

# The Last Word

Send your letters to The Editor, Greenkeeper International, 13 Firlie Close, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 2HL

## Method in madness

Jim Arthur points out in his article on grass identification (July) that the creeping bents such as Penn-cross which we know in the UK as *Agrostis stolonifera* are known as *A. palustris* in the USA.

The Latin *Agrostis palustris* translates as 'Marsh bent'. In other words this species is found in the wild in marshy areas. It is therefore surprising to find a plant of the bog so often used on pure sand golf green constructions.

But perhaps there is method in this apparent madness.

Recent research in the USA has shown that the roots of Penn-cross are capable of penetrating the poisonous anaerobic conditions found in black layer. And where does black layer often develop? On pure sand rootzones of course.

So if you have a golf green with black layer, the grasses which will survive in it are annual meadow grass (because its shallow roots can survive above the black layer) and Penn-cross (because its roots are specially adapted to be able to survive anaerobic conditions and grow through it).

Robert Laycock MSc., CBiol., MBiol., MIHort. General Manager, Karsten Turf Science, Gainsborough, Lincs.

## Arthurian legends

I write to say how much I have enjoyed Jim Arthur's two recent articles on mown grass identification. Having come through the 'ligule and auricle' school, with flow-chart at the ready, it is very pleasing to read such pointers on the overview of the sward and the significance of colour. In these days when play seems to be ever increasing and prolonged, it is difficult indeed to find an hour to slip out with a copy of 'Hubbard on Grasses' and a magnifying glass.

When entering the profession but a brief eight years ago it seemed to me that, when talking to those much older and wiser in the ways of greenkeeping, knowledge gained through experience was a valuable commodity and not one to be passed on. Jim Arthur has always been the excep-

tion in not only imparting his wisdom, but doing so in an enjoyable and thought-provoking manner.

I was also delighted to see our own master greenkeepers putting pen to paper in the last two editions of the magazine, in part inspired by one of Jim Arthur's earlier features on casting earthworms. To have current, topical, and sometimes contentious, issues debated can only be good for the profession and, of course, for the high standing of our magazine.

I shall look forward to reading many more Arthurian legends.

Tony Howorth, Head Greenkeeper, Willesley Park GC, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leics.

## BIGGA in Europe (2)

Having been approached by Neil Thomas earlier this year as representative of this fine Association for the Netherlands, I hasten to react to Colin Fairley's letter (August). By telephone I have updated Colin regarding the present situation in Holland, for by reading the comments of our dear editor I got the impression that communication between Aldwark Manor and Mr White was not quite 100% concerning this subject.

I regret the fact that Neil Thomas did not go into more detail in his AGM report about the 'master plan' I put forward to him recently. This plan has been spread all over Europe, I am happy to say, accompanied by a letter from Neil with more suggestions, plus a request to study the plan and to comment upon it. About thirty people have received this mail and a third have taken the trouble to react and I have read every reply, thanks to my receiving copies.

Please allow me to take this opportunity to thank these people for taking the effort to put pen to paper. Suggestions will be put into my briefcase and brought forward at the next European Forum at Harrogate at the latest.

In Holland all BIGGA members will receive an invitation to attend our first meeting, which is planned for September. I would like to suggest to David White that a new column, called BIGGA INTERNATIONAL NEWS, be

started in his excellent magazine, in the same way as Around The Green (*consider it done, see International News in ATG this issue - editor*). Hopefully, as the first representative of a continental country, I will be allowed the privilege of 'eating the first slice of a newly-baked cake'.

Frederick ten Hage, BIGGA representative for the Netherlands, George Breiterstraat 17, 1741 J.V. SCHAGEN. Tel: 31(0)2240 96022.

## Cup queries

It was with some concern that I noted the hole cups used for The Open held at Royal St George's this year. According to the R&A Rules of Golf, Section 2 of Definitions, "The hole shall be 108mm in diameter... and the outer diameter shall not exceed 108mm".

I discovered some six months

ago that the Patisson hole cup measured in fact 111mm and, after querying this with the manufacturer, reverted back to the Tacit hole cup, which is the correct size. When I discovered that Patisson hole cups had been used at The Open, I queried again with the representative as to the current dimensions and whether they had been brought back into line. I was advised that they had not. I feel that if we were to adhere to the R&A Rules, our club competitions would be invalidated with the larger hole cups. Would this also apply to other competitions, e.g. The Open?

Stefan G Antolik, Head Greenkeeper, Cooden Beach GC, Bexhill -on-Sea, East Sussex.

• A copy of this letter has also been sent by Mr Antolik to J S Scrivener, Chairman of the Rules Committee, The Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews - editor.



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## Forward attitude

I have been in the greenkeeping game for approximately 14 years, starting at ground level under the superb guidance of Duncan McGilvray, followed by more of the same with the Welsh 'wizard' himself, Henry Stead, both at the Great Yarmouth and Caister Club. I learned a lot under these two guys, for which I am eternally grateful, and now I lead my own team at Caldecott Golf and Leisure Club.

This club has a very forward attitude when it comes to greenkeeper/management/member relationships. For instance, my team and I are encouraged to enter all club competitions and use the club facilities – including bars and restaurants – and we are never looked upon as 'second-class citizens', a situation which I've no doubt still lingers at some clubs.

We also have been issued with smart polo shirts, sweat shirts, rain suits and American style peaked caps, all bearing the club emblem. The whole team looks and feels part of the complex and our pride and motivation is visible for all to see. Maybe there is a lesson in this for other clubs?

To close, may I express my thanks to my young team: Kevin Bunn, Conal Riches and the splendid 'Jimbo' (James Holliday), all of whom contribute greatly to making my job both easier and more enjoyable.

**Steven Davidson, Head Greenkeeper, Caldecott Golf & Leisure Club, Great Yarmouth.**

## Synthetic surfaces

Occasionally interest is shown in the use of synthetic surfaces on golf courses. In favour is: 1) Their ability to withstand use during adverse weather conditions. 2)

The reduced level of maintenance that is required in comparison to traditionally constructed greens. 3) The fact that they are environmentally friendly.

However, these apparent advantages are to some extent questionable. It is all very well to claim they are able to withstand use during adverse weather conditions, I do not argue with this statement, but surely the demand for course usage will be reduced during, say, heavy snow, as a result of user preference and the difficulty in getting to the site in question. Also, if only artificial tees and greens are being used on a course, what effect does play in these adverse weather conditions have on the approaches and surrounds to a green?

It is true that a much reduced level of maintenance is required in comparison to traditionally constructed greens. However, this should be qualified with the proviso that in the case of a synthetic green it has a limited life expectancy and will need replacing eventually at considerable cost. A traditional green constructed to high standards, using the correct materials and following a strict specification, theoretically has an indefinite life period.

The final point that they are environmentally friendly is true again, but it only tells part of the story. During the manufacture of glass fibre yarns a number of by-products are produced which are not perhaps so environmentally friendly. Also, moss, algae and weeds tend to thrive on areas of synthetic turf and need treatment using the appropriate chemicals. In an article written in the spring 1992 Eurogolf Business magazine, P Nederstigt states that due to the presence of a sand layer in some impregnated 'turf', there is a need

to spray artificials with pesticides due to seeds rooting in this layer.

Surely there are more points against the use of these surfaces than points for: 1) They possess an unnatural colour which generally detracts from the aesthetic appearance of the course and can also cause glare. 2) They are prone to invasion by mosses and algae due to their inherent dampness and low fertility, thus requiring regular remedial measures. 3) They give poor playing characteristics. In the same article mention is made to problems having arisen as regards the playing quality of these surfaces, but surely it must be stressed that the playing quality of a surface is its most important factor in deciding whether to use it or not. Bell, Baker and Canaway (1985) showed that ball/surface interactions included ball bounce resilience, rolling resilience, friction and spin. On synthetic surfaces it is difficult to judge pace and borrow and the surface lacks 'bite', thus reducing the effects of back-spin due to lack of deformation when the ball impacts. 4) Clippings and debris from the fairway fall on to the surfaces and a resultant accumulation of litter occurs which effects the trueness. 5) They have a very high replacement cost. 6) Home advantage occurs.

Having read this you will be under the impression that I am totally against the use of synthetic golf courses. On the contrary. There is a place for them, with areas of urbanisation being a prime example. However, their place must be at present generally regarded as being rather limited to, for example, teeing areas during the winter months.

**J H E Spencer, Advisory Agronomist, STRI, Bingley, West Yorkshire.**

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## EVENTS DIARY

**September 7-9: IoG Show, Peterborough, Northants**

**September 14: Supreme Mowing seminar on maintenance of cutting cylinder, Irvine Golf Club, Irvine. Details from Linda Adams: 0709 873436.**

**September 14-15: The Hayter Challenge Tournament Final, Sand Moor Golf Club, Leeds**

**September 24-26: Ryder Cup, The Belfry, Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire**

**October 11-12: Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award, Aldwark Manor.**

**October 12-13: Kubota Challenge, The Belfry, Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire**

**December 6-7: ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year Award, Aldwark Manor.**