

Scottish Appeal to Turfgrass Management

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As a young professional in the turf industry and a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota, I was given a perspective-broadening experience through a class trip to England and Scotland. This trip, taken with the University of Minnesota's International Experiences in Horticulture class during late May of this year, allowed a visit to the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews. I have come to realize that turf management practices in Scotland are much different than they are in the U.S. On the first day that we arrived, Gordon Moir, the Superintendent at St. Andrews, discussed his daily maintenance practices of his 135 holes of golf. While Gordon is mainly in charge of maintenance of the Old Course, he also oversees the maintenance practices on the other courses.

The St. Andrews staff was preparing for this year's Open Championship while we were there as it was less than two months away. Despite being in preparation for a tournament, I was amazed how different their practices were compared to common practices in the U.S. The aesthetics of golf courses are much more demanding in the U.S. than they are in Scotland. In the U.S., it seems as though golfers demand a soft visual with a hard playing surface, and the course being green is an absolute priority. In Scotland it is much different. It seems like the hard and fast playing surface is the highest priority at St. Andrews. Lush, green, visually soft grasses are set aside as a priority. Gordon explained that he waters very little, trying to keep the turf's roots active and given the fact that his water is very alkaline. He also mentioned that it is very expensive to water 135 holes so watering is only done when absolutely necessary. They average almost an inch of rain per week during the wet season, and a half-inch during the dry season, most of that rain coming in little bits every day, which reduces the need for watering.

Fertility practices were also very different than what are common here in the United States. Most of their turf is composed of fine fescues, making fertility requirements quite low. Keeping turf lean also helps reduce mowing and thatch issues. It also reduces the already low disease pressure. Fertilization is usually

done once during late August to early September depending on temperature and rainfall. The fertilization is usually done by applying 1 lb. N/1000 ft². That's it. No more. Here it seems as though we are fertilizing monthly, some times biweekly.

Cultural practices are a very large part of the maintenance program at St. Andrews. Topdressing occurs at least every other week, and if weather cooperates, it is done more frequently than that. Vertical mowing is done bi-weekly. Gordon mentioned that compaction is probably his biggest problem at St. Andrews, especially on the Old Course, as it can see up to 70,000 rounds per year. Therefore, aerification is done two to three times per year. Light weight rolling is frequently employed to all of the greens to guarantee a fast playing surface.

Pesticide and other chemical use is very limited on all of the courses at St. Andrews. Other than moss and algae, weather conditions make it so that disease pathogens are not normally found or do not become active in Scotland. They try to limit chemical applications to once or twice a year. Chemical applications are severely frowned upon throughout the UK and it has become a large political issue in recent years. Air movement is very good along the North Sea, where at St. Andrews, there is hardly a day when it isn't windy. It seems as though they try to keep their pathogens in check by using good and frequent cultural practices.

The second day we were in Scotland we played the Eden Course of St. Andrews. The weather was nice, occasional clouds, about 55 degrees and the wind increased as the day moved into the

afternoon. Immediately I was stunned by the ruggedness of the landscape. No trees, just Gorse lining the fairways. The playing surface was very hard and fast. The turf was green and smooth. Every lie (except for the rough) that your ball landed in was tight. It is truly a place where you want to keep the ball in the fairways or on the greens. You really pay for missing your target at St. Andrews. The greens were very large and the fairways were narrower than that you would think of in the U.S. Oh and bunkers! Some bunkers were 7-8 feet deep and hard as a rock. I only managed to get in one and it was pretty shallow, but it still took two shots. Another contrast to courses in the U.S. is the lack of water. There are very few water hazards, other than the North Sea on the golf course. It seems as though in bounds water hazards are a very large part of the game here in the U.S; however, this is not the case in the UK.

Overall, the time that I had at the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews was a quality international experience. I never thought that I would actually be able to walk on that course, let alone meet and talk with the Superintendent. This experience also gave me a new perspective on turf management that most turf professionals would not get to see here in the U.S. I don't think that most people realize how different golf courses are in the UK until they actually see them. I sure didn't, and I was truly surprised. I would highly recommend visiting the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews to any turf professional, or anyone that is interested in golf and its origins.



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