

A temporary solution

By Sandy McDivot, Head Greenkeeper, Sludgecombe Pay and Play

Temporary greens. When any self respecting golf club member hears these two words its rather like Pavlov's dog, but instead of producing saliva they instead generate copious quantities of bile and venom ready to be used in describing the feelings they have for the resident Head Greenkeeper and the use of the above mentioned "temps" as they are now universally known. Now perhaps I am tarring them all with the same brush but I have to confess that for many years before I was in the noble profession I too was one of these members. I therefore feel I can write such a statement with some degree of inside knowledge of the unenlightened club member. Yes, shamed though I am of my torrid and despicable past, I was one of the uneducated masses generally referred to by greenkeepers as people without fathers. I thought nothing of giving the Greens Chairman of my local club the benefit of my wisdom on the above subject, after all I was seen as a better than average golfer and so was on my way to possessing total knowledge about all things concerning greenkeeping.

In my defence however, I have to say that the temps in use at this particular course were of the uniform circular type, cut out in early November and measuring about 30 square metres. Add to that a one in two slope, a standard size and overgrown hole and a surface so littered with frozen worm casts that putting on them became more akin to pin ball than golf and one could see my concern on their use.

As you can imagine my views on the subject have now taken on a different perspective and I feel I can write on the matter from both sides of the fence as it were. At Sludgecombe Pay and Play I am in the not uncommon position of having to cater for something in the region of 55,000 rounds a year. It is therefore desirable, during periods of inclement weather and zero growth that the greens are rested by way of the use of temporaries. As we are all aware, the vocation of Head Greenkeeper requires (above such other trivia as a knowledge of greenkeeping) the art of diplomacy and a gift for politics. So when the temporaries are required we, like all greenkeepers make an effort to: a) limit their use and b) ensure that they are in a reasonable condition and as much as possible approximating to that of the main greens. So we mow them at the same height of cut and at the same frequency, spray with worm killer, aerate, top dress, feed etc..

I thought that I was getting quite good at this until recently I and my assistant played a very busy and successful course within the vicinity of Sludgecombe and noted the aston-

ishing condition of its greens. Apart from learning that this course was even busier than my own in that it catered for some 60,000 rounds a year, it was like mine, about four or five-years-old with greens constructed of a sandy growing medium. But where as mine had already started on the slippery slope to *poa annua* dominance these were almost totally free of the wretched stuff. Desperate to find the secret that they were undoubtedly in possession of, I accosted a young greenkeeper who was innocently working nearby and subjected him to prolonged interrogation in an effort to learn the truth. Did they use some sort of chemical control? Were there armies of backup staff hand weeding the greens? Or were they employing some other unknown more sinister means?

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Well, to my disbelief, it was none of the above. It appeared it was all down to good greenkeeping. But as we continued on our way around the manicured turf we noticed their temporary green preparation was well under way, but these were no ordinary temps. These were huge great things equal in size to the main greens and generally placed in the regularly mown approach areas. They were all top dressed with sand and a large hole was already in place.

Maybe that was the secret I had been searching for. In vulnerable times remove all play from the main greens and bung them on the temps. With such large and well prepared alternatives the golfers are kept happy while the owners are kept equally happy as play is allowed to continue. The main greens remain the best in the area free of that pernicious weed we have all learned to despise, because with such a dense turf it has no room in which to invade. As I indicated earlier, it all

comes down to politics and keeping everyone happy.

Still on the subject of politics, how else can we give our greens the breather they so desperately need while at the same time avoiding the risk of a members revolution. After all there is nothing worse than revolting members. Well, one thing I have noticed over the years is how there is a breed of golfer that delights in playing every day, or as near as possible to it. They usually come in the guise of middle aged ladies or perhaps more commonly senior men. Their desperation in playing the game is totally lost on me as I have not taken a degree in psychiatry, but I have noticed they are not it would appear, in the slightest bit interested in the quality of the putting surface they are given. The only thing they require is that the course remains open. Give them the choice of eleven months of excellent greens but with the course closed for one month, or 12 months of diabolical greens and they will choose the latter every time. So I utilise the years of diplomatic experience I have developed and mid week when the above mentioned desperado's like to frequent the course, I shove them all on temps or as many as I can get away with. Any hint of complaint from them and I mention the other alternative ie the course closed situation. This is normally followed by hushed tones and a fevered rush to the 1st tee. This leaves the greens in a reasonably rested condition for when the more discerning and politically more powerful arrive at the weekend.

Maybe course architects and course owners alike should think about leaving room for a large temporary green on every hole within their design of a new course. This green could be fairly adjacent to the main green so as the length of the hole is not altered. It could incorporate a subtle slope to shed water. In fact maybe all of us should think not in terms of temporary greens but of a two green system such as they used to have in Japan, before the widespread use of creeping bent grass. Here they had two greens, one for the winter and one for summer use. I am not suggesting a purpose built USGA spec affair but just a simple low maintenance green that is prepared sometime in October and kept topped with a tees triple during the summer. I know this may sound like a lot of extra work but think of the benefits. Less play on the main greens means less aeration work and when aeration work is carried out we can all stay off them and allow them to breath for a good three or four months. The main greens go into the playing season in excellent condition while the secondary greens can enjoy eight or nine months of rest before the next winter. In fact it could be the answer to all our problems! Well, there again...