

FROM THE FAIRWAY

Jim Arthur reaffirms his views

In replying to Peter Wisbey's arguments against 'little and often' irrigation patterns, I am sure that it would be more rewarding to debate personally, aided by some personal irrigation, as we used to do in the past years!

In writing a short note in general terms on any subject it is difficult not to over-simplify the problem, but it must be said that the arguments advanced for periodic heavy watering are not supported by either logic or results. In passing, I did not describe infrequent irrigation as a hearsay but as a heresy.

It stands beyond argument that greens must never be allowed to dry out completely before starting irrigation and it is equally vital that the capillary connection is never lost - otherwise, whatever watering pattern is adopted, it will result in the water sitting on the top and the roots coming up to meet it, with flooding on the one hand or dry patch on the other. Nevertheless, using those superb if tiny fescue greens on the short course at Peter's old Club as a justification for infrequent heavy watering is an example of correct observation but incorrect deduction, - a breach of the first law of logic.

The reason why these greens (heavily used though they were, thus contradicting those who claim that fine fescue is not hard wearing enough for today's heavy play) were so much better than the greens on the main course - though they improved dramatically under Peter's management - was that for years the small course was regarded as a poor relation, were never given anything like the fertiliser of the other eighteen and above all were watered by

hose or a sprinkler, and that has its own built in restraint. There is of course nothing wrong with pop-ups except that it is fatally easy to over-water with them and this was a very badly designed system, redesigned on our joint insistence.

If we must make comparisons and first assuming that irrigation is a topping up process to make up deficiencies in natural rainfall and that we must never lose the capillary connection, then it must surely be better to enjoy an hour's light rainfall every night (which is equivalent to about 50 gallons per 100 sq. yds), rather than a tremendous thunderstorm at infrequent intervals. In passing, those charged with presenting courses for major events dread more than anything such a sudden torrent which can flood greens, or even if it does not, slows them up drastically and there is nothing that they or anyone else can do about it until they dry up.

Of course we must have very well aerated greens with the associated free drainage, whatever pattern is adopted, if the water is not to stay on the top. Of course one can use drought as an aid to management to kill off annual meadow grass. This practice goes back to the start of greenkeeping - hence the old adage that a good drought gets rid of a deal of rubbish, but it should be remembered that such draconian measures also get rid of good greenkeepers, unless management of the Club is very enlightened and the members educated! What it all boils down to is whether we use the weight of water from heavy infrequent irrigation to push the water down or do we rely on capillary suction to pull it down by topping up little and often, so that that connection is maintained.

What is certain is that over-watering is the

cardinal sin of greenkeeping and water must never be used to make greens soft and holding, or even 'nice and green'. Slow overwatered greens destroy the finer arts of putting even if they do not later become thatchy and have to be 'rested' for weeks if not more in winter.

All I have ever aimed at is to make those making decisions think logically so that they can make the correct decisions. So long as we do not over-water - and in all conscience there is still far too much over-watering despite all the debate - then all I can say is that there are more ways of killing a cat than drowning it.

It is not, however, logical to observe conditions which do not relate to our specific problems and certainly even less so to deduce treatments. The Mediterranean zone is not the same as temperate northern Europe. We do not get many Bermuda grass fairways in Britain and Pennecross, bred for just those hot arid conditions and with an ability to stand up to the necessary high irrigation if the grass is to survive, does not long survive in our cold wet winters. My objections to greenkeeping methods and green construction designed for the hot arid States of the USA being adopted over here is that the conditions are totally different and it is this very point that the Green Section agronomists of the USGA stress in relation to their advice for both matters in the temperate States of America - as I have debated with them for some years and have been happy to note their agreement that in such areas austere greenkeeping gives the best playing conditions at much less cost!!

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the Golf Course

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