

The Last Word

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

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.