

In the clutches of pythium

Royal Porthcawl Course Manager David Ward looks back at the disease which hits his course just before this year's Walker Cup match.

Royal Porthcawl will go down in history as the venue for a magnificent performance by Great Britain and Ireland's amateur golfers who inflicted a rare defeat on their American cousins in the Walker Cup match in September.

The whole occasion was a triumph for all concerned not least for Course Manager David Ward and his team who survived an outbreak of disease which affected the Royal Porthcawl greens just before the event.

Now two months after the Walker Cup David can look back, reflect and analyse the events leading up to and after the match.

"Fortunately the disease affected the presentation of the greens but not the quality of the putting surfaces. The daily stimp-meter readings showed the greens to be running evenly at 10 feet," recalls David.

"A preventative spray had been applied three weeks earlier as the odd and feint yellowing patch – as with fusarium – could be seen on the 16th green. Taking no chances all greens were again sprayed but 72 hours later the disease had ripped through five greens with early signs of the disease showing on a further three," explained David.

"It was running randomly through the sward, sometimes forming into circular areas. The affected areas were a brown/orange colour and it was difficult to ascertain which grass species were affected most."

The agronomists appointed by the club and the R&A diagnosed the disease as Take-All Patch as the circular areas showed the classic signs of the disease but the extent and rapid spread were unusual and it was decided to send soil samples to a plant pathology unit for further diagnosis. In the meantime Rimidin was used at its maximum dosage rate.

The prolonged dry spell and the need for irrigation may have contributed to the outbreak.



David Ward (centre) with his team

"The club extracts water from an on-site bore hole and the pH of the water does not change dramatically even in drought conditions," explained David. "Water samples tested in September '95 had a pH reading of 7.3 while a reading of 7.6 had been recorded in August '94."

Pop-up irrigation was kept to a minimum and supplemented by hand watering. Ridges and the tops of greenside bunkers are the areas that stress out the most and where hand watering is most concentrated.

"These were the areas that were severely hit by the disease. We then stopped night time irrigation altogether and restricted hand watering even further in an attempt to reduce the spread of the disease," said David.

"In isolated areas the Catch 22 situation applied when turf affected by drought mingled with turf affected by disease.

"After 14 stressful days the disease finally stopped spreading. The fungicides used appeared to have had little or no effect while reducing the irrigation had certainly helped to slow the spread

and a drop in day and night time temperature did have a beneficial effect."

The orange colour faded to dull brown and the early signs of natural regeneration could be seen in some areas although other areas were completely lost.

Laboratory Diagnosis revealed that Take-All Patch was not detected but that the disease was the even rarer Pythium.

"Pythium is at its most destructive in hot humid weather and increases at an alarming rate. The Lab report concluded by saying that there is no approved product available in the UK to control Pythium," revealed David.

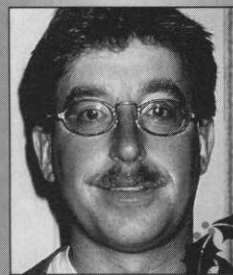
"It would appear that climatic changes, whether it be wettest winters or driest summers are bringing about problems in turf management which have not been seen before in this country.

"In my view it is important that information is pooled and therefore it would be interesting to hear from greenkeepers, plant pathology units and pesticide manufacturers about the problems they have encountered this year and how they see trends

developing," said David.

● If you have similar experiences to that of David Ward at Royal Porthcawl or perhaps are an agronomist involved in the identification and cure of unusual diseases this summer and would like to share his or her experiences please contact Greenkeeper International on 01347 838581.

WHAT I'D LIKE FOR CHRISTMAS



Norbert Lischka, Hamburger GC, Falkenstein, Germany:

"More hand mowers and from a personal point of view that my family stays healthy."

