



# ROYAL HARARE GOLF CLUB

IT IS with great interest that I read my copy of *the Golf Course* when it arrives and see the problems and solutions outlined. I have managed to pick up some very handy hints and have been able to adapt much to our local conditions. Perhaps it would be of interest to have a brief glimpse of some of the problems we have here in the Southern Hemisphere.

## PREMIER CLUB

The Royal Harare Golf Club is the premier golf club in the country and is situated very close to the city centre. It is an 18 hole (6,434 metres, S.S. 72) course on flat, deep red clay soil (c.55% clay).

The course is sculpted through a testing mix of indigenous and imported trees to ensure that every

hole requires a separate strategy and it is mature enough to have high trees to ensure that for the pros and other gorillas a driver is not the club to use off every tee.

Being in the sub-tropics Zimbabwe has a seasonal rainfall from November to March and the average received by the course is approximately 900mm per year. Irrigation is therefore a very important part of management as daily temperatures vary from 12-15 C in winter (July) to 25-35 C in summer (January).

Fortunately the course is adjacent to a Government Meteorological station and all the irrigation is scheduled on a Class 'A' evaporation pan. Converted E/E ratios can soar as high as 7,0 during our 'suicide' month (October).

Prior to Independence the greens

were watered with a Flawn-Thomas automatic irrigation system, but with Independence and a lack of foreign exchange, the obtaining of spares and the lack of a servicing facility began to cause problems. The greens are now watered with a 5 cm perforated aluminium pipe system which is manufactured locally, but which has to be arranged manually across the green. Precipitation is measured with individual rain gauges. Fairways are watered with standard Rain-bird 6.5mm sprinkler nozzles. The water is obtained from four boreholes and during the dry season pumping continues day and night, except at weekends.

## HEAVIEST

Royal Harare has the heaviest

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traffic of any club in the country, with an average of 110 rounds per day every day of the year bar one. In the last five years only two competitions have been stopped because of very heavy rain and lightning. This puts some quite heavy demands on the greenkeeping staff as there is no 'quiet' period, except Christmas day when the club is closed. Renovation and major structural maintenance has therefore to be done under the feet of the golfers.

The greens are all hand mowed with petrol driven Briggs & Stratton drum mowers. Four machines mow each green twice a day during summer and once a day during winter - when the grass grows it grows with or without fertiliser!

The greens are covered by a large number of grasses, as many as there have been greens committees, but in the main they are either Tiff or a bastardised local cynodon which has crept in over the years.

## RESISTANT

At present we are replacing all the greens with Florida which has proved in our climate to be one of the easiest to manage and most resistant to drought, disease and traffic. Grasses such as Tiff and the Bents do not react well under our high temperature conditions and are particularly susceptible to *Drechslera\_poa*. Under more temperate conditions this may cause! melting out!. Under our conditions we can lose a whole green in ten days if untreated.

All the fairways are nearly pure Kikuyu grass (*Pennisetum clandestinum*) which grows extremely well if fertilised and well watered, and these are mown with gang mowers twice a week. Ecologically, Kikuyu grass is the best for fairways in this part of the world and eventually takes over the whole course.

## CONSTANT PROBLEM

For this reason each grass is

surrounded by a 'cordon sanitaire' of local couch grass which is used as a battle ground to keep the Kikuyu at bay. This is a constant problem and requires a great deal of labour. The rough consists of natural 'veld' grasses which die off in winter and which have to be bush mown in summer to prevent them getting shoulder high.

As mentioned, the main disease is *Drechslera* for which we apply a Sumiscler/Bravo mix fortnightly during the rains and monthly during winter. This mix has been shown to be the best against Dollar spot (*Sclerotinia sp.*) as well and the fortnightly spray application keeps the course free of most fungus diseases.

When using the old watering system we did get a great deal of slime mould, but with the perforated pipe system, this has been eliminated. Ferrous sulphate was found to restrict this and any moss growth in these patches.

On the pest side, we get lawn caterpillar, army worm, red and white mite and, particularly on the fairways, crickets. A rotated spraying of carbaryl and diazinon keeps these under control.

On the weed side, we have little problem in the fairways as a healthy Kikuyu sward keeps out most things. However, on the greens we do get *Poa annua* in winter and under our conditions this can ruin a green in a couple of months. Once established, when our winter is over it can devastate a green. Fortunately, with Florida and the various grasses we have we can spray Kerb herbicide (propyzamide) and this is usually done as a pre-emergent in late March, early April once we start getting cold nights (c. 12-15 C). Other weeds, particularly *Euphorbia prostrata*, oxalis and *Cyperus esculentis*, we control with spot sprayings of MSMA, Ronstar, 2,4-D and MCPA-K salt.

## TOP DRESSING

Our greens receive a six weekly

light top dressing of alternately double washed and screened river sand and fumigated screened tobacco scrap or well rotted cow manure compost. Under our conditions and the high temperatures, thatch is not a significant problem. The greens are also verticut just prior to top dressing.

Throughout all our soils we have a very low organic matter content and our problem is keeping some sort of structure to the soil and we rely on the compost to do this.

Under our conditions during summer, dry maize stover ploughed in and left for 60 days to rot down is almost undetectable as organic matter let alone as maize stover. With fine stem grasses it only needs a couple of weeks and all thatch is gone. It is with great envy that we look at your advertisements for slow release fertilisers.

## 'NON-ESSENTIAL'

On the equipment side we have sufficient, but we can only drool over some of the advertisements in your magazine. At present, equipment is very difficult to obtain as we are a 'non-essential' industry and we take what we can scrounge and borrow. Normally new equipment can be wangled, but spares are almost non-existent. For small things like bearings for motors and mowers we can wait for up to seven months, nozzles for sprayers up to a year, and so on. As an example we have some mowers whose Briggs & Stratton 5HP motors have been working every day for over eight years - so much for planned obsolescence.

At present our course is in peak condition and we are looking forward to hosting the Zimbabwe Open. After a dry start our rains have arrived, so it's all systems go!

**DR. DOUGLAS McClymont IS  
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