

Greens must not

Fine fescues and bent grasses are known to be stressed when turf areas are played on in frosty or adverse conditions – or that is what we are led to believe. However, this appears not always to be the case. As with many theories passed on in greenkeeping management it is up to the greenkeeper to convince himself what abuse a green can tolerate.

Talking to consulting agronomist Gordon Jaaback, Mike Travers at Lamberhurst Golf Club situated in the Weald of Kent, has for over ten years held the firm belief that golfers are the main value to the club – they are the main source of income – and the greens should not be spared. Particularly, as he says, with all the effective modern renovating and aerating turf equipment available today.

Mike doesn't believe in temporary greens and unless conditions on the course are unpleasant and muddy, the course remains open – whether the rain has bucketed down or the greens are covered in frost. And the results are there for all to see. Golfers at the club will all agree the greens are as good and true as they have ever been. There is no noticeable damage after play on the wet firm clay or frosted greens. This has been the case every



Golf on frosty greens: 'everything should be done to keep greens open'

year for the last ten years and the members appreciate this.

There are no gimmicks or special treat-

ments. As on most courses *Poa annua* is dominant on the green though fescues and bents seem to be increasing. Mike keeps the nitrogen



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levels up with six applications of 10-2-6 plus 1.5% Fe turf granules at 34 grams m² and follows up with an autumn treatment of 4-6-7.5 plus 3% Fe at the same rate. Liquid applications of iron sulphate are applied in one or two treatments in the late autumn before the frosts arrive. He keeps the cutting height low – in the winter at 5mm and during the summer as low as 3mm. Yes, the root growth is shallow – not more than 35-40mm – but Mike is confident he will improve the depth.

The greens are constructed with local heavy soils. Underground pipe drains were installed in the nine greens constructed in 1976 but are generally ineffective. There is no significant difference in the drainage of these greens compared to the first nine holes that are without any drainage. The soil texture is such that permeability is very low and surplus water unable to penetrate is lost by surface drainage. The greens all have a good puttable grass cover – although mainly *Poa annua* – and Mike believes the low cutting height is necessary to get the playing surface he wants.

Mike directs his efforts at removing thatch and relieving compaction. He is a strong believer in the regular use of thatching reels –

often heavily when growth is vigorous – and he slits throughout the year, hollow tining in the spring and autumn. All greens have had at least two Vertidrain treatments in the summer and levels are not adversely affected.

'Today the worst compaction can be treated', he says, 'so why spare the greens if there is no sign of suffering or deterioration?' Over 2,000 rounds were played between Christmas Eve and January 5 when frost cover every morning lasted until ten o'clock. Although often well frosted into the rootzone the temperatures – though not measured – could not have been lower than -5°C. This is probably where the explanation lies. Temperatures are so close to zero that rigid conditions do not persist and limited bending and bruising of the leaf can occur. Cut short to 5mm the dense mat is not displaced by foot traffic – even with no frost – and so physical damage is negligible.

The winter of 1992-93 has been the most severe on record. With no temporary greens, play has been maintained on frosty mornings and often on wet greens throughout the winter. The course was, however, closed on 26 occasions when conditions were such that the course virtually closed itself. Now that winter

play is gaining in popularity cost effective measures to remove surplus water throughout the course must now rate high in priority. Today most clubs have a busy schedule of commitments – Lamberhurst has approximately 100 society days in the year – and Mike strongly believes that everything possible must be done to put golfers to the minimum inconvenience and keep them happy.

Frosty wet conditions are expected during the winter months and yet golfers, who pay the money that keeps the club going, must get maximum return for their investment. It is up to the clubs to 'sharpen' their maintenance programme and where necessary effect physical improvements to keep up with the golfing demand. The challenge is there and every effort must be made to provide all the cultural attention required to sustain a vigorous and healthy turfgrass cover in all conditions – and to drastically limit the number of days when the course is closed.

■ Mike Travers served an apprenticeship as a greenkeeper in Scotland, serving six years in that capacity before becoming a professional golfer 22 years ago. His triple role at Lamberhurst is that of PGA professional, course manager and chairman of green.

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