

# In the Region – Korumburra Golf Club

**Superintendent:** Chris Verboon  
VGCSA member since 2008



*L to R - Chris Verboon & Tully Bernaldo with recently purchased new roller*

## **Turf career**

I started at Korumburra in 2003. I have worked my whole career at the Korumburra Golf Club and have been the Superintendent for the last 13 years.

In 2012, I started my company South Gippsland Turf Solutions, a small turf farm that has continued to grow. Our primary product is Santa Ana couch and this summer, we began selling Kenda Kikuyu, which has proved popular.

I also work part-time at the Meenyan Golf Club and provide consulting support to the Foster Golf Club as part of South Gippsland Turf Solutions.

## **Korumburra GC Staff structure**

Korumburra has a 3rd year apprentice and me working full-time. I have another apprentice employed by my company who works at Korumburra, Meenyan and the turf farm.

## **Course overview**

Korumburra Golf Club is set amongst the rolling hills of the lower Strezlecki Ranges. The course is located approximately four kilometres from the Korumburra town centre, along Warragul Road. With a beautiful array of trees, the undulating and lightly bunkered 18 hole course is a challenge to both members and visitors - along with a great variety of holes to keep interest all the way around the course.

Other unique aspects of the course are the views you get from certain points. From the Clubhouse, you can see Wilson's Promontory on a clear day. From the 15<sup>th</sup> tee box, the whole course unfolds before you like a French impressionist painting. The view up toward the green on the fifth hole fairway, with the pine trees setting a backdrop for the hole, is very reminiscent of Augusta National Golf Club.

The other very exciting development for the Club moving forward is that all the fairways have now been line planted with Santa Ana grass. In the next year or two, the course fairways will be in the same league as Leongatha South and Lang Lang - the other two quality golf courses in South Gippsland. This will provide a very appealing golf experience for golfers and it is the Club's expectation that the course will see a big increase in play and memberships. It is one thing to have great fairways but it is another to have views and exciting holes to add to the mix. This will position Korumburra Golf Club in a very viable financial position in the years ahead.

Other options are also being discussed for an indoor golf simulator, a driving range, disc golf and even caravan sites beside the reservoir for travelling golfers. So, in spite of the difficult year due to COVID-19, the Club has a strong future looking forward.

## **Turf management**

Our management practices have changed over the years. Machinery upgrades have made everyday jobs a lot quicker and easier. We usually have two staff on course and are lucky enough to have a dedicated group of volunteers for things like rough cutting and tree maintenance, freeing up the full-time staff for technical work. We tried to do too much in the past, which meant there was little time to do anything else but the regular course maintenance.

We started dusting greens four years ago which has slowly built up a good sand profile over the old push up greens. Dusting is our main maintenance procedure and provides good consistent greens throughout the year. We have



recently purchased a new Graden scarifier, which we expect to use twice a year along with verti draining.



We have a 30 year old Toro varitime irrigation system that is still going strong thanks to some much-needed maintenance over the last few years. The care has meant that we get much better coverage with little to no hand watering required. I used to hand water just about every day as an apprentice and hated every minute of it.

2020 was challenging for a lot of golf clubs. Korumburra has come through the pandemic well. We have increased memberships and had more golf being played than I've seen in recent years.

#### **Korumburra course improvements**

The dusting program has been the most significant improvement on the greens and how they are maintained. It has saved us from having to fully reconstruct some greens.

The last two years, we have been converting the course to Santa Ana couch. I made the machine a few years ago and, once we saw the results of a few fairways, the decision was made to do the rest. The machine is very basic and only plants one line at a time. We also borrowed a line planting machine from Moe Golf Club to finish four fairways. We have done it with little to no irrigation but have had great results. We should

see all fairways covered by the end of next summer.



Fifty to sixty pine trees were also removed in 2018 to open up the golf course and make it a lot easier to manage.





*Views from the 18<sup>th</sup> green*

We have spent a lot of time on extending surrounds and treating them like greens, and will continue to push them out going forward. This has had pleasing comments from members which is always good! We have constructed a new 7<sup>th</sup> green and rebuilt most tees, converting them to couch.

The course is positioned around the Korumburra reservoir, which was recently decommissioned. It is now only used by the golf club. Previously, the Club had to manage water restrictions, however, we now have access to 60 megalitres of water. A new 165,000 litre holding tank was installed last year to get clean water up to the pumps as the reservoir level dropped when it was decommissioned. The land is being cleared around the reservoir to open up views of the water and ease maintenance in the future.

#### **One piece of machinery you could not live without**

Good spray equipment. Although ours is an old Cushman, it has been the best purchase since my time at the Club. It has stopped us from hand spraying greens through the fish mouth nozzles. It also pulls the dusting machine.

#### **What are the pros and cons of being a Superintendent at your course?**

The main thing we struggle with is not having specialised machinery for specific jobs. Now that we are working with Meeniyan and Foster Golf Clubs, we can split the costs and buy the machines you only use a few times a year. For example, we recently purchased the Graden scarifier between Clubs.

The volunteers who are reliable and work hard week in, week out, keep this Club going so strong. We had 16 volunteers laying turf last week and got over 500m<sup>2</sup> laid. Korumburra's rough is all cut by volunteers.

I don't have many cons. I love the relaxed vibe working on the country courses. Budgets are a little tighter but it forces you to think outside the box.

#### **Describe your management style**

I grew up on a dairy farm, so my management style is very hands on. Very little work is outsourced, which means most jobs like machinery maintenance, irrigation and construction are all done by the two staff and volunteers. I wouldn't have it any other way. I enjoy this job because of the multiple things you get to do each day. It is continually changing.

Things have changed over the years. With things getting busier, jobs that I used to do like rough cutting are now allocated to volunteers, freeing up time to develop other projects. Updating machinery over the last five years has also meant we can get things done quicker and easier.

#### **If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be, and why?**

I would like to see changes in course management implemented quickly. I think country golf courses and sporting clubs more broadly have so many opportunities for cooperation, reducing costs and increasing the quality of playing surfaces.

#### **Most pleasing/rewarding moment during your time as a Superintendent**

The most pleasing thing is to see maintenance practices that I've started years before - like dusting greens - make such a significant improvement in playing surfaces. Seeing our couch fairways covered next summer, and reflecting on the improved playing conditions for members, will be very satisfying.

I have also enjoyed building my business in the turf industry. Developing a work environment which allows me to improve three courses and people's gardens has been very rewarding. I am

looking forward to the next challenge and growing my staff.

### **Favourite spot on your course**

A couple of my favourite spots are the 5<sup>th</sup> green, with the backdrop of the pine trees, and the views from the 18<sup>th</sup> of the rolling Gippsland hills.



*5<sup>th</sup> green*

### **Hobbies & interests**

- Spending time with my wife and three kids
- I play football for Leongatha parrots
- I love getting out and playing golf when I can
- Gardening at home is an excellent way to get my mind off work
- Expanding my business is also something I am very passionate about