Solving the height of confusion

I feel I must respond to the Autumn Turf Maintenance programme employed at Ham Manor Golf Club (October), and would make three points:

1) Height of cut. Mr George Barr comments that he "raises the height of cut from 1/8" to 3/16" on his greens gradually over a period of three weeks". I presume from this that he regularly cuts at 1/8" during the summer. This would seem to contradict Mr Jim Arthur's article on Page 9, where the regular cutting of greens at 1/8" is thought harmful to turf. It is also contrary to STRI opinion and that of many experienced greenkeepers, who have seen the results of such treatment. Does Mr Barr advocate regular (more than a few days) cutting at 1/8", and if so, does he not agree that there could be serious long-term problems?

2) Cutting height of adjustment. Might it not be time to change to the metric scale, specifically millimetres? After all, we deal with hectares, kilos and litres as a matter of course and I believe much confusion could be eliminated by adopting a millimetre scale dealing in whole numbers and not fractions. The metric scale appears to be eminently more practical and understandable and therefore less prone to error.

Also, is it not time for a more accurate method of measuring height of cut, especially below 6mm (1/4")? Even a small error can adversely affect the accuracy on the putting surface, exacerbated by the fact that cylinder mowers (and units) are set up in the sheds, where both front and back rollers and the height of cut setter are all rigid and unyielding, whereas the surface they relate to is anything but!

3) Hollow tining. Mr Barr states that he not only hollow tines in eight hours, but 'clums' as well. This claim must be totally unrealistic unless his greens are only 100m and all close to his sheds. He states that only one Ryan GA30 is used at 50mm (2") centres. My Club owns an Iseki Coremaster which we attach to a John Deere 885 compact tractor, both being less than three years old and in good working order. The speed needed to core at 50mm centres is so slow that our digital speedometer is incapable of consistently giving a read-out. The time taken to 50mm core our greens (average 500m²) at 50mm centres is approx. 50-60 minutes per green. If one adds non-core time, such as essential maintenance on corer and tractor, breaks for the operator, travel to and from each green, plus stops for golfing play (to eliminate noise, if nothing else), the job takes two and a half days - this just for coring! Remember also that the job is done in October, when daylight hours are short and subsequently restricting any overtime that could be worked to finish the job. Mr Barr's statement could give the wrong impression to inexperienced greenkeepers, Club members and green committees.

If agreement on basic course maintenance cannot be reached, how can we achieve consistently high standards nationwide?

PAUL BERTINSHAW
Head Greenkeeper, City Golf Course Ltd. Cambridge

We asked George Barr for further comments, which are printed below:

After reading the October issue there are several points that require further discussion. Jim Arthur's article, "The Quick and the Dead", was full of useful and sensible ideas concerning the "headless chicken' quest for speed. Common sense tells us that higher cuts are healthier cuts, but should they be set at 1/8"? Does Mr Barr wish to compare the "headless chicken's" quest for speed with the Thetford designation - a thinning sward and increased weed and poa invasion. This is especially so when accompanied by the increased wear and traffic of 1,000 playing members, as at my Club. Add this to the dry summers and water shortages of recent years and we have a situation where our priorities have to be those of maintaining 100% grass cover. I have long advocated the practice of a thinning sward which leads to a healthier sward and increased weed and poa invasion.

We asked George Barr for further comments, which are printed below:

Both Mr Bertinshaw and Mr Jones seek uniformity of advice, or perhaps more accurately, advice with which they can personally agree. At the same time, surely they must concede that the practice of greenkeeping is by no means an exact science. It is the very fact that different management practices are followed - at different locations on different lawns and in different circumstances - that makes greenkeeping such a fascinating and infmite subject. In replying to the specific comments, it is my considered opinion that height of cut should be the decision of the head greenkeeper alone - the one who is in control of the whole course - and not written in stone.

Granted there are general rules to observe, but there will always be those who break new barriers, repeatedly obtain successful results and feel no pain. Such actions are based on personal experience and are called free choice. The greenkeeper is dealing with a multi-faceted living area and should alone be the arbiter, based on the many factors (soil, grass species, growth patterns, root qualities etc) he is capable of evaluating. I can state categorically that the management programme outlined works remarkably and consistently well at Ham Manor.
At work the choice is perhaps one of greater individuality, though welcome. May I wish the winner and runners-up the very best.

Mark Ellis Woburn Golf and Country Club, Bedfordshire

With BIGGA offering an ever increasing variety of official uniform, do you think it would be a good idea to provide official BIGGA overalls? A small range would do much to improve the professional image we try so hard to create.

PETER LACEY Penrard Golf Club, South Wales

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Mark Ellis Woburn Golf and Country Club, Bedfordshire

I have now read and re-read Mr Jim Arthur's article entitled 'The Quick and The Dead', which appeared in your November issue. On behalf of our Tournament Committee and senior colleagues I write to advise you that the Tour are appalled at his ill-informed references towards our efforts to assist greenkeepers involved with Tour events. Indeed, we believe that elements of Mr Arthur's comments are potentially damaging to the Tour and to your magazine to reproduce this reply.

I question Mr Arthur's current knowledge of principles or methods that are now employed on the PGA European Tour, as the consultancy relationship the Tour had with him ended several years ago. It should be pointed out that the Tour look to put green in a positive light, 1) having true as possible, free from bumps and 'snaking', 2) have a consistent resilience for bounce and grip, i.e. a poorly struck shot should not hold the putt green; 3) having as fast a speed of putting surface as possible taking account of slopes and grass species and; 4) having consistency on all 18 greens, practice putting green and chipping greens.

I will, however, reiterate that the sound principle of aeration and sensible levels of water and fertilisation for putting greens preached by Mr Arthur still hold true today. Our approach in recent years has been one of gentle persuasion to build up a good working relationship with host greenkeepers. In the last three years we have organised two one-week seminars to enable all greenkeepers and managers of the Tour venues to meet and exchange ideas.

We feel these exchanges can only be good for the game, believing that no one person can honestly claim to have total knowledge.

In our experience of running professional golf tournaments, which even Mr Arthur might concede is considerable, we have found that the wish of everyone concerned at a Tour venue is to achieve perfection in terms of presentation for their tournament week, and if we are asked to provide practical help, we will continue to do so.

It is quite wrong to suggest that the Tour have advocated prolonging 'shaving' of greens to achieve speed alone. Indeed, all the methods mentioned by Mr Arthur - including rolling - have been used to good effect and certainly in taking the long term health of the Tour golf courses into consideration. Mr Arthur seems to suggest that the Tour have no care or consideration for the venue when the final putt of the tournament is held. I regard this as so contemptuous that it does not even require further comment.

It seems that the inclusion of Tour representatives on the R&A's Joint Golf Course Committee doesn't meet with Mr Arthur's approval.

Our wish, and we believe it is also that of the R&A, is that with all parties 'pooling' ideas constructive ideas may be forthcoming.

Please suggest to Mr Arthur that many if not all readers of your magazine would dearly love to read constructive ideas from a man who was, for so long, the agronomist. I am sure that he can pass on a great deal of knowledge, rather than embarking on yet another attempt to discredit other organisations or individuals.

J N PARAMOR Director of Tour Operations, PGA European Tour

Thank you for your response. It is always worrying when those with little practical or technical expertise get involved in very important matters such as how to comply with the Control of Pesticides Regulations, and in particular with the Code of Practice. In order to fully comply with the Regulations, the operator of a pesticide applicator must show that he/she is using a 'safe system' to accurately apply the pesticide to the target, and only the target. Whereas marker dyes will show the operator where he has been, correctly aligned marker dyes quite clearly show him where he is going! Thus it can be seen there is a role for both marker dyes and marker dyes and sometimes they may well be used in combination to good effect. Ground conditions vary so much that having options is very wise, and all who are involved in this area, be it selling, advising or using, must be responsible and professional in their approach to protecting the environment.

RICHARD FRY Basildon, Essex

Richard Fry, the author of the article to which Jon Allbutt referred, is a Marketing Consultant, perhaps best known to greenkeepers as the head of Rhone Poulenc's (formerly May & Baker Ltd) Environmental Products Division in the early 1980s and the organiser of the National Turf Care Workshop seminars.

Back home again after yet another stay in my quest for the elusive work permit, my first move is to catch up on all that's been happening in the wrong way may greenkeeping.

Congratulations! Greenkeepers continue to grow in stature and quality, and indeed such a 'uniform' greatly improves one's professional image. At work the choice is perhaps one of greater individuality, though welcome. May I wish the winner and runners-up the very best.

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J N PARAMOR Director of Tour Operations, PGA European Tour

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Opinions expressed in these columns are not necessarily shared by the editor or BIGGA and the Association accepts no responsibility for them.

Write to the editor, Greenkeeper International, 13 Firle Close, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 2HL. Letters should be signed. We reserve the right to edit for brevity, clarity and good taste.