

# Hung, drawn and quartered

**Alistair Connall, Course Manager at Collingtree Park Golf Club explains the background to the well documented problems experienced in the lead up to and during the recent British Masters.**

I think I now know how people felt before being hung, drawn and quartered or being found guilty without a trial.

In over 30 years of greenkeeping I have experienced many highs and lows but never anything as bad as during this year's British Masters.

It has been said in some papers that the greens were vandalised, burned by over application of fertiliser, that the plant was killed by the use of chemical trying to control annual meadow and other means that defy description.

I would like, in this article, to give my view and then let others form their own opinion.

Collingtree is still a fairly new golf course, constructed on a pure sand base and sown out with Penn cross. Unfortunately the predominant grass species in the sward is now annual meadow which seeds almost continually.

During the past 14 months we have been implementing a soil exchange programme in conjunction with overseeding to try and create both a healthier root zone along with a more manageable grass sward.

Until the beginning of August there were no problems with the putting surfaces except for the annual meadow grass continuing to flower.

A highly successful professional Seniors event was held during the last week of June and all the comments were very favourable from the players regarding the conditions of greens, tees, fairways and roughs. From the completion of that event through the month of July cutting heights were slightly raised and a regular maintenance programme of top dressing and feeding, using both granular and liquid materials followed.

The grass plant only started to show some signs of stress in early August and symptoms seemed to indicate leaf spot. An application of fungicide was applied to all the greens.

At this time not all the greens were showing signs of decline, however, within a week, all greens were going the same way.

Temperatures for that ten day period in mid August were extremely high, although the surfaces and the root zone were never allowed to dry out and the sand almost seemed to bake. To try to help the plant grass clippings were never boxed in the build up to the tournament.

A further application of fungicide was applied ten days after the first sign of the problems showing themselves.

By this stage all greens had

areas of discoloured patches, brown in colour as if the plant was going further into decline and it seemed a Catch 22 situation. We either kept the height of cut up or continued with the programme that had been successful for the Seniors event with more light top dressing to keep a true surface. We chose the latter.

The previous year for the British Masters the height of cut

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was slightly higher and the greens were turf ironed for speed. Then the seed heads were a problem and green tended to spike and when it rained that was another worry. This year the decision was taken to go the other way.

The course was closed for one week prior to the tournament and during that time an autumn and winter fertiliser was applied. The Sunday of tournament week all greens were sprayed with a colouring dye.

Used on a trial area this proved quite satisfactory however hindsight proved that the greens may have looked better with the discoloured areas left showing. With the grass plant thin and heavy rain on the first day of the tournament the top dressings which had been used to keep surfaces smooth looked even worse.

Unfortunately it doesn't seem to matter how good the rest of the course is - tees, fairways, roughs etc are never mentioned.

It would appear that the climatic conditions during August ie. very warm weather plus the pure sand root zone and the tight mowing caused the Poa to complete its life cycle. The results were well documented.

Laboratory diagnosis proved that there was no disease present to cause such a rapid deterioration and it would appear to have been a straight physiological problem.

I'm sure that there are people who, either saw the course on television, read about it in the press or in reading this article, have experienced similar conditions with sand constructions perhaps not to the extent of Collingtree. I would certainly look forward to hearing their views.

Finally it is pleasing to know that the grass plant is now recovering perhaps quicker than this writer, but it does prove rightly or wrongly annual meadow grass can survive.

## Yorkshire course scoops top UK honours

Rudding Park Golf, on the outskirts of Harrogate, has beaten 300 clubs from around the country to the coveted £5,000 Best Environmentally Designed and Managed Course Award in a competition organised by ground care specialist Amazone.

The £1.5 million 18 hole course, set in the Rudding Park resort's spectacular 18th century grounds, is no stranger to awards. It reached the finals of the same competition last year, but won only the North of England category.

This year entries came in from the four corners of the UK and were of an 'unprecedented standard', say the event's judges, who visited all the short listed courses.

Rudding Park Golf was designed by leading course architect Dr Martin Hawtree, and its four miles of fairways, including flower meadows and woodland, are already recognised as a haven for flora and wildlife.

Environmental information boards detail points of interest, and its meticulously designed

woods and lakes now prove as irresistible to many of Britain's native species as they do to hapless golfers.

Managing Director Mark Mackaness said, "Being the best at anything is always a tremendous achievement, and when it involves an area of the business which competes against the challenges of nature, it's all the more rewarding.

"There is so much more work to be done to build on the solid environmental foundations stones we have laid

during the first year, and we are eagerly looking forward to putting the prize money to valuable use."

The course is part of a golf complex which also has an 18 bay floodlit driving range and a PGA teaching academy equipped with state of the art video swing analysis.

Rudding Park's 2,000 acres also play host to Rudding House; one of the north's leading conference and banqueting venues which, from next Spring, will include a 50 room four star hotel.