

# GOLF COURSE IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LAST THIRTY YEARS

**A report prepared by the Greenkeeping  
Winter Fact Finding Committee at  
Dundee College of Further Education**

FROM the players' point of view, more and more golfers are looking for 12 months of play on a golf course kept in reasonable condition. More winter golf is being played now than ever before.

It is up to every greenkeeper to strive to give the best possible conditions throughout the year, within the bounds of the budget provided and his own ability.

While there have been many definite improvements in education within the greenkeeping profession in the last 30 years, there is still a need to improve the status of greenkeepers.

In an effort to improve the standard of advice from consultants it has been said that consultants should have degrees in agriculture to be better able to understand turf management. Those present felt that the possession of a National Diploma in Turf (NDT) would be better for the consultants, and indirectly, for their clients.

Golfers themselves need more education in how to use a golf course sensibly. Good golf course etiquette is essential in these days of increased use of courses. The meeting felt that associations such as BIGGA could do much to help put over this message more firmly. This would improve still further the players' attitude to golf.

Thirty years ago mistakes were made in the design of new courses and with alterations to existing courses. Many of the

problems created then still exist today.

Improvements which have occurred or arisen as a result of recognising these mistakes:

- Choosing only land which is suitable for golf in the first place.
- Taking short cuts (eg. building to the lowest price) should no longer, be considered the best policy, automatically.
- Better golf course architects are available.
- Using more land for each course - 150-200 acres instead of 90-100 acres.
- Larger tees, designed with the greenkeeper and maintenance in mind.
- Avoiding narrow walk-off areas between greens and tees which lead to unwanted worn and bare areas.
- Recognising that flat greens and tees are not necessarily desirable.
- Using stronger and more visible bunkering.
- Abandoning clay bowl constructed greens - 'Dew pond greens'.
- Using better drainage techniques and 'know-how'.

It was recognised that golfers play more slowly now, but this may be due in part to congestion on the course. The newest courses to be built are being

designed to be a little shorter than those built in the 60's and 70's when the emphasis was on length. This could help to speed play.

The playing speed of the ball was also considered. Badly used pop-up sprinklers on greens lead to a slower putting surface.

More desirable, faster putting surfaces have been achieved by:

- Encouraging a predominance of fescue and bent in greens.
- Regular verticutting.
- Increased and more careful use of top dressing.
- Producing drier surfaces by regular spiking.
- Cutting more closely and more often when weather conditions allow it.

The suggestion that Annual Meadow Grass (AMG) had now been relegated to the status of a weed and therefore, unwanted, was now widely accepted. However there are still some greenkeepers who feel that its presence as a tough persistent grass can still be tolerated.

Cultural methods have changed over the last 30 years, in fact quite recently, to discourage invasion from AMG on golf greens:

- Fertilisers containing no phosphate are used.
- Overall reduction in the use of fertilisers.
- Regular spiking and

verticutting.

- Use of less water.
- Encouragement of acidic conditions (but not over acidic).

It was pointed out that by using wetting agents before AMG flowers appear, followed by a back-up application 14 days later, there would be a noticeable reduction in flowering heads.

One suggestion was to apply Farmura Green at the general rate of 1 gallon per average sized green, before AMG flowers appear, and 14 days later, apply Aquagro at 2oz/110sq yards.

It is the unsightliness of the AMG flower heads which makes its presence so unwanted. Without the flower heads its presence may still be tolerated over the next thirty years.

In the last five years the problem of thatch has become less pronounced than 20 years

ago. This is probably due to:

- Improved slitting treatments - much higher frequency.
- Better use of irrigation - linked with a better understanding of AMG control - too much water is thought to be the culprit for encouraging both thatch formation and AMG development.
- Use of improved top dressings, containing less peat.

As already stated it was agreed that over-watering is the biggest cause of thatch and AMG. The application of water is still required, but its use should be left to the head greenkeeper's discretion.

In recent years the spread of patterns of sprinklers has been studied more closely, which has led to improved watering systems being introduced.

This has been linked with better systems for measuring the amount of water applied. Used in conjunction with soil tensiometers this should ensure that water is applied only when required and in the right amounts.

Hand watering of high areas, particularly on greens, but also on other parts of the golf course, is still recommended even although standing with an open ended hose is time consuming.

The use of wetting agents has increased in recent years. Their use reduces the amount of water requiring to be applied to get sufficient water to the grass roots.

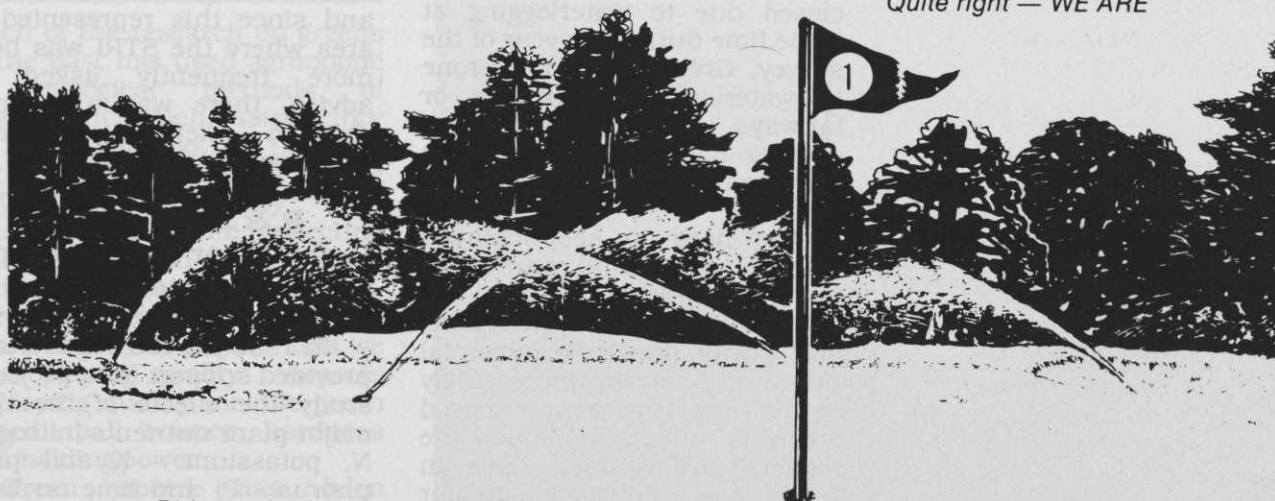
A note of caution was sounded. There is still not enough known about the long term effects on turf and soil organisms of the use of wetting agents.

**If you would like to join the committee, they can be contacted at Dundee College.**

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