McDivot 1

As a member in good standing of BIGGA, I take exception to the article in the January issue of Greenkeeper International entitled “Sand Green Destruction” by “Sandy McDivot.”

I have always enjoyed the author’s articles in the past. He has an admirable flair for the written word. However, his knee-jerk, ad hominem observations on the state of our industry and outspoken opinions (albeit under a pseudonym) are a much desired breath of fresh air in the otherwise stifled atmosphere of golf politics.

In his past articles, Sandy McDivot always had a firm grasp of his subject matter, and seemed to me to be someone speaking from an informed position. In the case of “Sand Green Destruction” however I can forthrightly state that any demonstrable knowledge of sand green maintenance is sadly lacking. I base this on my own 13 years of building and managing sand based greens.

To begin, McDivot complains of greens that puddle up and a “huge splat of a pitch mark”. The only way that happens on a USGA green is if you are throwing out way too much water. Likewise the Poa annua infestation, excessive spiking, black layer and Fusarium that McDivot describes in the article are all symptoms of chronic over watering. Any turf school graduate could point that out.

Try field capacity, Sandy, and not saturation.

McDivot would do well to read the USGA literature on the desired level of irrigation.

Then the author says he was forced to apply “ultralow quantities of fertiliser”, and even worse - he had to do it in the autumn! Well, when exactly do you fertilise bentgrass? High summer? And just what is an “obscene” amount? A half an ounce a thousand? Two tons an acre? Further, what fertiliser is he applying? Ammonium nitrate? Cow manure? We are left to wonder.

Regarding fertility levels, one constructive suggestion I could make to anyone with sand greens is to “spoon feed”, applying small amounts, (ie 0.5 oz N/M, depending on sold analysis) at frequent intervals, every week. This will avoid nitrogen-induced disease incidence and the surge of green growth McDivot describes.

I have never seen a case of the described thatch build up when the correct management procedures of aeration, verticutting and top dressing were applied. This latter practice isn’t mentioned at all in the article. Here’s a clue, Sandy: Regular, light top dressing has been proven to reduce thatch, improve disease resistance, improve ball holding capability, reduce grain and smooth those old spike and ball marks. Try it!

If it’s take All Patch that you’re worried about. I’ve obtained 100% control with alternating applications of Bayleton (2.5 kg/ha) and Rubigan (3.0 ha) supplemented with ammonium sulphate at 30.0 kg/ha, all on seven day intervals. It took about 2½ months to disappear completely, not so many years as McDivot says, and the total cost didn’t exceed £2,000, hardly exorbitant in this day and age. This may not work in all situations, but it certainly cleared up the problem for me.

Speaking of heavy play, we are presently doing over 200 rounds a day on our public course where the soft spike policy is cheerfully ignored and no golfer takes particular care to pick up his pitch or repair his pitch marks. We change holes three times a week, or about every 450 golfers on average. This is on sand greens which don’t even meet USGA specifications, and they remain both playable and attractive.

We are managing “Pennlinks” creeping bentgrass in a sub-tropical climate for which the species is entirely unsuited. We mow at five mm, the greens roll nine feet on the Stimpmeter and, oh yes, they are absolutely free of Poa (which grows here) or any other weeds for that matter without an ounce of herbicide.

For decades the USGA Green Section has worked diligently through scientific research to develop the best possible growing medium for golf greens. This is meant to benefit both the Course Manager and the golfer. I spend a considerable amount of time and effort to convince the powers that be to the necessary expense in constructing USGA greens, and it dismays me to see my arguments undermined by ignorance.

I believe it is irresponsible to publish articles, which contradict the fundamentals of sound agronomic principles by an individual who is either uninformed or incompetent. I find it distressing that a professional and reputable publication would carry such misinformation. Printing anecdotal evidence - moreover from an anonymous source - that flies in the face of proven industry standards is a disservice to this organisation.

I understand why the author wishes to remain anonymous, but he could do himself and everyone else in golf a favour by consulting with someone who truly understands USGA golf greens. I am acquainted with several knowledgeable people in the UK who I would be happy to recommend.

Alternatively, I invite the author to visit us here in the Canaries, to observe first hand, the successful management of sand based bentgrass greens. After all, it’s better to light a candle than curse the darkness.

Stephen Okula
Golf Course Superintendent,
Golf Las Americas, Tenerife, Spain

I seek both paid and non-paid internships at up to four courses over the period of one year. If there is interest from your course to work together with me, or if you may know of a interested course or company, contact me at: Mieke A. Damaske 7067 Boughton Rd. Victor NY 14564 United States Tel: (1-716)-657-7867 Fax: (1-716)-657-6733 e-mail-dangolf@hotmail.com

Thank you for your time.

Mieke Damaske,
Victor, New York