

SUMMER COURSE REPORT 2011

GREENS

Here we are again, fast approaching the end of a summer season. Time does fly. You would think that, after 37 years in green keeping, nothing would surprise me and that I would have experienced all the seasons possible. But yet again this year has proven me wrong. Although to this point in time it's not been the worst I have ever experienced, it none the less has shown how the weather can fill a greenkeeper's life with so many challenges. Having just come out of one of the worst winters for a number of years, I was looking forward to getting back to a nice normal growing season. However, Mother Nature decided that spring should be delayed somewhat, with a very slow start and by keeping things very dry, and for a lot of the time cold. This inevitably led to the spring growth being held back a number of weeks. We would have normally experienced a flush of spring growth from May into June, but this never materialized until late June and only lasted a couple of weeks before we hit another dry but slightly warmer spell. This inevitably prohibited the establishment of new grass.

Although this caused some concern for the season ahead, the weather did finally break and gave us some helpful warm rain and temperatures that helped things along. Recovery, however, was still well behind what would have been expected for this time of the year. We did what we could with the application of fertilisers and wetting agents etc to help speed recovery/establishment of all surfaces, but in particular of the greens. This was crucial given the scarring caused by disease over the winter. It got to the stage that we had to plug/patch some scars to speed this recovery up. This was further aided with the aeration, over seeding and top dressing of the greens. On the whole the greens recovered fairly well and have been very good since. They have been cut at 4mm for a number of months now and are showing good sustainability. It is hoped to continue with a 4mm height of cut for as long as possible for the rest of the season and I hope it will be close to the end of September when we will need to start easing the height of cut in preparation for the autumn and winter. The greens have had 2 applications of topdressing so far this season, and if weather and time allows, I would like to get one more on before the autumn arrives. This will also include a further over seeding and extensive aeration.

The control of the rye grass has been fairly good, with only specific problematic areas being addressed this season. Most of the rough grainy rye was dealt with last season and has shown no sign of return, but this will be monitored closely to ensure control is maintained.

As we are fast approaching Autumn, the greens will require further aeration. This will, as always, involve the deep spiking of the greens with the tera-spike machine to a depth on 10" and followed up straight behind with the aircore machine with needle tines to a depth of 4" to compensate and level the surface. Dependant on the condition of the surface and weather conditions at the time, this may be followed up with a winter feed, but as always this must only be done if really necessary and if there is no risk of disease.

TEES & SURROUNDS

The tees and surrounds have probably suffered more than I would have liked this season. This is due to the slow spring and conditions related and has been further prohibited by not having the ability to irrigate at optimal times due to limited irrigation on these areas. I will hope to treat a number of weak tees and aprons by hollow coring, over seeding and dressing this autumn. All the tee and aprons will also be terra spiked to at least six inches within the autumn maintenance programme. The 6th tee areas are planned to be renovated and redesigned more in keeping with the desired playing direction of the hole. Further details of this plan are available independently of this report and have been displayed in the clubhouse.

I have extended the cut of aprons to accommodate for winter play (winter greens). As always the winter greens will only be used to accommodate play during frosty conditions and/ or when the main greens are unstable due to poor weather conditions and /or are being worked on.

As with the greens, I have extended the use of Rescue (the rye grass control programme) on to some of these areas. This has been carried out on a limited scale with the perimeter areas around all the greens being done, all of the 3rd apron and on selected areas on other aprons to evaluate the effect of the programme before possibly using on a larger scale. This will also determine the amount of follow up treatment required in re-establishing new grass to fill in any areas thinned out by this programme. A small number of tee areas have also had Rescue applied to determine the same. The early signs are promising and this will be further reported on at a later date. The extent of implementing this programme will be gauged by the extent of works required in treatments, the time required for recovery of new grasses and any costs in labour, time and material costs in achieving this.

FAIRWAYS

All things considered, the fairways have been very good this season and weed infestation has been low. I have, however, been spraying problem areas with weed killer. A number of weak/bare areas will require treatment by hollow coring and over seeding to help recovery i.e. areas close to bunker edges and other areas where concentrated wear/trafficking occurs. Divots continue to be a problem and may need addressing before the onslaught of winter.

It is planned to terra spike all the fairways. This will start in November and will continue over a period of weeks until complete, but this will be dependent on weather and as and when both staff and necessary equipment may be required elsewhere. I hope to spike the fairways to a depth of +/- 10 inches. This treatment has contributed greatly over the years to keeping our fairways in good condition.

ROUGHS

The rough has, as a whole, been less of a problem this season, although I am sure many of you will disagree. I put this down to the slow dry spring, which prevented this area from having its spring flush and causing it to establish an overwhelming sward that can sometimes take a number of weeks to get

on top of. However, the slower growth did allow us to get a good number of cuts made, which gave us a good base to work from before the serious growth finally got under way, although this was knocked back by the dryer spell soon after the serious growth got under way.

Some areas have benefited more than others this season with the semi-rough looking its best for some time. Another benefit gained was only having to cut semi-rough once a week as a whole, except for a handful of occasions, although any time saved was soon used elsewhere on the course on other problems caused by the varied weather conditions.

BUNKERS

This is always an area of contention and often a question raised is: do we put enough time into this area of course maintenance? And I have to answer that yes, all that time and man power will allow, and this has always been the case. We have always raked the bunkers fully with the motor rake at least twice a week, usually a Tuesday and Friday, and hand raked many of the problem bunkers in between times.

However, this year for a number of weeks we have tried motor raking them on a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. This has not always been successful, mainly due to heavy rainfall and or problems with manpower being available. This task is one of the most demanding tasks on any golf course maintenance programme in terms of manpower, even when using a motor rake and certainly if hand raked. This inevitably is affected by the number and areas of bunkers involved. When using the motor rake, our bunkers require at least 5 hours with one man or, by hand, three staff require approximately 3.5 hours, i.e. a total of 10.5 hours. This then pulls two staff away from other areas on the course, or equal to one man cutting all the greens and one man cutting the aprons. As you will see, this does pose the question of how and where I deploy staff in the most effective manner, not to mention a cost effective way. In my experience, the only satisfactory way for bunker maintenance to be carried out effectively, would be to have a dedicated member of staff with sole responsibility for bunker maintenance. Unfortunately, within the present staffing level, this would prove almost impossible and would lead to other areas being denied attention, particularly in the summer season. The machine "sand-pro bunker rake", although not always a popular method, is the most practical efficient and cost effective way of carrying out this task.

Another area often debated is sand depth. There are many opinions on what level and or depths sand in bunkers should be. Some people like a good depth of sand that your ball sits into so that the ball needs to be punched out and others only want a shallow/firm depth that the ball can be flicked off. This option often is favored by the lower handicap and pro golfer, for example. We have used some 60 tons of sand to top up the bunkers this season and without a question could use as much again and still not fill all the bunkers to satisfaction. However, the costs of sands are proving inhibitive in achieving an ideal balance. In this financial climate I feel that all golf clubs will have to look hard at their bunker requirements and will need to look seriously at what they can afford in this area of the course design. This I feel will inevitably lead to the removal/reduction of bunkers on some golf courses. Good, I hear some of you say. That's not a problem as they are not always liked, but this doesn't always mean a total removal of a hazard. For example, it could be that you could turn a sand bunker into a grass one, or could implement

some other form of hazard, be it in the form of a mound or the planting of more trees. All options should be considered, but I do feel that a review of our 62 bunkers is required to ascertain if they are really required as a sand bunker. Or if not, what are our alternatives and what could be used in place of them.

TREES

This area was addressed for the large part during our last winter programme, mainly due to the excessive weather, so should need little attention this coming winter. Although, there are still a number of areas on the course that would benefit from clearing or thinning works, I feel that we have more pressing issues.

However, the areas cleared last winter are regenerating nicely, as was expected, and in some instances you would hardly know we had been busy within them. The hawthorns that had major cutting back mainly on the 11th and behind the 3rd green have all shown signs of new shoots and should develop nicely over the next couple of years into better specimens. If funding allows, I would also like to see some new trees planted throughout the course and hold back on further clearance work this winter, but there are many areas for consideration and I will leave this to debate within the greens committee in the first instance.

WINTER PROGRAMME

The first half of the winter programme plan has more than been filled with the need to complete the installation of the drainage on both the 8th and 5th greens. Recovery of the partial drainage work done last winter on both these greens has been very good. Although, the drainage works on said greens are not a full reconstruction of the greens, this work is the minimum required to ensure that both the greens should be better placed to hold their own during wetter conditions.

Other work planned is the renovation and redesign of the sixth tee areas. This will involve the splitting of existing tee into three clearly indicated tee areas to accommodate red, yellow and white positions, with the yellow and white tees gaining a few yards length. It will also involve the narrowing of the tees by some 4 meters to encourage the use of the far side of the tees towards the trees. This is felt necessary to reduce wayward shots over the fence towards the public footpath and adjoining property the other side. The footpath will be redesigned and relocated to accommodate the new shape of the teeing areas, with the winter tee mat being installed between the ladies tee and the gents yellow tee area. There will be a few lower branches removed from the adjacent pine trees, and a number of shrubs will be removed directly behind the white tee area to allow for length to be added.

While in the area of the 5th green /6th tee, and if weather and time allows, we hope to further remove a number of the ridges that affect the front of the fifth green apron area. We have already removed two of these ridges last winter with good results. The aim is to improve the apron area so as to aid the run in of shots more fairly, as well as to make it easier to maintain and cut. Improving this area will also help to accommodate the positioning of a winter green when required, an area that has always proved difficult in achieving a fair winter green.

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