AYRSHIRE, Scotland — “I like to keep it lean and mean rather than soft and green,” said golf course and estate manager George Brown of his maintenance practices here at the Westin Turnberry Resort.

While he admits that there are differences between what the golfing public has come to expect from the conditioning on a true links-style course and a modern layout, Brown insists that his cultural practices make for healthier turf.

“I don’t care if it goes a little brown here and there, it is especially nice to see it on a links course,” he said. “I like to see the greens firm up and get a wee bit firmer. And I think traditionalists like Tom Watson and Lee Trevino would probably appreciate the effect of the water saved, the land saved, and the lives saved.”

Now if superintendents elsewhere let their greens dry out or let a little bit undernourish them, they would probably wind up losing their jobs. Everyone wants the ball to stop dead when it hits the green whether they are hitting a wedge or a one-iron,” Brown continued. “But you don’t get your true native grasses when you start putting on too many nutrients and too much water.”

Brown, who is on the Royal and Ancient advisory panel and has been at Turnberry for 16 years, points out that even in Britain native grasses are disappearing from the greens.

“On some greens you have more than 80 percent Poa because of close mowing and over fertilizing over watering,” he explained. “Water is becoming a premium and new projects are putting in USGA-spec greens that need lots of water. That’s crazy. When you over water and over fertilize that encourages the wrong grasses, encourages disease and leads to the use of more chemicals. All of this costs a fortune, pollutes soils and is very labor intensive. And you finish up with not a very good quality green.”

At Turnberry, Brown oversees the management of the famous Ailsa course that has hosted three British Opens, the newly opened Kintyre Course that was designed by Donald Steel, the new nine-hole Arran Academy Course, the golf academy and pitch and putt areas, and the resort’s gardens.

The courses all feature a mixture of browntop bentgrass, fescues and other native turfgrasses. Brown does have about 15 percent Poa in his greens, which he attributes to wet summers and dark, damp winters.

Brown has a double row irrigation system that is used “just to keep the turf alive”, and uses a fertilizer derived from chicken manure on the greens. The fairways only get fertilized once every two or three years. He also gets an occasional attack of fusarium on his greens which he has to treat with a fungicide. At the peak of the year-round playing season, his staff mows the greens once a day and the fairways twice a week.

Brown, who at 65 is starting to “wind down his career,” is assisted at Turnberry by three head greenskeepers: Martin Lothian, Jimmy Johnson and Tom Cuthill.