

Sandy McDivot responds to the flood of letters which appeared after his January article on Sand Based Greens

Drawing a line in the sand

Oh dear! I seem to have caused a bit of disturbance with my January article. Now I know how Glenn Hoddle must feel.

Firstly, can I say I quite obviously miscalculated somewhat on this particular article and I apologise to anyone who took exception to my words.

Please believe me when I say that no offence was ever intended. But in my defence can I point out that it has never been my intention for the articles to be taken as a statement of fact.

I have in the past written the odd one or two articles under my own name but on answering the general

As in my previous articles, this one was so over the top that I wrongly, as it happened, believed no one would accept it as completely factual. Rightly or wrongly I believe that it is sometimes good to have a bit of a laugh at oneself. My style may be condescending but it is also self-deprecating. Look at the great TV comedies we have in this country for instance. Fawlty Towers, Father Ted, Rising Damp or Home Front for example. Do they not painfully parody the worst aspects of us as a society? Are they not self-mocking but at the same time made all the more hilarious because there is a recognisable element of truth in

the facts get in the way of a good story. Sure there are huge generalisations in the article but I believed the readership would be able to decipher fact from fiction.

What I perhaps should have called the article was "Sand based and mainly non USGA specification greens at hugely underfunded, understaffed and colossal overplayed golf courses in Britain with typical British weather". Somehow though it did not quite have the same ring.

However I do still believe there are inherent weaknesses in sand based greens that can lead to problems particularly given our climatic conditions.

■ They do, initially at least, all suffer from a low CEC that will require additional feeding.

■ Spike and pitch marks are far more of a problem compared with good soil based greens regardless of the water that is applied to them. As a matter of interest I applied a maximum of one minute per sprinkler to my greens per night last year during a couple of weeks in August.

■ Given average playing levels and a realistic operating budget Poa annua invasion is almost inevitable and can end up dominating the sward in the long term. Initial poa annua invasion is by the annual form (poa annua annua) which always looks unsightly and greatly affects the quality of the surface.

■ Tolerance to wear is lower than that of a good soil based green. This is a point highlighted by Mark Jones in his response when he said that pin positions should be changed more often to limit wear and that the use of triplex mowers should be

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call from the magazine for more articles by greenkeepers, I decided to submit a few under the pseudonym of Sandy McDivot from Sludgecombe Pay and Play. I did this as the articles were of a light-hearted nature and chose this particular name so as no one would take them too seriously. Obviously in this respect, I did miss the mark by a mile. They are, at the end of the day, meant as a bit of light relief and are quite correctly placed at the end of the magazine after the more informative articles.

what they portray?

Of course I can in no way compare my simple offerings to these comic classics but I believe they do give balance to the magazine and are enjoyed by at least one person (thank you Richard Heaslip).

I must admit that in this last article and all the others that preceded it I have been guilty of writing the odd terminological inexactitude, as a politician may say. But as I am now a fully paid up member of the tabloid press may I borrow their motto and say you should never let

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avoided at all costs. This would be impossible in my position as I have 1.5 hectares of greens spread out over 200 acres, myself and three staff to hand mow and 20 year old mowers to do the job. When you add the fact that saturation golf, starting at around 7 am, is the norm you will appreciate my predicament. Neither my extremely hard working staff, or myself would relish the prospect of significantly adding to our standard 11-hour working day that we presently do for several months in the summer.

■ They are, to start with, very low in microbial activity and this can lead to specific disease problems due to the lack of antagonists and competition to pathogenic organisms.

■ As pointed out by Mark Jones, there are a mass of potential mistakes at the construction stage that can and will lead to additional problems later on.

■ Sand based greens are expensive and time consuming to construct.

But it is not only me that is having problems with their greens (although I must point out, I did greatly exaggerate the symptoms in the article). If there is one thing I can do it is observe. As I visit other courses I see the same problems replicated, especially when they are under resourced and over played. I was recently told of a very highly regarded Course Manager, and I mean one of the very best, state to a large audience that he had rebuilt two greens on his course recently. One was of sand based construction while the other used local soil. He stated that it was the one built with local soil that was performing the best.

Maybe I could be accused of mak-

ing life difficult for greenkeepers who are looking to reconstruct, although I seriously doubt that any committee members or owners would take someone called Sandy McDivot seriously.

On the other hand, maybe I am encouraging greenkeepers to take a closer look at the problems that they may encounter should they embark on the sand based route. I have seen this route followed at other clubs for no other reason than it appeared to be the done thing to do even though their original greens were of a very high quality. The result has been an unmitigated disaster of frightening proportions. Promises of perfection were made and after about a hundred grand has been spent, the result has been a big drop in standards, a totally demoralised work force and a membership that is baying for blood.

Of course, I am not saying that such greens should never be built. They can and are of tremendous value in the right circumstance. However I will stick my neck out and say that a well maintained, established soil based green in this country is as good a green you will find day in and day out anywhere in the world, so why change a winning formula.

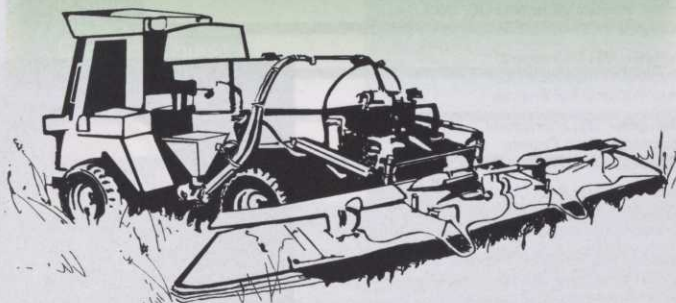
Once again I must apologise for leaving myself so open to misinterpretation in this article. It was poor judgment on my behalf.

Finally in response to Stephen Okula from Tenerife. Thank you very much for inviting me over to visit you. Shall we say two weeks in May and would it be alright to bring the wife and kids?

Sandy McDivot,
Sludgecombe Pay and Play.

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