

Greenside Comment...



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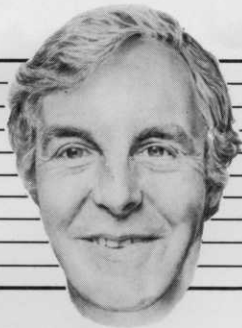
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John Lelean

Menace below the surface

An horrific accident to Eric Green, Head Greenkeeper at Woodcote Park Golf Club in Surrey for the past fifteen years, prompts Golf Greenkeeping to highlight the potential danger on many golf courses in the land.

Woodcote Park, celebrating their 75th anniversary this year, recently decided to update their irrigation system to include water on all eighteen tees as an addition to the Toro system installed on the greens thirteen years ago.

At 9.00 pm on a July evening, Eric Green, accompanied by his wife Carol and their ten year old daughter walked the course to check the sprinkler system. A number had failed to operate in the automatic mode so were switched on manually before transferring back to automatic.

At the 7th green, recently fertilised the sprinklers again had failed to operate. According to Mr. Green, as he bent over the cover to operate the manual valve, the box literally blew up in his face under a pressure estimated in excess of 120 psi and a piece of

plastic split his nose wide open, requiring immediate hospital treatment and seventeen stitches.

Once the stitches are removed, he will need a further operation to re-set his broken nose and could require plastic surgery.

Although his injuries are quite appalling it could have been worse. The valve box cover shot through the air and landed in the middle of the green; had that hit him the result could well have been a coroner's inquest. It was also fortunate his wife was there to rush him to hospital.

Frank Jones of British Overhead Irrigation Ltd, the Shepperton firm who installed the updated system, said he could not say at this stage how the accident happened but it was being investigated. He confirmed his company had replaced the control valves on all greens with a new three wire system using Buckner equipment. He further suggested the cover plate could have hit the nipple as it was lifted. Expressing regret he told Golf Greenkeeping the company was adequately covered by insurance.

Peter Roberts, Chairman of the British Turf Irrigation Association, has recently criticised golf clubs for paying more attention to the bottom line figure instead of looking at the specification standards, when considering quotations. He said Green Committees do not have the technical knowledge to judge whether an automatic water system is technically and hydraulically sound and should be guided by either an independent consultant or accept the standards laid down as a minimum by the B.T.I.A.

Until a full investigation can take place it could be wrong to attribute blame to any quarter, but it is not too late to issue a strong and urgent warning to all golf clubs of the potential danger to greenkeepers and members should a faulty irrigation system blow up under pressure.

Carol Green summed up perfectly when she said, "I would hate to think of the consequences if my daughter had been standing alongside Eric when the cover blew off".

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