

# Meet the Jones boy

**In the first of a new series, Robert Jones explains how he managed to get a place on the OSU turf programme**



Hi, my name is Robert Jones. I am 20 years old and I am just about to embark on the Ohio State University programme for Greenkeepers that you have just been reading about. I will be out in America for twelve months.

When I left school at 16 I did the usual thing of following my friends to six form college but, after being there for a year, I realised it wasn't for me. I needed to look for something that would suit me knowing that, whatever I chose, I would probably end up doing for the rest of my life.

With my love of the outdoors, sport and gardening I looked into careers that were available in these fields (excuse the pun). My careers officer gave me some college info to plough through and this is when I discovered greenkeeping. As soon as I saw it I knew this was the job for me.

I studied at Reaseheath College in Nantwich for two years doing a full time National Diploma where I achieved a Distinction with Merit. I really enjoyed the whole course from start to finish. During this course I had to find work experience and I was lucky enough to get a placement at the De Vere Belfry working under the then Estates Manager, Bevan Tatterstall. I given the opportunity to work on all three courses. This gave me a basic understanding of the working life of a greenkeeper. If I hadn't been bitten by the GK bug I certainly was after my time at the Belfry.

Once the work experience had ended, and I was due back in college, I asked to be transferred to De Vere Carden Park as it was closer to home and college. Here I was given the opportunity to work during a tournament. Even though the hours were long the praise given to us by the golfers gave us all such pride. I continued to work at Carden Park on a part time basis throughout the remainder of my college course.

On finishing my National Diploma I applied for a job closer to home. I needed the knowledge to push myself that bit further and found the Ohio State programme on the Internet. I discussed the whole idea with my parents and they just said 'go for it!' They have been very supportive and now I intend to give it my best shot.

At BTME Harrogate I met Mike O'Keefe, who is the manager of the OSU programme. He gave me an application form to complete. One part of this application was to write an

essay about myself and my experiences.

I faxed my application form back to Mike and, later that same evening, he phoned me to offer me a position at Double Eagle Golf Club in Ohio. While talking on the phone he said how much he enjoyed reading through my essay and told me a bit about Double Eagles. It is rated number 8 in the top 100 golf courses in America and is privately owned. To be able to play is by invitation only and Mike mentioned that some golfers fly in by helicopter. He painted a fantastic picture and it just blew me away to be offered such an opportunity.

The costs involved to undertake the course are very high and, without help from my parents, I don't think I would have been able to take up the position. These include 12 months insurance, the initial fees to the college and the cost of my flights. But all this has made me even more determined to get as much from this opportunity as I can.

The Ohio State University programme management have given me excellent support and made the whole process as easy as possible. They have stayed in contact with me, arranged to meet me at the airport and have also introduced me to the Course Superintendent at Double Eagles. He has assured me that he will help me through any home sickness I might have and outlined all the positive aspects of working and training at his course.

Apparently, I will move around America. I will spend six months in Ohio then I am going to a conference in California for a week and then on to another part of America for their summer. At the same time I will be doing my foundation degree online course at Myerscough College. They have made it easy for me to access it all the way from America. All the contacts I have made in my short time in this career have given me so much encouragement.

I just hope that, in the months to come, I will be able to send you my experiences and photographs. I also hope that you will be part of my adventure and enjoy reading about my experiences.



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# Robert Jones *Diaries*

**Rob Jones is part of the Ohio State University's programme for young greenkeepers. In part II of his diary he tells us about the trepidations of leaving behind his family and his first 'wide eyed' experiences of the United States**

I have now arrived in America and I am safe and well and hope you enjoyed reading my last article. I am going to talk about my experience of coming out here to the States (Ohio), and the first things I have experienced since being here.

When I left Manchester early on March 26th, I had so many emotions running through my head. At one point I was thinking "Is this the right thing to do?", but I told myself "I have got to do this!" My parents came with me to the airport to see me off, which made me really emotional, and when I was going through passport control, that is when the tears started to flow but, thankfully, I pulled myself together and got through that part!

Once in the departure lounge, I phoned a friend to pass the time and that helped me get over everything. Soon, it was time for me to board the plane and, at that point, I knew there was no turning back! I had to give this my best shot.

I flew from Manchester into Newark, New Jersey, which is next to New York. Everything was straightforward - or so I thought!. As I got to passport control I realised that I had left behind one of the most important forms. Not good! I then had to go to security to get in to the country. The form I left behind was my DS-2019, a visa that entitled me to take up my internship in America. Security asked me a few questions and told me that my mom should send out the paperwork as soon as possible. They could, and should, have sent me home on the next plane, but they were very understanding and helpful.

Then it was on to catch the connecting flight to Columbus Ohio. I only had two hours to get through Newark, but I found that was plenty of time.

I flew into Columbus International Airport in Ohio, collected my bags ( I had already cleared customs in Newark) and phoned the University Plaza hotel. The hotel is owned by OSU. Here I met other internees.

The following morning we were collected from the hotel at about 9:30am and taken to the University where we did our 'orientation' or induction. There were ten others doing their induction at the same

time, but we were not all going to work on golf courses. Some were going to farms and one was going to a massive pig operation. There was a mix of nationalities - two lads from Denmark, an Australian, a Brazilian and an Irishman. The remainder were from England. One of the lads was an old work mate of mine from Carden Park. He was going to Merion Golf Club in Philadelphia. During the induction the OSU team explained in detail about taxes, Social Security, immigration and even sorted out the fact that I had forgotten my visa!

Then it was off for lunch where we met the OSU staff who, themselves, were from many countries - England, Ireland, Brazil, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, China, Poland, France and, of course, America. In the afternoon we were shown around the campus including the OSU College team grounds. It was amazing to see just how big the stadium was - even bigger than the new Wembley Arena!

The bit that blew me away was that it was only used for between seven and ten college games each year. It holds 105,000 people, and the score board alone cost \$10 million. The campus covers an area of 15,000 acres. It was at this point I realised that everything in America is on a much bigger scale than England.

Then it was on to the Jack Nicklaus Museum. Columbus Ohio is his home town. It housed all the trophies he has ever won from a very young age up to the last tournament he played. There was even the only Masters Green Jacket



outside of Augusta.

Later that day, back at the hotel, I went to the Programme office, where I met my new boss Todd Voss, Course Superintendent at Double Eagle Golf Club. He appeared to be very professional and I am looking forward to working under him. On my way to the golf course, and my accommodation, I had to take a drugs test. This is compulsory and has to be taken by every person who comes out here as an intern on the programme.

On arrival at Double Eagle Golf Club I was surprised because, if you didn't know the golf course was there, you would drive right past it. This is the way the owner, Mr John McConnell, wanted it. The boundary of the golf course has a big fence, trees and very long grass so you can't see what is behind. It is not signposted and there is no big entrance saying 'Welcome to Double Eagle'. Just a gate set back off the road and, inside, a little sign saying 'Welcome'. That's it! I had been told it was a private club, but I hadn't realised just how private!

Double Eagle have three machinery sheds. They don't call the main shed, a shed. Out here they call it 'The Shop', which I am still getting used to.

The golf course is very exclusive. It has 50 local members and 100 International members. It is a Par 72. The course opened in 1992. It was designed by Tom Weiskopf, who also designed Loch Lomond in Scotland. It has moved up from 7th to joint 5th in the ratings of condition in the top 100 courses in America.

Todd took me on a whistle-stop tour of the course before taking me to my house to let me settle in. At this point I made a quick phone call home to England to let them know I had arrived safely. On my first evening Todd took me out for tea and, the next day, it was left to me to put my accommodation in some sort of order!

My first day on the course didn't disappoint me. The first person I



# “The first few jobs I did were all designed to get me eased into the course and to familiarise myself with its layout”

got introduced to was Kevin, who is one of Todd's two assistants. He showed me how to clock on and off and I also got introduced to all the other lads on the team. The first job I had to familiarise myself with was to plug the greens. At this golf course they go around and take the *Poa annua* out of their greens and replace it with plugs full of bent grasses. Then, in the afternoon, I learned how they cut their greens. I was working with a guy called Scott and we cut the greens together with hand mowers. We cut five greens in total. I really enjoyed my first day at the golf course.

The first few jobs I did were all designed to get me eased into the course and to familiarise me with its layout. The first few days were so wet that we had to cut the grass around the bunkers, and the steep banks, with rotary mowers. We only got half the course done on the first day. I also helped dig a trench for a water hydrant for the clubhouse as it doesn't currently have one.

All the staff have been very kind to me. They are mostly Americans, but there are two Mexicans and one fella from Ecuador. The two Mexicans cannot speak much English and they have asked me if I could help them learn the language and, in return, they will teach me a bit of Spanish.

My daily routine at the moment is getting up at 6:30am each day and getting picked up about 7:20am. Then we go out on the course just after 7:30am returning for lunch at around noon. We have 42 minutes for lunch then head back out on the course to tackle the afternoon tasks, finishing about 4:30pm.

In my first two weeks I had Saturday and Sunday off, but that changed on week three because we now work a rota system where we are split into two groups. My days off are now Friday and Saturday.

The weather in the first few weeks has been so different. I have seen all four seasons. We had 80°F on one day which then plummeted to 40°F the following day - what a shock. This was followed by snow and thunderstorms. We also had a glimpse of the spring weather, which we should be having at this time - such a nice temperature to work in.

I had to wait a few weeks to set up my bank account because I needed a social security number and, to get this, you have to be in the country for ten days. Then you have to wait for it to be sent out to you. Once you have that, you can get a bank account and a drivers licence for the state that you are in.

I recently passed my driving test for Ohio which was very easy and took about 45 minutes altogether with the practical and theory. I have a car as well - a Honda Accord.

I went to watch the local ice hockey team, the Columbus Blue Jackets, who are a professional team. Sadly, they have not done so well this season. The game I went to see, against the Anaheim Ducks, they lost 5-2. I had never watched ice hockey before so it was new experience for me, and one which I really enjoyed.

I have settled out here very well and already feel at home. The country is very nice and I don't feel like I am missing home that much. Mind you, I am getting phone calls daily from people back home so I don't feel like I am missing them.

There will be more people coming out to live with me while I am here, including two English lads and one from West Virginia.

I hope you enjoyed reading this second 'diary' and I look forward to telling you about my experiences when I have settled a little bit more.

ROB JONES

## A few words from the new BAGCC Chairman

**Brian D Pierson, the incoming Chairman of the British Golf Course Constructors Association, says “wait until you can afford it!”**



THE greatest asset of any golf club is the golf course itself and yet, far too often, more is spent on the '19th' than the other 18.

If clubs are to embark on alterations, they should ask the following questions:

- Can the work be done in house?
- Are the green keeping team free to take on the extra work? Have they the time?
- Do they have access to the specialist equipment?
- Most importantly, do they possess those differing skills?

It has always been my contention that “Golf course builders build courses” and it is the Greenkeepers who “make them into courses”.

It is now generally recognised that the solution to alterations or improvements is to employ an experienced specialist who has the ability and, most importantly, a proven track record.

My views are based on the experience gained in golf course construction and alterations over the past forty years, in that time working on over 250 courses, including major construction and reconstruction at St Andrews, together with

the renovation on seven Open Championship venues.

To quote international golf course architect, Donald Steel, who, as long ago as 1974, stated in an article in *Golf Monthly* - “Entrusting work to inexperienced contractors, even on the grounds of economy when funds are limited, is inviting disaster”. That statement is as true today as it was then. BAGCC members are far too often called in to “put right” sub standard work. It is essential that companies with experience and expertise are commissioned to undertake improvements. Golf clubs must also be aware of their legal responsibilities for insurances and Health & Safety and the very recent changes in government policy.

This year I have been elected as the Chairman of BAGCC, of which I am proud to have been a founder. Our members have an unrivalled reputation and experience, and are always willing to meet with clubs and offer professional advice.

My final advice, if I may offer it, is “if you are unable to afford to do the job properly then wait until you can.”

# Robert Jones *Diaries*

**Rob Jones is part of the Ohio State University's programme for young greenkeepers. In part III of his diary he talks about long hours, soccer, meeting influential people and enjoying a day at Muirfield Village during The Memorial Tournament.**

This article is going to be action packed with loads of information about the things that I have done. My time out here is going very quickly and I'm really enjoying it.

I have settled very well and am enjoying every minute of my experience. I reckon this is one of the best things I have ever done in my life, that is how much I am enjoying it. There is a window of opportunity for me to extend my stay for six more months when I have completed my twelve months and, at the moment, I am really considering it.

I did have a bad day a few weeks ago because my Mum had to go into hospital for an operation back home. I did get told I could go home if I wanted to, but I wanted to keep working hard because it was the right thing to do at the time. It's a hard lesson to learn but, thankfully, she is okay.

I now have two housemates. The first is Jim ??????? from Scunthorpe. The second is Will Law. He is doing a foundation degree at Myerscough College. I will live with Will and Jim while I am in Ohio, but will be moving to another course down south in late October.

I have now learned the layout of Double Eagle inside out and can get to any part of the complex I need to by the quickest route. I have also been taught how to cut the approaches to the greens which I enjoyed, because it was something different for me .... and I have learned most of the rules that are in place on the course!

My daily routine has changed slightly since my last article. I am now getting up at 5:45am to be on the job for 6:30am. Lunch is at midday and we finish up between 4pm and 5pm. That means my daily working hours have increased to nine. I am not finding that a problem and I think it helped that I was able to come out just as the season was getting going. This allowed me to familiarise myself with everything before the pressure was on! Bare that in mind if you are thinking about coming out. Come early to get settled better.

Will and Jim had to settle in as quickly as possible as we were already motoring along at breakneck speed.

I have just completed my first competition at Double Eagle. This was the US Open Qualifiers. The week before we were in early, every day of the week,

and worked till about 5.00pm. Then on the day of the competition we had to start at 4:45am.

When we got to the course Todd Voss, the Course Superintendent, had bought breakfast for the whole team before we went out to work. I thought this was a really nice touch and showed that he appreciated our extra efforts. We finished at around 9:30 in the morning and that was it for the day.

We had the rest of the day to ourselves so we watched the golf to see if there was anyone in the field who might challenge the tour professionals. It was fantastic to be involved in the course set up and it looked really stunning. Sadly, due to a heavy rains storm the night before, the greens were a bit slower than we would have liked. So much for all the long hours!

I have been out and about since the last article. I have been to watch the local football (soccer) team called the Columbus Crew ([www.thecrew.com](http://www.thecrew.com)). I try and watch every home game when I am not on duty. I really like my 'soccer'. The atmosphere is totally different to English games. It's more chilled out and much more of a family atmosphere. I have been to about six Crew games and seen them win twice. They remain unbeaten in their last four games. I have even bought a souvenir shirt!

I have also been to watch Arena American football. That is a totally different experience. If I was to compare it to anything in England I would say it is similar to Rugby sevens. The local arena football team is called the Columbus Destroyers. They got beaten in the game I watched, but could still make the arena football playoffs apparently. It is not the best sport I ever watched but it is all part of the 'American' way, which is what I am trying to experience to the full.

I sat in the owner's hospitality box. How come you may ask? Well, Mr. McConnell, who owns Double Eagle, also owns the Destroyers as well as the Columbus Blue Jackets Professional Hockey Team. It was a great experience



**Above: Robert and his souvenir shirt at a Columbus Crew soccer match and, right, enjoys the 'American' experience to the full!**

sitting up there and being treated like a VIP. I am glad I took the opportunity because it might not ever happen again.

I also got chance to go the Memorial Golf Tournament at Muirfield Village Golf Club. The club is about 20 minutes drive away from Ohio. I got the opportunity to have a look round the course and at their facilities, and then managed to grab a front row seat on the 18th. I saw all the big names play up, including Tiger Woods. I got my programme signed by a few players including the eventual winner, K J Choi.

Muirfield Village, as you may know, is the home course of Jack Nicklaus. It is an amazing golf course, built for the tournament, and manicured to the highest level. The OSU Intern Programme also places trainees there, but I think I prefer being at Double Eagle. The trainee at Muirfield is from Ireland. He wanted a tournament and he got it - big time! The hours are very long, but he knew that coming over. Keep that in mind, if you want a tournament course, the programme can get it for you, but you must be willing to accept the demands that go with the placement. It's not for everyone.

I have met some very influential people. One is Darryl Rogers. He is a leading architect and rated as one of the top forty most influential people in Columbus. He is also a mad 'soccer' fan and loves to watch English football. I never thought I would meet someone who is as mad on football as me. He's a good friend to have as he has the best seats at the Columbus Crew games and I get to sit with him occasionally!. He tries to get over to England at least once a

**“If you want a tournament course the programme can get it for you but you must be willing to accept the demands that go with the placement”**



**(l-r) Todd Voss, Course Superintendent at Double Eagle GC, Robert Jones and Mike O’Keefe, Programme Manager OSU**

year to watch a Premiership game and this year, having met me, wants to watch my team, Everton.

I have also met Pam Sherratt, who may be known to some of you. She is an ex pat who now works out here in the research department at OSU. She produces an excellent web page about Sportsturf, which is well worth a visit -

[www.buckeyeturf.osu.edu](http://www.buckeyeturf.osu.edu)

Pam is very well respected by all the top people at the University. She used to work at Myerscough College and it was good to get her views on how the colleges in England and America differ. It was also good to meet another Everton fan out here!

Bob Brame is a USGA agronomist ([www.usga.org](http://www.usga.org)) who has been very willing to pass on his knowledge to us. He took me, my two housemates and some of the qualified staff on a tour of the course. He talked about the fairways, the greens and the tees. I tried to take in every bit of information as I thought everything he said

was very interesting. We all got a copy of his report that he presented to Todd and the owner Mr McConnell. This will be a useful document for me, not only because I can relate it to the course I am working on but also in later years, when I get my own course, I will be able to refer back to it.

As I go through my internship I realise I am learning things that did not seem important in the past, such as making connections and meeting important people. These people can help me in my career because they are successful.

Mr. McConnell is a very famous and powerful man and, through him, I get to see lots of things that I might not otherwise see. Perhaps the biggest lesson he has taught me is that, even though he is successful, he still treats his employees well and looks after them. This is something I want to do when I get into a management position because people work better for you if they are appreciated.