

Advice left wanting

May I take this opportunity to pass a comment on a couple of articles in the last two editions of the magazine that perhaps help to demonstrate the inconsistency of agronomic advice being given to greenkeepers, but perhaps also the short-sighted and false economy of some of our golf clubs.

Firstly, the very fine detailed account of the building of the new greens at Birkdale. It seems a lot of trouble and hard work went into the removal of the offending "organic" soil and its subsequent replacement with a sandier rootzone. Why then replace the old *Poa* turf over this new material, surely an opportunity to instantly replace this with new fescue/bent turf grown on a sandy rootzone or of the washed variety was missed. Even STRI's Jeff Perris comments that "It will however take a long time to amend the turf from annual meadow grass to one containing more of the desirable bents and even fescues". Was this decision one of purely economic grounds, perhaps the "toughening" and remodelling aspect of the project took greater priority than the true links turf on which we assume we want to play.

Secondly, the merits of replacement of the old *Poa* turf on the new rootzone material is clearly called into question by an article in the following month's magazine, again by an STRI advisor, this time Mike Canaway. Especially interesting is the data on performance after wear and filtration rates on the new turf types laid on a sandy rootzone. Even though a *Poa* turf was not tested, comparison can surely be made. I am sure that we can all assume that the *Poa* turf in question has a very high probability of containing a large amount of organic matter, prone to disease and even if thinly cut, must still contain, in part, the "undesirable organic soil". Mike Canaway states: "Clearly the purpose of a sand-based green is to provide free draining conditions. If the turf supplied caps the rootzone, then clearly much of the effort put into golf green construction has been lost." Mike finally appears to recommend the use of the "Coronet" washed turf as having "no detrimental effects on playing quality" and being *Poa* free.

May I therefore suggest that we have a well respected advisory body contradicting itself in its recommendations and can I also ask if the option to put washed fescue/bent turf on the new greens at Birkdale was suggested and subsequently turned down on purely economic grounds. I have no doubt that in time with the correct remedial programme bents and fescues will return to the greens at Birkdale and having a free draining rootzone will be a big help. We are all familiar with the recommended process, but we are also familiar with the facts that it can be a long hard road, one that sometimes falls foul from the pressures of irate golfing

In admiration of Tom O'Brien

After reading, with great interest, your article on the remodelling of Royal Birkdale, I felt I must write and express my admiration for the honesty and sheer guts of Tom O'Brien. It takes a special kind of man to admit his mistakes in such a frank manner.

We have all made mistakes, some large and some small. If we are lucky we get away with them, if we are very lucky, nobody notices them. For your mistakes or oversights to be seen and discussed by, who knows?, many millions, is a burden not many men could carry.

Two years ago a very dear friend and colleague of mine took his own life after dam-

age was caused to some of his greens, he felt, wrongly, that he was at fault.

Tom O'Brien can retire assured that our industry is the poorer for the loss of a man of his calibre.

He is right when he says that the club would not spend £300,000 on the greens just because they were cut too short.

His comments on the agronomic advice he received should also make a few people take a long hard look in the mirror.

Enjoy your retirement Tom, you've earned it!

Peter Wisbey, Pinheiros Altos, Algarve, Portugal

members who often wish to forsake the far-off resulting quality of putting green turf for short-term colour and softness (remember the 5 wood syndrome) and regularly comment on the seemingly continuous aeration treatments

I have perhaps been lucky that I find even with a very limited budget and high levels of play, that my greens sustain an ever increasing population of bents and fescues. Am I lucky in applying the right programme of treatments, or being in total control of policy and having no greens committee? I can clearly state that in all areas of performance fescues and bents outperform *Poa* any day. Even this winter my greens have been in play, they have stayed firm and been disease free, so perhaps I am biased against *Poa*. I have also previously seen thatchy, fusarium ridden *Poa* turf removed from a green, closely boxed (thinly cut), the rootzone replaced with the intention of being more free draining and re-contoured and the old *Poa* turf replaced. To this day, probably over 12 years later the green is still *Poa*, prone to disease and remains soft during wet periods, no improvement in performance whatsoever. I sincerely hope Birkdale's results are markedly better.

Paul Copsey, course manager (among other things) at Barnehurst Golf Course, Bexleyheath, Kent

Ultimate challenge?

Your news column last month had a story relating to long holes. We have a 620-yard par 5 (medal tee), 602-yard (yellow tee) par 5 9th hole. Whilst Knaresborough would appear to be longer, bear in mind that the original medal tee, now used as the 18th medal tee position, would have added a further 40 yards to the hole, and the green is surrounded on three sides by a spinney which drops down 10-15 feet almost immediately.

The hole was reduced in length as we felt

that it was too long, bearing in mind the undulations that exist as well. We have had a certificate designed which will be awarded to any player achieving a birdie off the medal tees in competition, and have had about a year's supply (6) printed!

Steve Rumball, Chalgrave Manor Golf Club, Luton (due to open in May)

Rakes' progress

I am writing to inquire if any other golf courses have had the same experience with plastic headed rakes as we are experiencing at Delamere Forest Golf Club.

In 1993 we purchased 75 rakes and had no problems until the frosts, which started in October of last year. We now have 43 useable rakes, as the rest seem to have shattered in use since the onset of hard frosts.

We have contacted the manufacturer who says he is unaware of any problems, and that the plastic manufacturer assured him that the plastic is not at fault. He suggested we must have heavy-handed golfers.

For this reason, would other courses like to inform me if they have such clumsy members and if their plastic-headed rakes have withstood the winter intact.

PN Bertenshaw, course manager, Delamere Forest Golf Course, Cheshire

Just great, Sam

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Samantha Flint at head office for putting on a great ladies programme at the National Conference. Everything from accommodation, meals and especially the trips were great. Thank you very much, Sam, for making it an interesting and very enjoyable few days.

Edna Small