

In·My·Opinion

Derek Edwards

Derek Edwards is managing director of
Rolawn (Turf Growers)

WE ARE fortunate to be part of an industry that is expanding during a period when many of our basic industries are in steep decline. I suppose the best example of this came with the move from Motspur Park to Windsor of the Institute Of Groundsmanship international exhibition in 1981.

Presumably, the IOG was increasingly under pressure during the '70s to find more exhibition space and was able to predict the massive increase in exhibitors and visitors to the show.

There is a greater awareness that a well organised, professional sports turf and leisure industry does exist in this country. Indeed, the industry is probably the best in the world.

As far as our greenkeepers and groundsmen are concerned, they must benefit from this progress. Advanced maintenance equipment and materials, access to advice in publications, exhibitions and seminars, as well as the number of advisory services now being offered, all combine to further improve sports and leisure areas.

In my opinion, the greatest advances have been in education. Not only have horticultural colleges been running day-release and full-time greenkeeping courses for some time, but we also have an increasing number of seminars and training programmes organised by various trade associations.

Most notable perhaps is the educational programme that started just a year ago and which attracted a tremendous attendance to *Golf Course '84* at Cambridge and not just from the trade which, hitherto, dominated the attendance at many such events.

In my particular business, growing specialised mature turf, a number of advances have been made that, hopefully, will benefit everyone. We are now producing a 20/80 bent/fescue turf on a sterilised, sandy medium, which is ideally suitable for green renovation or, indeed, for use in the construction of new greens—either all



sand or conventionally built.

I am mindful of those who are against turving, particularly for fine turf areas such as golf and bowling greens, and everything is being done to grow turf in its most acceptable form for the non-converted. Ideally, turf for golf green construction needs to be mature, evenly cut, grown on a stone free sandy/loam soil, free from all broadleaf weed and rogue grasses, dense in sward, mown down to approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ in and, most importantly, should be laid within 24 hours of harvesting.

Once established, preferably over the winter months, the sward can be gradually reduced in height, scarified and top-dressed to produce a good playing surface, within approximately nine months, assuming that the turf is laid during early to mid-autumn. It is our experience that a great deal of time and effort can be saved in creating a new green with the use of correct mature turf.

Due to the greater awareness of

grass seed cultivars, we now make a point of stating the varieties employed in our mixture. I am somewhat surprised that it has taken the industry such a long time to recognise the differences and be more discerning about its choice of cultivars. There can be vast differences in characteristics in any single specie. Take smooth stalked meadowgrass (*Poa Pratensis*) for example. With something like 25 cultivars being produced, there are only about a quarter of them that, in my opinion, are any good for use on sports turf areas and only a few that are fine textured and attractive all the year round.

When selecting cultivars for our R1 bent/fescue turf, we look for speed of maturity, fineness of leaf, compactness of mature sward, disease resistance and all-year-round colour and appearance. We do not simply take the plant breeder's opinion, but look at the STRI ratings (a turf grass booklet is produced annually) to make sure that the Bingley trials confirm our assessments. We are also making full use of some of the exceptionally good varieties being produced in Holland.

I do feel, however, that many of the problems experienced in turf management have never been fully resolved. The weed grass *Poa annua* is still around in abundance. Unless you are fortunate to live in one of the few *poa* free environments in this country, I feel the only successful way to create a weed free sward is to sow completely pure seed into a sterilised medium.

Of course, there is nothing new about this theory. In 1260, a Dominican monk used to sterilise his soils with boiling water prior to planting. Keeping *Poa annua* out of your sward is the main difficulty and, with all our advisory services, chemicals, machinery, etc, we still seem unable to master it.

I believe it was Dr Peter Hayes of the STRI who, writing in *Greenkeeper* last August, stated that many of the theories expounded about turf culture

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the next year. Full copies of the minutes are available to members.

The turnout in April at Heswall Golf Club, Merseyside was much better—more than 80. This number was boosted by another 70 guests of SISIS, all of whom helped get our first spring tournament off to a fine start. As members may appreciate, a lot of hard work goes into organising such events and, therefore, thanks are due to Terry Adamson and Bill Lawson. Bill had a particularly demanding task on the day, preparing the course and handling all the normal duties of a chairman.

The committee wishes to thank SISIS and Maelors for their tournament sponsorship and particularly Walter Briggs of SISIS for his hard work on the branch's behalf throughout the year.

The prize table, as usual, was of an excellent standard, which again goes to show how much support we receive from our trade members.

First prize winners were: Paul Pearse—assistants' trophy presented by G.Cox, professional at Rhuddlan GC; Terry Adamson—shield donated by Walter Briggs, and Francis Cripps of Abergele GC, who won a shield donated by Maelors. The many more prize winners are too numerous to mention.

Thanks go, as always, to our hosts and their staff who made a valuable contribution to the smooth running of things, making the event such a success.

Finally, may I inform members that there is absolutely no truth in the rumour that Bill (Wm.) Lawson only donates William Lawson's Scotch Whisky as a prize because he receives a generous discount. In fact, he gets it for nothing!

Andrew Campbell.

Kent

The spring tournament that was to be held in May was cancelled, but at North Foreland on June 20 we will play for the shield usually contested in April/May.

The golf will be followed by a lecture on first aid for minor injuries and correct procedures in the event of something more serious. If you can't make the golf, please try to attend the lecture at 7.30pm.

The Kent branch would like to welcome Steve Richardson and Gordon Farrington. Steve has taken charge at Cob Tree Manor Golf Club, constructed by Golf Landscapes for Maidstone Council and due to open in late summer. Gordon replaces Mike Smith as head greenkeeper at Littlestone. Good luck also to my first assistant Steve Suttle who has taken over as headman at Sene Valley GC near Folkestone.

Following the undoubted success of the EIGGA/STRI seminar at Broome Park in March, we are looking to arrange something along the same lines for the autumn. Members might like to know of a one-day seminar arranged by the Sussex branch and to be held at Plumpton College where the speakers will be Martyn Jones and George Shiels.

A lecture by Dr Bryn Green of Wye College is being arranged at Chestfield GC in September.

Two other forthcoming events with dates to be finalised will be a trip to Lely Iseki at Cambridge arranged by Hugh Page (Sussex) and a machinery class held by Paice & Son in conjunction with Ransomes.

The autumn golf meeting will be at Canterbury GC on October 4.

Peter Wisbey.

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in the 1930s are still relevant today. I am sure he is right. Are our sports and grass areas really that much better than they were 50 years ago? I suppose that without control of the main elements, and let us hope that day never comes, we will only ever be able to control the fine tuning.

Whether it be a new grass variety, chemical or piece of machinery, I find that whatever new techniques are adopted—and we have a full-time technical manager constantly experimenting with new systems—we are still at the mercy of the basic elements.

I can remember producing some fine mature turf by our 'standard' production method in just over seven months. Normally, the process takes around 18 months and sometimes turf will not harvest after two years. Yet, that year, with that particular turf, the elements were obviously on our side, illustrating the degree of influence weather can play on the speed of establishment.

With our turf production nurseries now totalling about 1,000 acres throughout the UK and having sold well over that quantity since our business started (much of which has gone for golf course use), I can confidently say that, in our small sector of the industry, all is well and growing.

I am convinced that there is a tremendous future for us all in the business of growing and maintaining grass, not only here but in Europe generally where the industry is still in its infancy.

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