

**Brian Turner, Course Manager at Sunningdale GC, takes a look at the stresses involved with the everyday running of a golf course and offers some advice**

# Stress.

## All part of the job?

The very meaning of the word stress is the physical, emotional and mental pressure which is experienced by most people in the modern day work place. In greenkeeping management stress is becoming more and more apparent, and part of this is due to the very high standards we set ourselves.

BIGGA was formed in 1987 to bring the profession of greenkeeping the respect it deserves.

**If the green is not dark green there must be something wrong with it**

**If the greens are not receptive and do not make a big pitch mark you are not putting on enough water**

**And when the greens become waterlogged and covered in disease, the golfer demands to know why you have ruined the greens**

We are not merely grass cutters, and turf management is essential for the success of a course.

Although we have come a long way since then, we still have not broken the barrier of respect we deserve.

Since the early 1970's after Tony Jacklin had won the British and US Opens, golf has boomed, and our presentation standards have risen

dramatically, with green speeds going crazy. I can remember working at Wentworth in the 70's when we cut the greens at 5mm once a day during tournaments. Today Chris Kennedy tells me the greens are cut three to four times a day at 3mm height of cut. This is stress, not only on the greenkeepers, but to the grass plant as well. These mowing heights cannot be maintained for long periods without the grass plant suffering from thinning out and disease.

Televised tournament golf has made our job more demanding, as golfers expect these playing conditions all the time, which is impossible as we know, but the golfer does not fully understand the reasons why.

Green speed seems to be the most important and talked about subject on the golf course. Why is it when a golfer says to us the greens are slow we take it as a criticism, yet when they say the greens are quick we take it as a compliment? I know that some golfers are as comfortable on slow greens as some are on fast. It does not matter how good your course presentation is or how good your tees and fairways are, the bottom line is if your greens are not quite perfect the course is not up to scratch.

You may have noticed that I have not mentioned bunkers. This is another contentious issue. I am sure we have all experienced the complaints that the sand is the wrong type and particle size, there is too much or not enough sand and it is unevenly distributed.

Water and fertiliser management can come under question by the golfer. If the green is not dark green there must be something wrong with it, and if the greens are not receptive

and do not make a big pitch mark you are not putting on enough water. On the other hand when the greens become waterlogged and covered in disease the golfer demands to know why you have managed to ruin the greens.

Aeration is the one task that causes most complaints, but I feel is the most important task in turf management. When is the right time to aerate? Never if the golfer has his way. This one operation gives the greenkeeper his biggest headache, especially if he is hollow tining or verti-draining.

Turf management is not an exact science, and in greenkeeping we experience peaks and troughs. Our aim should be to make these peaks and troughs into small ripples with sound management programmes that satisfy all parties within the golf club. This is not easy to do, but we must get across to golfers the importance of all tasks involved with sound practical greenkeeping management.

Good greenkeepers through experience, training, knowledge, and gut feeling know when to carry out particular work programmes, and how to peak their course for special events, giving all golfers a fair chance, and not tricking the greens up to ridiculous speeds.

To ease stress in greenkeeping management, sound policies must be laid down by the greenkeeper and committee and carried out with conviction and confidence, and with no fear of retribution from golfers.

In America many people have their personal 'shrink' to help them get through a stressful week. I wonder when the greenkeeper will be joining them.