May I express my appreciation to both ICI and BiGGa offi-
cials for the hospitality shown to me during the recent ICI Pre-
mer Greenkeeper award held at Aldwark Manor.
I felt this to be a real learning experience and would urge all
greenkeepers to support these educational competitions.
Finally, may I again congratulate David Whitaker on his suc-
cess and wish all finalists good luck in the future.

TIM MCECRADIE Oundle, Peterborough

I feel I must enter the fray regarding the controversy arising
from the cutting heights declared by George Barr at Ham
Manor (October Greenkeeper International), and the subse-
quent letters which appeared in December.
First, I must come clean and admit to being a long-time Jim
Arthur fan, though not always totally agreeing with everything
he says, as will be seen from the following.

Reading your article, I considered it the most sensible and
honest I had ever read since first becoming interested in this
profession. I control eight golf courses and seven bowling
greens and every one is managed in a very similar way to that
outlined by George Barr, including height of cut. The only real
difference is that my top dressing is an 80/20 mix of
medium/course sand and sterilised soil, though I have used
a straight sand in the past on numerous courses in Ireland,
(where good soil is at a premium) with great success. My find-
ings suggest that a medium/course sand, rather than a
medium/fine, is infinitely superior as a green top dressing,
with peat a definite no-no.

Returning to the point re Barr's seasonal cutting at 1/8",
Messrs Berrinshaw and Jones suggest that this is not good
greenkeeping practice, as does the STRI and, apparently, Jim
Arthur. Indeed, judging by the number of courses I play with
slow greens, there are a large number of other greenkeepers
who share this view.

Let me state a few facts on cutting height. First: If a basic
maintenance programme is unsound, with soft, spongy sur-
faces produced as a result, then bench setting becomes irrele-
vant, as the mower will obviously be 'sitting down' into a
thatch layer when cutting. This 'sitting down' produces scalp-
ing when cutting heights are dropped, the results of which
could be seen to dramatic effect last year on television.

Second: I have been cutting greens to 1/8" for 12 years now,
only raising to 3/16" in winter, and have never experienced
any problems because the surfaces remain firm thanks to a
solid maintenance programme. During 1990 my bowling
greens at Northfield hosted the Scottish Ladies, Scottish Mens
and Ladies Home Internationals over four weeks in
July/August. Over that time, plus a gradual drop over the pre-
ceding weeks, they were cut at 3/32" twice a day with Pal-
adins and still retained the same high percentage of fine
grasses found at the start of the season. Our bowling greens
have been overseeded for the past 3 years in Autumn with a
50/50 mix of browntop and Emerald creeping bent – yes,
creeping bent – and this works very well because they are not
played on in the winter.

Third: In his book Practical Lawn Care, published in 1939, R
B Dawson of the STRI reveals the results of an experiment in
cutting heights carried out at St Ives, summarised as follows:
Two areas were cut at 1/8" and 3/8" respectively. First result:
the long cut produced only 75% – 97% of grass clippings
depending on seasonal variations. Conclusion – the shorter cut
encourages more vigorous growth. Second result: After two
full seasons the plot cut at 3/8" contained (having been sown
with highland bent) 17.6% Poa annua and 6.3% weeds, with
the plot cut at 1/8" containing 0.5% Poa annua and 2.1%
weeds. Moss was slightly more common on the shorter cut.
Other results showed that counts of shoots and tillers on the
1/8" cut were outnumbering those on the longer cut by nearly
2:1, thereby giving a much denser sward. One other interest-
ing fact revealed that worm activity was three times greater on
the longer cut.

This, remember, was back in 1939. I do not subscribe to the
theory that because of heavier play nowadays things have
changed. Certainly, there is a greater need for vastly improved
aeration, but not for cutting heights.

One other point concerns winter cutting. Every old publica-

tion I have ever read on greening keeping states categorically that
grass should be cut regularly in winter. My experience cer-
tainly confirms that not cutting, or cutting too high or too
infrequently, causes course growth and wet, soft patches prone
to disease and damage.

Finally, I would take issue with Mr Berrinshaw over his com-
ments on cutting height adjustment. Surely he can work with
millimetres if he wishes, just as I and many others work in six-
teenth of an inch, as we wish. If he cannot set a mower accu-
trately using a ruler and straight edge then he apparently still
has a bit to learn.

DUNCAN GRAY

Golf Course and Bowling Green Superintendent,
Kyle and Carrick District Council, Ayrshire

In order to avoid possible misinterpretation and confusion, I
would like to observe that the otherwise excellent, informative
(and condemnatory!) article by Tim Colclough on sand greens
(January Greenkeeper International) is fatally marred by his
failure to specifically differentiate between sand-only green
constructions and those with 'sand based root zones'. Virtually
all greens are now built with sand-based root zones, ie.
sand/sil/peat; sand/fen soil; or even sandy links greens with
the links sand ameliorated by natural build up of humus, as
Timmer correctly observes.
The recommendations and observations in his article, based
on STRI research and personal observation, refer to sand-only
construction. Even if followed, they cannot prevent severe
and serious attacks of Ophiobolus (Take-all Path) and eventu-
ally Poa annua dominance.

I must ask that all concerned realise that greens with root
zones (however sandy and free draining) which incorporate
a humus rich additive to act as a buffer or nutrient-retaining el-
ement should never be fed with phosphate or lime and only
exceptionally with potash using only limited amounts of basi-
cally slow release nitrogen, or Poa annua invasion will be as
rapid as it is extensive.

However, if omission of the qualification about sand only, as
opposed to sandy humus-enriched root zones, was the result of
an oversight, his qualification to the unarguable statement that
"there is no place for pure sand greens in this country" except
where there is "a complete lack of suitable local materials and
a tight construction budget" is illogical and misleading.
When money is short, why install a system which demands very
intensive and expensive management to even postpone the
inevitable disastrous end result? Furthermore, there are
nationally available ideal sources (no monopoly of any one
firm, though some are better than others) of suitably organic-
rich light soils with very low clay and silt fractions for admix-
ture with quality controlled sand at prices which add, at most,
1% to construction costs.

It is to be noted that the use of 'local soil', which I have long
condemned as being expensive to extract and screen, unreli-
able, often contaminated and very rarely physically suitable,
not to mention the restoration costs involved on site, is now
"not advised by the USGA Green Section". Hopefully, we shall
soon have an agreed specification for British and European
green construction – if it can be agreed before the Germans
(and their 'Greens') get theirs in first on the EC table – for if
that happens the resultant problems and embargoes will be
horrrendous.

When German architects state that they want their courses
to look like Disneyland (I quote verbatim) where will our
Royal and Ancient sport still be played?

JIM ARTHUR
Budleigh Salterton, Devon
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