

How one of Ireland's great courses keeps in top condition



When Sid Arrowsmith took up his appointment as Course Manager at Royal Portrush Golf Club in County Antrim - the only venue outside England ever to have hosted the Open Championship - he had barely five weeks to prepare both the Dunluce and Valley courses for the Club's Centenary week celebrations in the second week of June '88.

The greens and fairways of the Par 72 Dunluce and Par 70 Valley courses where some 100,000 rounds of golf are played each year were all suffering from threatened infestation by perennial ryegrass, the cause of which he puts down to the wind, and to a far lesser degree, birds carrying the previous season's seed from the surrounding agricultural land. His answer to this and to the added problem of the

emergence of annual meadowgrass on some of the greens was to use a predominantly organic spray regime to encourage the thickening out of the finer - fescues and bents - which in some areas were very weak and thin. To clip the greens much finer to discourage the broader leaf grasses and to hand pull clumps of ryegrass from both sandy mix courses.

Given the right conditions, Sid would adhere to a 100% organic regime, but the sandy soil necessitated the use of Nitrogen immediately prior to the Centenary week and in readiness for 4 major tournaments over the next 2 months.

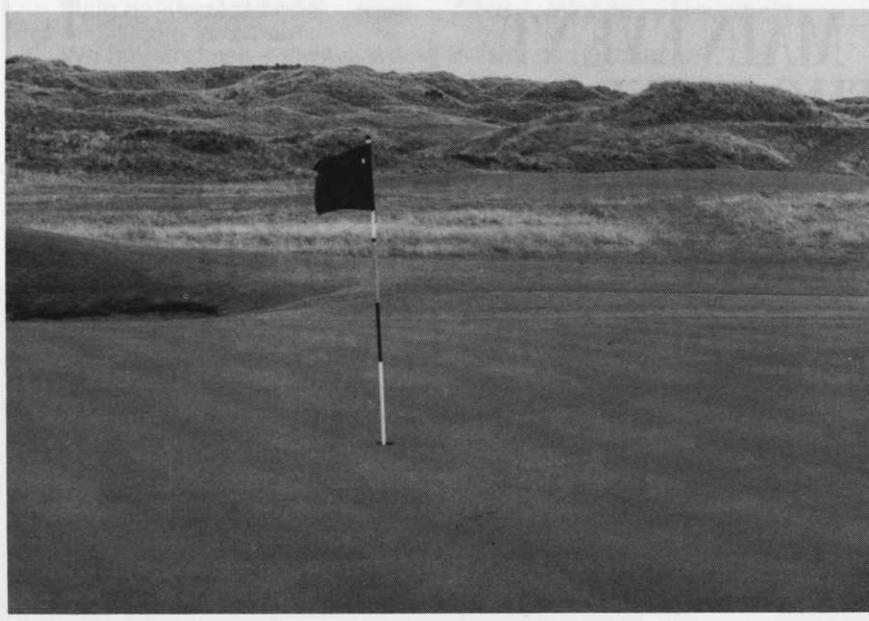
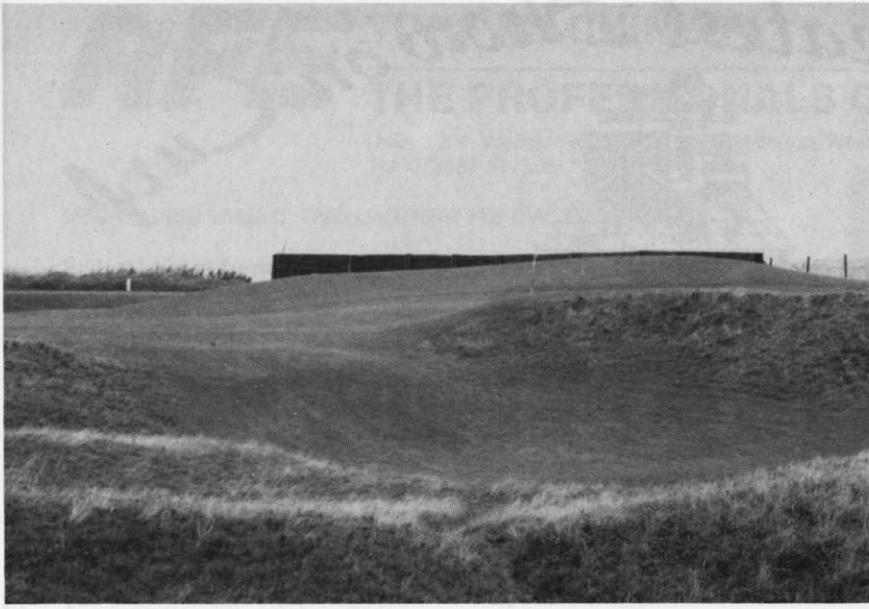
When greenkeeping at Southport he had regularly used Maxicrop foliar sprays and the success there made Maxicrop the automatic choice for Royal Portrush.

Starting in mid-May when the soil had warmed up a little he used a mixture of Maxicrop plus 17% Nitrogen and Maxicrop Mosskiller and turf conditioner (itself with a 3% Nitrogen content) at a rate of 5 litres of each per 227 litres of water every 3 or 4 weeks on the greens and 3 applications of 12 1/2 litres of each per 227 litres of water per hectare on over 200 hectares of fairways.

This same basic programme continued through 'till Christmas although the level of Maxicrop Mosskiller and Conditioner was increased at the expense of the Maxicrop plus 17% Nitrogen.

In terms of nitrogen content, this mixture equates quite closely with that of Maxicrop Supergrass which he also tried and discovered the grass looked even better, which is why, in 1989, he

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will be using a combination of the new No. 4 (Supergrass) and No. 2 (Moss Killer and conditioner) from the company's newly established Amenity Pro-Series.

He has found that even when spraying in less than ideal conditions the results are still good. The combination of reduced Maxicrop plus 17% Nitrogen and Moss Killer and Conditioner sprayed in December has helped harden the growth while, in summer, high levels of Maxicrop doesn't scorch and, throughout the season it gives good colour," he said. "Even more important, an application immediately after a major tournament when the greens are subjected to intensive mowing, results in very good, strong

recovery."

One problem that beset surrounding courses, yet left Royal Portrush unscathed in the Autumn, was Fusarium Patch and, for this, once more gives the credit to Maxicrop and points out the fact that the saving in terms of time and money through avoiding this disease alone makes its use cost-effective.

The root stimulating properties of seaweed foliar feed together with regular aeration has helped keep the soil healthy and provided a deep-rooted sward with improved shoot density and steady, hardy growth, avoiding the 'sappy' growth or sudden flushes that no Course Manager ever wants to see. His relief is that the natural

bacterial and micro-organisms within the soil also benefit from Maxicrop natural trace elements to help form an even better root environment.

Species that have particularly benefited from this at Royal Portrush are Festuca and Agrostis.

Application has always been easy, quick and simple and, in Sid's view, will be particularly important in respect of the new spraying regulations that came into force in January 1989.

"Certainly its ideal for early Spring or late Autumn dressings but, in my book, weather permitting, it is possible and desirable to spray throughout the winter as well as the other three seasons. Such regular use, without interfering with play, keeps moss at bay and helps maintain a really healthy deep-rooted sward all year long" he concluded.

Sid's other requirement was to encourage plant growth to withstand not just the wind burn from the off-shore winds (the courses are a mere 90 metres from the sea), but the wind blown frosts that occur in winter. Even so, his initial 5-week target of making both courses look 'the best they'd ever looked' in time for the Centenary celebrations, when players from 55 Royal Golf Clubs from around the world were in attendance, was also achieved.

To mark that very special occasion, the players dressed in nineteenth century costume and tackled the ten original holes, thanks to the intimate course knowledge of the club professional, Di Stevenson's, father. 'Stevie' as he is affectionately called was the Club's professional for 50 years before being succeeded by his son and he was able to point to the spot where the original holes would be and were, indeed, found.

The very next week, the Valley Course, where the Par 3 eighteenth is named 'Stevie', the Causeway Coast Open Competition took place, involving 4 clubs and over 800 participants.

The following week it was the European Quadrangular Championship between Ireland, France, Germany and Sweden on the Dunluce course, in turn followed by the Irish Championships in the third week of August.

Meanwhile, the requirements of over 1200 members including a large contingent of regular member visitors from America (12 from Atlantic City alone) on both courses and on the 3 putting greens could not be overlooked.

But that's the pleasure as well as the problem of looking after Ireland's two finest and most famous courses.