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## ■ Entering discussion 'beyond argument' ■ Height of common sense

■ May I address Mr Gray (February letters) through your columns, thus?

In your letter in Greenkeeper International you felt that you must enter the fray. I am glad you did, because apathy is one of the greatest enemies of greenkeeping and I am sure you are sincere in your beliefs.

I am equally sure that people like Jim Arthur, who by the way clearly states his view 'beyond argument', in his October article, Steve Isaac of the STRI, Jack McMillan and even Neil Whitaker of Woburn (see February issue), are also sincere in their beliefs; in fact Neil Whitaker's experiences seem to contradict yours entirely. Anyway, the pace of any putting surface is a personal interpretation and comes second, in my opinion, to smoothness.

Your comments on cutting height are interesting and the first part I agree with entirely. On the second, I note you say that your surfaces are firm but not solid and unyielding. Therefore my point on accuracy still stands. As you seem to use a ruler and straight edge, you obviously do not put much emphasis on accuracy. I use a height of cut setter which is both very simple to use, and very accurate. My staff regularly set all three Paladins and all three units on each of our two Jacobsen GreenKing triplex mowers, to an accuracy of 1/10mm.

Even with 20/20 vision your method is inherently inaccurate and prone to operator error.

As far as your third point goes, all recent (say the last ten years), STRI research and trials suggest that fescues thin out when mowing heights drop much below 5mm for any extended period of time. Concerning winter cutting, I cannot agree more, and never raise the mowing height to more than 6mm.

Finally I prefer to work with millimetres, as I feel the sooner we accept the metric scale, the less painful it will be in the long run. I do not, by the way, object to you or anyone else using sixteenths, as long as you stick to this unit, and do not jump about between eighths, quarters, halves, thirty secondths, and even sixty fourths!

I like to learn about greenkeeping techniques, and enjoy nothing more than a good chin wag with a fellow greenkeeper. I have learnt a great deal from such face to face discussions. I do, however, change my mind if I find that I am wrong. Do you?

PN BERTINSHAW

Head Greenkeeper, Royal Norwich Golf Club

■ I find it necessary to reply to the letter of Mr D Gray (February issue) with particular reference to greens mowing heights, if only to voice

some well-proven common sense on behalf of those professionals in our business who seek to restore, by way of a corrective programme, or maintain the quality in the turf which the game of golf inherently requires but which is still so sadly lacking up and down the country.

Surely Mr Gray cannot be seriously suggesting that the large number of S-L-O-W greens he has experienced is a direct result of normal summer mowing heights (ie. 3/16"). No, surely he must agree that the basic reasons for said slow greens lie elsewhere, in all probability with the dominance of well fed and watered *Poa annua* in a poorer state of health than his own, being mown at 3/16" possibly only three or four times per week! Mr Gray is well aware that well managed fescue/bent greens do not require drastic mowing measures to produce fast, true, firm surfaces for any class of player.

He is also aware of alternative interim measures should greater speed of roll be deemed necessary, infinitely better indeed than the severely detrimental effects of close mowing on a fine fescue population in particular, a widely accepted fact especially when combined with the abrasive effects of wear and tear from the intensity of play consistent with the majority of courses nowadays.

Mr Gray's diagnosis here is plainly incorrect and the very fact that he is mowing at 1/8", sometimes, it appears, even lower, and twice a day at that, is indicative of a sward lacking certainly in fine fescues and which may contain a percentage of bent species interspersed with a dominance of *Poa annua* and perhaps some patches of Yorkshire Fog. I am assuming here, of course, that the head greenkeepers on the courses under Mr Gray's control do indeed carry out this severe mowing regime. They may however make their own adjustments to any formal programme and hence protect and maintain fine species present.

He may well have firm greens but his mowing heights inform us that although, yes, he has attained a thatch free turf, possibly well drained, he has gone no further towards true quality nor cannot with such close mowing practices. He has taken what has been seen as the "easy" way to fulfil a requirement or trend, the quest for speed, to the detriment of the finer species and consequently the production of all year round quality surfaces, at the same time forsaking the correct turf resilience so important for surface ball reaction so typical of fescue/ bent turf.

Jeff Perris's statement comes to mind here when he said "it is unfair to condemn the men with *Poa annua* greens when you know that one of the main contributory factors is the pressure from members to mow too closely," and here we have a turf manager willingly carrying out such practices! Interestingly, Mr Gray does not mention grass species or relevant percentages present or indeed any overseeding programme for the golf courses under his control, although he does mention the case of the bowling greens which are closed for half the year.

This point is significant, as is the fact that Mr Gray still found it necessary to oversee his bowling greens for the past three years in the autumn despite the fact as he states, "The bowling greens still retained the high percentage of fine grasses found at the start of the season", following his close mowing regime. This obvious contradiction begs the question, why then the seemingly needless expense of overseeding? If this does not represent a serious indictment of faulty mowing practices, I don't know what does!

Why put whatever fine turf species you may have (or have recently sown) on golf greens under unnecessary physiological stress? Mr Gray must be aware of the adverse effects of extremely close mowing on plant rooting capability particularly at prime periods such as late



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