



Aah
DANISH



This picture: August 2001. How the greens have developed, now showing 5-10cm of new rootzone development

Below: Ian Tomlinson



Ian Tomlinson describes some of the problems he has faced since beginning work as Course Manager at Rungsted Golf Club in Denmark.

Having worked in Switzerland for 14 years I returned to work in the UK for three years before my family and I decided to spread our wings once again and this time head for Denmark.

I became Course Manager of Rungsted Golf Club in July, 2000, and had just 24 days to prepare the course for the SAS Invitational Tournament!

Taking on such a challenge in the middle of the playing season and not understanding the course, the climate, or how the Danish Green Staff worked, pushed me to the limits of my greenkeeping abilities but thankfully the competition was a success.

So why Rungsted? The previous year the club held the final of the SAS Invitational with Scandinavia v The Rest of the World with stars such as Tiger

Woods, but after the competition the Poa greens failed due to stress and the members ended up playing temporary greens.

Before discussing the greens let us look at some worrying facts and imagine that in 2003 all greenkeepers in the UK were faced with the same prospect as Danish Greenkeepers. Today the only legal fungicide labelled for golf course use is Sportak, a systemic fungicide that has been used so much you may as well throw orange juice on the greens.

Imagine that in 2003 the only fungicide that you can use will be banned for use on golf courses along with all weedkillers. In fact all chemicals. Quite a daunting prospect for any greenkeeper but how long before UK greenkeepers are faced with the same situation?

In the Talking Heads feature in August some Course Managers/Head Greenkeepers were stating that they accepted having Poa greens and that you could not get rid of it and that standards would fall if they tried to eradicate the Poa. It is all too easy to say we manage the Poa when you know that you have an arsenal of fungicides available to you in your chemical storage room at the first sign of any disease.

The way forward is going back to traditional greenkeeping methods and trying to encourage fescue and bent grass to establish on the course, major aeration programmes and limit the use of water and fertiliser.

So let us go back to understand why the greens failed in 1999. The greens were 100% poa with 5cm of thatch. NPK had been applied on a regular

basis, greens were receiving 20 to 25 minutes of water every night but what is quite incredible is that six years ago a consultant had told Danish greenkeepers that aeration was bad for greens and so everyone stopped aerating. The result was at Rungsted we had 1cm of root growth and serious compaction problems.

Obviously trying to cut greens low for a major championship with no root growth the resulting failure was inevitable.

It would appear that many a golf course has been set back by poor agronomic advice in this country and with the prospect of all chemicals being withdrawn in two years time a rethink on greenkeeping practices is urgent. There is no quick fix solution here only a lot of very hard work ahead for most greenkeepers.

One man who has taken on the crusade is Chris Haspell. Chris has been in Denmark six years and has done an incredible job of turning 100% poa greens into high percentage fescue/bent greens at Falster where he worked. His traditional methods have not gone unnoticed, as he has now become Greenkeeping Consultant for the Danish Golf Union, offering advice to clubs who have found themselves in the same situation as Rungsted.

Just after the SAS last year the serious work on to the greens began. Soil tests showed we had huge excesses of fertiliser in the soil. The greens suffered with dry patch and Anthracnose disease. The irrigation water taken from a bore hole was of poor quality and turned the poa yellow if used on a regular basis (the course is only 500 m from the sea) and the irrigation system required major work to it.

The old greens still drain but the thatch holds the water on the surface. In August 2000 I hollow tined with 16mm hollow tines with a new Toro Procure aerator at

3cm spacings to remove as much thatch as possible, overseeded with 200 kgs of Bar 2 fescue/bent seed applied with a proseeder and applied 60 tonnes of top dressing. Solid tining was done with 8mm tines every two weeks followed by a light top dressing. In September we hollow tined again the same as above but did not top dress and applied 300 kg of seed. In October I verti-drained the greens with 12mm tines down to 30cm depth some six times in six weeks. I will not tell you what the members were saying.



Now, unlike the weather that you experienced in the UK from the autumn in 2000 through to the spring of 2001, we missed all the rain. Winter was perfect with cold dry weather and some snow. The temperature was down to -15 at times and I had some greens that had frost in them for three months. This was perfect for the greens as natural decompaction had taken place under the greens and fusarium was the last thing I was worried about. We also verti-drained the fairways in the autumn for the first time in the club's history. We had a very dry spring and summer and the fairways were in great shape without any fertiliser being applied. In the past four tonnes of fertiliser had been used on the fairways each season. The programme for the fairways in the future is deep aeration with the vertidrain and verticutting as required.

As mentioned previously the irrigation system left a lot to be desired. The first thing that I did was to have Bill Hawthorn come out to evaluate the performance

of the present system. I have worked with Bill for over 20 years and value his experience as a true professional. We had no isolation valves out on the course at all so if I had a burst on a green the whole system had to be drained down just to do one repair. To quote Bill, "The tees irrigation sys-

tem is a complete mess and we need to start all over again".

As we had so many other problem areas out on the course and needed major finance for new machinery it was decided to tackle the upgrade on the greens system in-house during the winter of 2000/2001 and the tee system in the winter of 2001/2002. Not only did we have seven different types of green sprinklers but also their spacings were out and then we discovered that the pipe loop around some of the greens was of different sizes. On the 15th green we discovered that the pipe down the left side of the green was a 50mm and the section round the back was 40mm and the right side of the green was laid with 32mm. It was imperative that we had each green irrigated with the same pressure and we installed new Logic impact sprinklers spaced out by Bill. The concern that each green was watered equally is because we have just installed an acid injector system, a Phairway 6,8 controller to correct the water quality problem and bring the water's pH down as the water from the bore hole is nearly pH 8 and the soil pH of the greens is 7.6 plus. I am pleased to say that the greens irrigation upgrade went very well and the difference in the greens with using water that I have regulated at pH 6.5 is incredible. Dry patch is less in evidence and disease also. We have reduced the amount of

irrigation being used to water the greens and tees by 75% compared to previous years.

It is not just one thing that will make the transition of poa greens into fescue/bent greens but at least by creating the right growing environment to encourage the finer grasses to succeed and sensible management I believe we have a good chance. One of Rungsted's members has been working every winter for seven years cleaning out the woodlands and allowing sunlight and air to enter the green and tees areas. One of my new French workers is a qualified tree surgeon so guaranteeing future good management of the woodlands.

Knowing the intense work programme that is required on the greens obviously needs the support of the Board and membership and to help the members to understand what was required in the coming five years I held a members' evening with slides and they had the chance to ask questions and understand the problems. I have 100% backing from the Board and when I was asked if I wanted to take the SAS Invitational the next three years I explained that you cannot embark on the major aeration programme to remove the thatch and also expect to have firm fast greens for the world's top golfers.

The result was that the club have turned down the competition and I

have hollow tined four times in four months so far this year once again with 16mm tines at 3cm spacings and am aiming at five times, weather permitting. I am looking to apply 750kg of Bar2 seed to the greens and 300 tonnes of top dressing this season. Is there any evidence that in the 18 months since I took on the challenge we have made any progress with the greens? The winter certainly helped, as did the dry spring. We now have between five and 10cm of root depth on most greens and a 10 to 15% increase in Bent and Fescue in the sward. The only way the new seed will survive is to keep the thatch dry and open hence the aggressive aeration programme. The members have been very supportive and can see the difference in the greens already and as we get more top dressing into the thatch layer so the greens will become firmer. Following a recent meeting with the Board members there appears to be no opposition to continuing with the aggressive aeration and top dressing programme in 2002. Fertiliser is 8.0.0 with supplemented liquids, trace elements and seaweed & Humic acid supplied by Tim Le Mesurier, of GreenBest, with whom I have worked closely for many years.

Jim Arthur states in his "Practical Greenkeeping" book that it is a very brave man who embarks on a 8.0.0



Left: The condition of the greens in 1999 after the S.A.S

Above: The greens at the start of 2000. Note the 5-6cm of thatch on the core sample and the absence of rootzone

Bottom: The Rungsted Greenkeeping Team in their uniforms supplied by the Kansas Clothing Company. Our members now comment on how professional our team looks as we look after the course.

seeding these greens with a creeping bent grass in Denmark is doomed to failure with no chemical control and the Nitrogen tax. What I didn't realise is that Denmark is one of the largest fescue seed producers in Europe which gives you hope that if it will grow naturally like that in this climate we should be able to make it grow on the golf course.

I am extremely fortunate to have a staff who have accepted me and taken up the challenge with me to make Rungsted not only the best course in Scandinavia but one of the best in Europe. Proof that we are heading in the right direction is that Golf World has just rated the course in 54th position in its Top 100 courses in Continental Europe when it was in 87th position in 1999.

I have four Danish greenkeepers, two French greenkeepers and an excellent Danish right hand man called Johnny Mortenson. The staff are really wanting to learn and there is a greenkeeping school at the top of Denmark but the courses are spread out over 11 weeks each year right throughout the playing season which

is a major problem. After some serious thought and talking with David Golding at the GTC and Huw Parry at Elmwood we have come up with a way to educate my staff to NVQ Level 2. I have my D32/33 Assessor qualification. Five of my staff have enrolled with Elmwood College and we have bought the training logbooks from the GTC. We are following the theory notes that go with the Level 2 course that the STRI helped produce. I shall assess my staff and sign them off on the practical work for each of the tasks and when I feel that one of them is fully competent he shall go to Elmwood for a few weeks to be assessed on all the underpinning knowledge and also reassessed on some practical tasks to make sure that the college is confident that I am myself assessing to the industry standards. The staff are very excited about having the chance to obtain an NVQ in greenkeeping and believe that it will not only make them special in Denmark but will allow them more opportunity to advance their career within Europe having a recognised qualification behind them.

Although fluent in French with a working knowledge of German nothing quite prepared me for the Danish language. I am trying hard to master it but when nearly every Dane speaks perfect English it is all too easy to carry on daily life in English.

We work out of a first class maintenance facility. We have a fully fitted workshop and I am fortunate to have three qualified mechanics on the staff and breakdowns are very quickly put right. The staff quarters and canteen are cleaned and washed every day by outside contractors (now that is something that you should ask your committee to implement at your next meeting, I would probably hear their

reply from here!) We have a full range of equipment from all the major suppliers.

There was talk before I joined the club about bringing in an Architect to see about lengthening some of the holes and assessing the bunkers which are in a terrible condition and need major renovation work to them. I am fortunate in that Ron Kirby who has designed Jack Nicklaus' courses in Europe for the last 16 years and has worked with Trent Jones Snr and Gary Player is a family friend and Ron came out in May of this year for two days and has given us some invaluable help on the way forward for the course. Ron was somewhat surprised that six of the holes are growing on pure peat which goes down some 18 metres before reaching solid ground. This as you can imagine creates a special maintenance practice. The grass on these fairways grows 2 cm every night! It is worth noting that Alistair MacKenzie's brother designed the course back in 1937.

Following a recent meeting of the Board, finance has been made available to start the bunker reconstruction programme. The first investment will be a 3.5 tonne 360 degrees excavator on tracks. I have sourced the materials required from sand to fill and turf and will start in October 2001. We are going to push ahead with as many bunkers as possible through out the autumn and winter and will fit in the tees irrigation upgrade as well when ground conditions means that construction of the bunkers is not possible.

The coming years look like being very interesting and exciting and I look forward to giving the members the course they deserve after all the disruption that they are facing today.

programme when greens have been used to a high NPK diet and that a softly softly approach is required which is very good advice. I am aiming at 100 to 120kg/Ha of Nitrogen this year on the greens but it is a fine line between letting the poa struggle and still having some sort of playing surface for the 1100 members. As we manage to get more fine grass to establish so I hope to reduce the Nitrogen levels each year so making the poa struggle even more.

Another reason why Nitrogen is being limited is the fact that the Danish Government has levied a tax on every Kilo of Nitrogen used. I think it is quite obvious that building greens to USGA specification and

