

# No feet of clay from Kedleston's Mr Sand Man

**Dave Leatherland talks with Scott MacCallum about the major change his club is currently undertaking.**

Let me outline the following scenario to you. For 23 years you have been Head Greenkeeper at what is widely regarded to be the best course in the county. You know the course like the back of your hand. Whatever is thrown at you in the way of disease, weather conditions or general freak of nature you know what to do. You can handle it. Everything runs with the precision of a Swiss watch...

Then the decision is taken to dig up the clay based greens and replace them with USGA spec sand based greens.

How would you feel? ...A touch concerned, a tad disconcerted, a little bit worried?

Exactly that happened to Dave Leatherland, Head Greenkeeper at Kedleston Park, near Derby.

"I was absolutely terrified," confessed Dave, as he looked back two years to when the decision was taken to re-construct every green on the course.

"After 23 years of being at Kedleston and managing clay, parkland greens I would be working with USGA spec sand greens

with creeping bent. I told myself it was just a new learning experience and I would have to start all over again," said Dave, who readily paid tribute to BIGGA's education programmes which helped to ease him through the transition.

In fairness Dave was fully involved in the decision making process and was in little doubt that it was the best way to go.

"The existing clay based greens had been designed in 1946 to retain water and were excellent in the summer months but flooded in the winter.

"The members had spent a lot of money on the clubhouse six years ago and when the VAT money became available this year the members told the club that it could have the money as long as it was spent on the course.

Kedleston Park is beautiful parkland course set in the grounds now part of the National Trust but previously the Estate of Lord Curson and the late Lord Scarsdale. Widely regarded as the best course in Derbyshire it has hosted the Midland Professional Championship, the English Amateur and the English Boys in 1975



**Dave Leatherland: massive task in digging up the clay based greens to replace them with USGA spec**

which was won by a young lad by the name of Faldo.

Resident Professional is David J Russell, a former European Tour two time winner and stalwart for many years and it was DJ who brought European Golf Design to the club to speak to the members and EGD recommended Craig Cook as designer and constructor of the new greens.

"Before the work began I said that I wanted to see some of Craig's work and I flew to Powers Court in Ireland which he

designed and constructed.

"As soon as I saw the end product I thought 'yeh, that's for us'. I also spoke to the young American Head Greenkeeper and asked him what he thought of the design and construction," explained Dave.

The decision was taken not just to rebuild the greens but to redesign them and in some cases to relocate them, adding around 150 yards to the length of the course, as well as amending the existing greenside bunkering.

The work has been phased with seven greens already finished with five more next March with the remaining six before the Millennium.

"We worked closely with Craig on where he was going to take the drainage and on matters regarding the irrigation. His foreman was on site permanently and he would come for three days at a time to make sure everything was going according to plan," explained Dave.

Of those already done – the 6th, 13th and 15th – were seeded in April of last year while the others – the 7th, 8th, 10th and 14th – were seeded in mid October.

"I feel we missed out on three of four weeks of seeding with the first four and didn't get a good coverage of seed before the winter set in. That encouraged a little poa to get in but we hand picked it all and hopefully we've got on top of it. We were playing on the greens on May 31."

The root zone mix was Dave's decision and he decided on an 85% sand 15% peat mix.

"The standard is probably 95-5 but I wanted to incorporate a little more peat and the contractor had no worries about that."

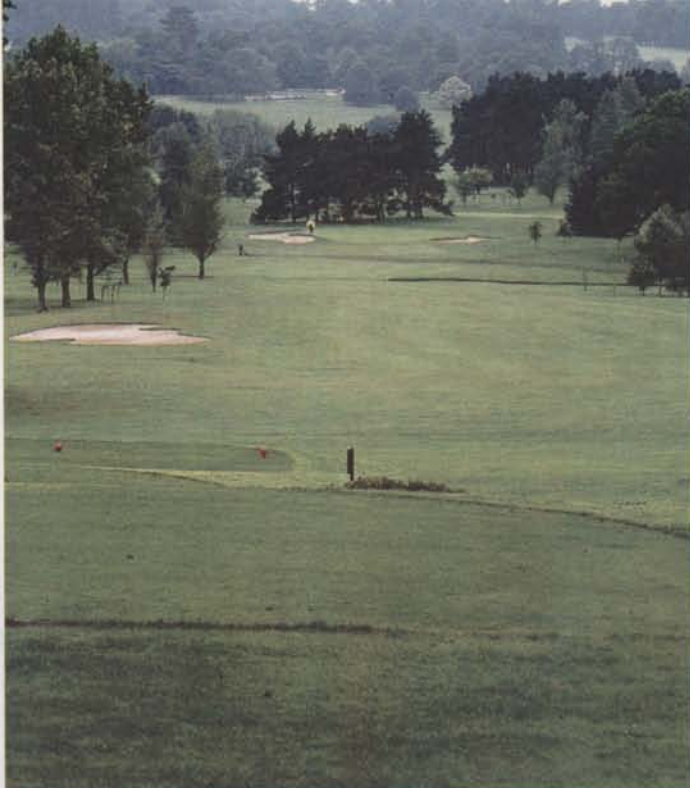
It was decided to sow Providence Creeping Bent which didn't take long to establish itself.

"With the last three greens we were cutting them five weeks later. I'm still bringing down the cutting heights. It's a patient game we're playing. I was probably bringing them down a millimetre every ten days during the growing in period but now we are cutting them every day seven days a week," explained Dave.

Until the remaining 11 greens are laid and established Dave and his team are left with a situation where they are managing some clay based greens and two sets of USGA spec sand based greens of slightly differing ages.

"It is a problem. I would have liked to have seen them all done in the one scoop but obviously the members wouldn't have taken too kindly to that. However, they were extremely patient when having to play off temporary greens during the rebuilding work.

"The main difficulty is on the playability side as the old greens are still quicker than the new."



It has also seen major changes in Kedleston's feeding regime.

"The old greens are fed perhaps three times a year while with the new greens it is every two weeks with a Rigby Taylor 12-0-6. It's a little and often especially with the weather we've been having and the leaching which has been caused."

If any members had doubts about the validity of the decision to make such a fundamental change to the golf course the weather during the club's Jubilee Week put their minds at rest.

"In the thunder storms the new greens were the only ones which didn't flood and remained playable. The members were over the moon and were shouting that the others should be done as soon as possible," said Dave, who revealed that the cost was working out at around £19,000 per green.

Dave's initial reservations are now well behind him and he is relishing the challenge that lies ahead.

"I'm excited by the prospect of 18 new greens. It's almost like having a completely new golf course.

"I would say to anyone who finds himself in the same position that it is not as scary as it seems. You hear reports about how different sand greens are and what complications they cause but, and I'm touching wood here, I haven't had any real problems yet," said Dave who did say there was a couple of patches of Take-All on one of the greens but that once it had been treated it was fine.

He is fully aware of the differences between the two, fundamentally different, greens with which he is currently working.

"Things happen more quickly on sand based greens so you have

to be ready to react when necessary," said Dave.

Dave is quick to pay tribute to BIGGA and, in particular BTME, for giving him access to the information needed to cope with such a marked change in his working practices.

"I love Harrogate. I think it's the bees knees. I go every year and talk to other greenkeepers, not just from this country but abroad as well, and get ideas from them. It was through talking to guys up there that I got the confidence to do the job."

Dave is also quick to pay tribute to the rest of the club staff, and in particular, DJ and the club secretary Ken Wilson.

"We have a meeting every week and discuss what is happening out on the course and what the members have to say. At the end of the day they all think that it is DJ who is behind all the ideas and he has played all over the world, seen many golf courses and been able to bring back ideas. He doesn't get involved in the running of the golf course but I've learned things from him and he's learned from me.

"He is a front man who can explain to members in the bar why certain things are done," said Dave, who also plays with members every Saturday and learns what they think has been a good idea as well as what hasn't gone down so well.

What has been universally acclaimed, however, are the new greens and Kedleston is a fine example of how a potentially disrupting process can be undertaken by planning, professional execution and sound greenkeeping.



## EQUIPMENT INVENTORY

Equipment Inventory  
 Two GM 3000a  
 One GM 3  
 Four Super Certes  
 One 5300D  
 One set of Hydraulic Five  
 One Set of 214 Scarifiers  
 Two Sets of Five Ransomes  
 Magna  
 One Sisis Outfield Spiker  
 One Sisis Greens Slitter  
 One small Verti-drain  
 Three Victa 460  
 One Kubota 2150  
 One Ford 1710  
 One Ford 3600  
 One Massey Ferguson 20  
 One Prospread Top dresser  
 One Turf Iron  
 One Hardi Sprayer