Another issue we have is that some chemicals haven't been registered for turf, especially a number of pre-emergent herbicides. You have to specially apply to use those products on the golf course which takes a lot of time and red tape."

# A super life on 'the rock'

Starting his turf management career in the small Tasmanian town of Wynyard, Shaun Satterly would never have picked that over a decade later he would be a superintendent plying his trade on the small Caribbean island of Barbados.

It's the sort of journey which a number of up and coming Australian superintendents are deciding to take these days and for Satterly, who has just notched up his second year in charge at Barbados Golf Club, it is one that has widened his eyes to not only turf management but life itself.

Barbados is quite literally a world away compared to Australia's beloved southernmost state, but for Satterly the road that has taken him there is just another example of the wide ranging opportunities available to turf managers in this modern era.

Barbados, or the 'the rock' as the locals

know it as, is situated east of the Caribbean Sea. An independent nation which boasts a population of around 280,000, the country lies in the southern Caribbean region where it is a part of the Lesser Antilles island chain.



Barbados Golf Club superintendent and expat Australian Shaun Satterly

It is close to the South American continent, around 434 kilometres northeast of Venezuela, while its closest island neighbours are Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the west, Grenada to the south-west, and Trinidad and Tobago to the south. Barbados' total land area is about 430km<sup>2</sup> and is primarily low-lying, with some higher regions in the island's interior.

Satterly's journey to Barbados started, not surprisingly, when he decided to head to the United States to take part in the Ohio State Program. Having served his apprenticeship at the small nine-hole Wynyard Golf Club and then moving to Queensland where he enjoyed stints at Redlands and Brisbane golf clubs, Satterly ventured overseas and was placed at one of South Carolina's leading golf resorts, Daufuskie Island Club and Resort.

Returning to Australia, Satterly joined The Australian Golf Club in Sydney under then superintendent Rob Ashes and was part of the crew that prepared the course for the

Centenary Australian Open in 2004. After four years there, during which time he completed a Masters in turf management through the University of Sydney, Satterly decided to see what opportunities were going overseas and through contacts made during his Ohio internship found out about the position at Barbados Golf Club.

Superintendent at the time was a Kiwi chap Ed Paskins who took Satterly on board and literally threw him in the deep end. Five months later Paskins handed the reins over to Satterly who has never looked back.

Barbados Golf Club is one of a handful of golf clubs on the island and is located about 20 minutes from the capital of Bridgetown in the island's southwest corner. Further north there is Royal Westmoreland Golf Club, as well as the exclusive Sandy Lane Golf and Country Club which is home to the highly regarded Tom Fazio-designed Green Monkey (Australian Steve Johnson is superintendent there).

Another 18-hole championship course is currently under construction as part of the Apes Hill Club development, while over the

next five years there are plans for a further six courses to be built on the island.

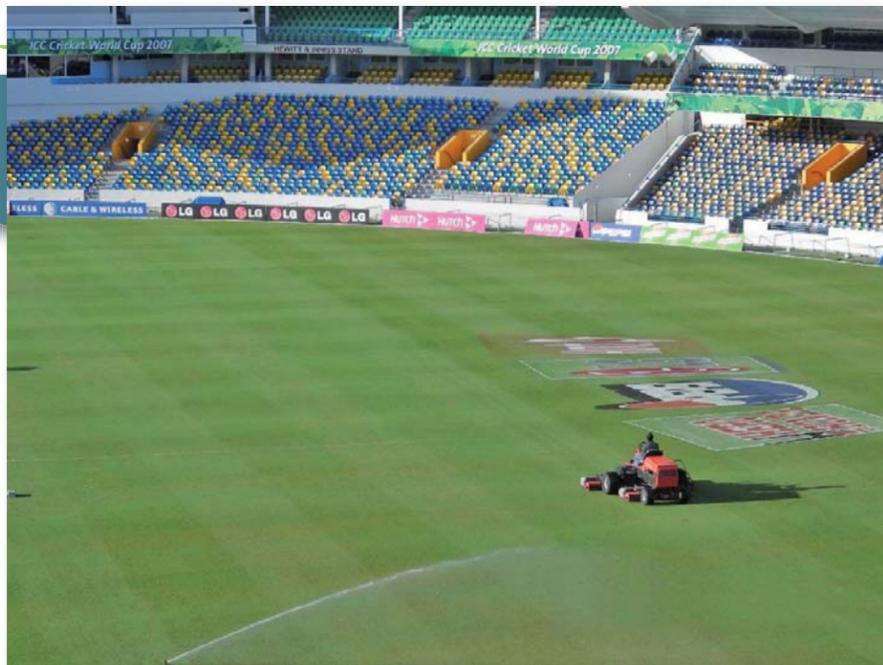
By contrast, Barbados Golf Club is one of the smaller golfing operations. A public access course with around 250 members, it attracts about 30,000 rounds of golf annually, catering mainly to US and European holidaymakers who fly in or stop off on the many cruise ships which sail the Caribbean.

The course is 419 Bermuda throughout with TifDwarf greens which are constructed with local sand profiles. Satterly manages a

Barbados Golf Club is 419 Bermuda throughout with TifDwarf greens



**Satterly and the crew at Barbados Golf Club won the tender to maintain the Kensington Oval outfield which hosted the final of the 2007 Cricket World Cup**



Located in the tropics, Barbados also has a distinct wet and dry season which has taken some adapting to. Fortunately for Satterly, Barbados is often spared the worst effects of the region's tropical storms and hurricanes during the wet season as its far eastern location puts it just outside the principal hurricane belt.

"You can see them (the hurricanes) rolling in from the Atlantic on the radar, but most of them miss us," says Satterly. "What we do get are large tropical depressions which will just sit over the island for days and unload a torrent of water. They then move on up the island chain and that's when they turn nasty."

**HEY-MAAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

Ask any ex-pat Australian who runs a golf course maintenance operation overseas what their biggest challenge is and chances are it will have something to do with managing the local workforce.

The West Indies region has a reputation for producing some of humanity's more laid back and relaxed characters and the local Barbadians are no exception. From a human resource management perspective that has created plenty of interesting challenges

for Satterly, but one which he has enjoyed adapting to.

"There's never a dull moment, that's for sure," laughs Satterly. "It can be frustrating and exciting all in the one day. There are a range of emotions that go on. I've been here two years now and I guess I'm comfortable with how everything is but at first it was a big culture shock.

"I came here with my Aussie way of doing things – that things should just happen easily. Simple things like topdressing greens shouldn't be an issue but sometimes it doesn't happen that way. Here you've got to learn to

relax and accept that things will eventually get done, even if it's not quite how you had envisaged them.

"Managing staff is one of my most significant challenges. They're a pretty relaxed bunch as you can imagine. One of the problems I have is that a lot of the workers rely on public transport to get to work and during the wet season when the rains set in it can become a big issue.

"The bus system isn't the best and when we get extended rain some people literally can't get out of their houses. They don't like the rain either so sometimes you may get just six or seven staff coming to work, which when

the grass is growing so fast at that time of year makes it very difficult to manage the course."

Satterly admits that when he first started it was an issue which he had difficulty getting to grips with, but now he deliberately increases his crew to anywhere up to 24 to cater for any such problems. He also has to constantly motivate the staff to produce a top quality product.

"Obviously it's completely different to back home," says Satterly. "For instance, when I was working at The Australian, it was hard not to be motivated, particularly in and around the time of the Centenary Open. Over here it's completely different. You quickly learn how to lead people and manage people, keep them interested and motivated.

"The other thing is that most are just straight labourers. You have to train them up yourself as there are no formal apprenticeships or turf education system in place.

"But with the industry starting to grow there is a career to be made if they apply themselves. There are a lot of projects in the pipeline at the moment so there are opportunities for greenkeepers, assistants and irrigation techs if



**Satterly with members of his Kensington Oval maintenance crew**

they want to get in and learn.

"I do try and project that there are opportunities, but I don't think it has registered with some of my guys. Most just see it as a job, a source of income. I guess once these other projects start coming on line and they see that there is a growing industry then maybe attitudes will change.

"A lot of them don't want the responsibility

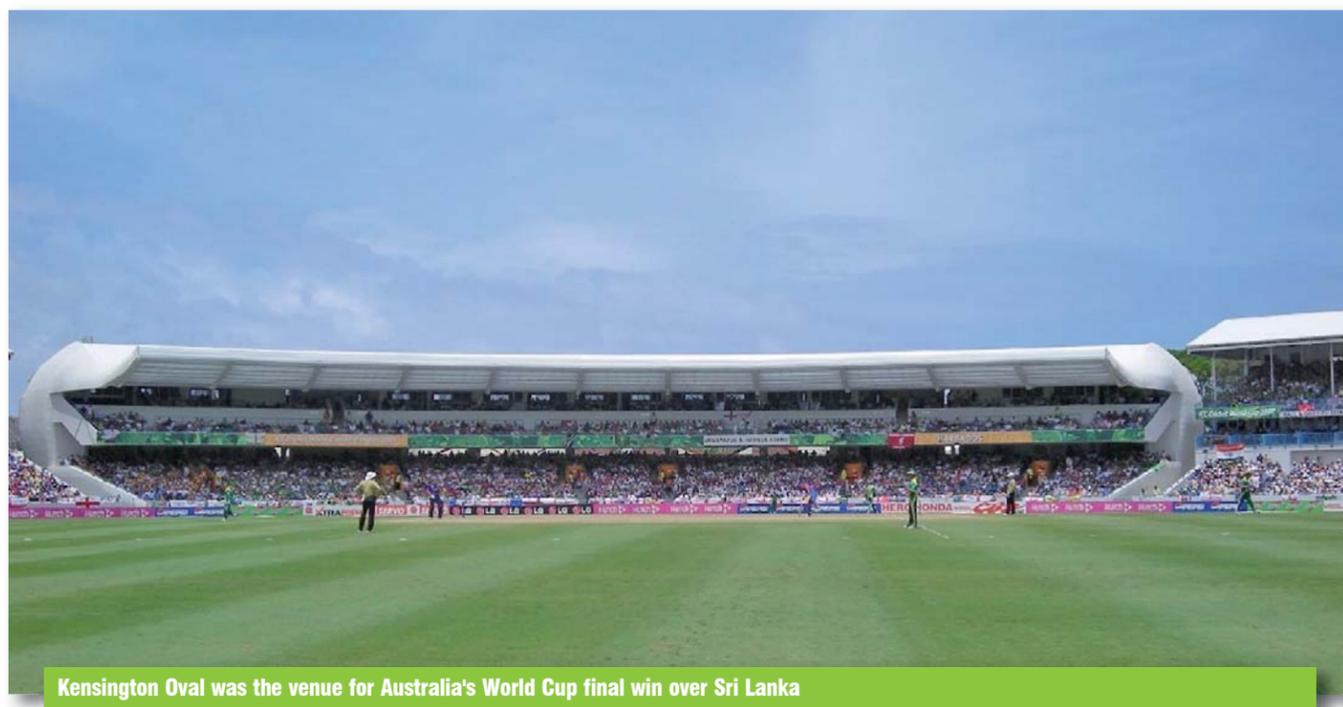
either. They're just happy to get to a certain point and stay there; they don't want the stress. It's a cultural thing. Back home most people are goal driven and want to be a superintendent one day. Over here they're much more laid back and are quite happy to cruise."

Satterly says it has taken him a while to adjust to the relaxed Barbadian way of life and reckons I took him a good 12 months to fully get his head around how things were done West Indies style.

"Now that I have been here for two years, I'm at a level where I feel I am comfortable with things and the guys are comfortable with me as well," says Satterly.

"I have certainly learnt a lot off the guys here. They've taught me a lot about leadership, people skills, management and being organised. I was fairly easygoing back home and fairly organised to a point I guess, but being here has taken me to that next level in terms of managing yourself.

"They don't teach that sort of stuff when you're doing a turf degree. They teach you how to grow grass but they don't teach you



**Kensington Oval was the venue for Australia's World Cup final win over Sri Lanka**

the psychology side of things, how to lead and motivate staff. That's a whole different ball game and one you don't find out about until you're thrown into that position."

### A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

While working in Barbados has equipped Satterly with numerous new management skills, there was one rather unique opportunity which presented itself recently. Not many superintendents can say that they have prepared a ground for the Cricket World Cup but for Satterly that unusual chance came about with the West Indies playing host to the 2007 tournament.

Together with the CEO of Barbados Golf Club, Satterly responded to tenders calling for the maintenance of the outfield and practice wicket area at Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, which hosted a number of Super 8 games as well as the final between Australia and Sri Lanka.

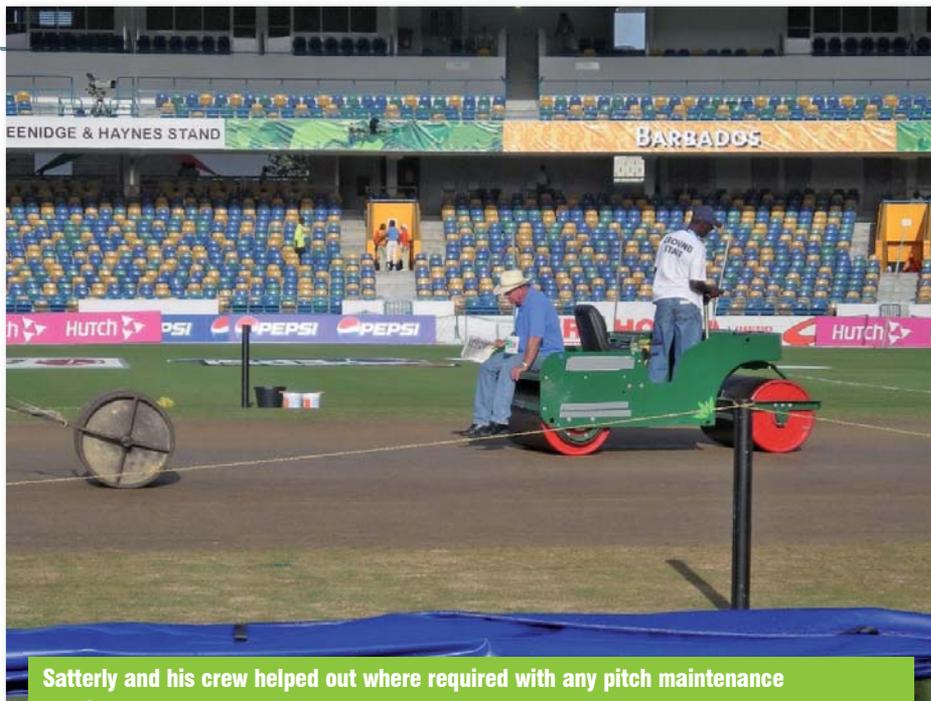
After discussions with the UK's STRI and World Cup Barbados, a maintenance program was accepted and from October 2006 Satterly was in charge of putting together a crew to maintain the oval's outfield while at the same time maintaining the golf course.

"It was quite a juggling act," reflects Satterly, who will continue to maintain the oval until the contract is renegotiated later in the year. "We moved one guy full time from the golf course and I was down there overseeing things every other day.

"Logistically it was very challenging moving guys between the two venues and keeping both venues ticking along without sacrificing quality. If we went in to topdress or fertilise we would take a crew of about five down. As the World Cup came closer everything intensified and you had to plan a couple of steps ahead all the time."

Not having a cricket background, Satterly undertook investigations into what was required for a successful outfield and quickly found that it was much like preparing a golf course fairway. A smooth, quick, uniform playing surface was the goal from the outset and with that vision in mind he and his crew set about achieving it.

"Turf quality at the start was fair with approximately 85 per cent coverage," says Satterly. "419 Bermuda was chosen for planting on the outfield. The first step was to obtain an accurate soil and water analysis so as to



prepare an effective fertiliser programme which would peak for the first Super 8 match and hold through until the final.

"Once the outfield obtained 100 per cent coverage it was then a matter of improving the quality of the playing surface. The field required considerable topdressing to improve smoothness and reduce the undulations which remained post construction.

"All sand topdressing required screening as the local sand contained a high percentage of large aggregates. The screening was time consuming and made a relatively straight forward task a little more difficult."

A few challenges were experienced when working in conjunction with the stadium construction. Debris from the construction efforts were constantly on the field which resulted in areas of turf being killed off, while the use of heavy lifting equipment to install light and sound fixtures made progress slow.

Some shade issues were also experienced on the southern side of the oval with algae quite prevalent. The use of grow lights was investigated but it was decided that with normal cultural practices the playing surface would improve and become manageable as the seasons changed and the position of the sun became higher in the sky. That diagnosis proved correct and that particular section returned to 100 per cent coverage by the start of the tournament.

"For the Super 8 games and the final we cut prior to each match and aided the wicket curator with any pitch requirements," says Satterly. "The goal for those games was to pick

the field up to maximum just prior to the first match and hold it through to the finals. Wear and tear and become considerable by the end of the Super 8 matches and we only had seven days to try and restore the health of the grass before the final.

"It really kept you on your toes, but it was exciting to be a part of it and certainly a once in a lifetime opportunity for a golf course superintendent. And to watch Australia take out the title was the icing on the cake."

### A SUPER LIFE

So does Satterly see himself coming home in the near future, or has the Barbadian bug bitten him enough to stay on?

"I'd love to go back to Australia' says Satterly. "But that's one of the reasons I left - there weren't the opportunities there. I wasn't prepared to stay in one spot for 5-10 years before moving into a superintendent position. I was keen to go where the opportunities were I suppose and through contacts I landed up in Barbados.

"I love the fact that I'm developing my career but traveling the world at the same time. You can treat it as a stepping stone or you could quite easily stay on for a number of years. There are plenty of other golf courses coming on line soon not just here in Barbados but also around the region.

"I'm just enjoying the Caribbean at the moment. It's a pretty good part of the world, once you get your head around it. You just have to take your foot off the accelerator a little and adapt to the local way of life." 🌿