

Royal Portrush Golf Club

I would like to congratulate you on the March edition of Greenkeeper International. In particular the excellent articles by Chris Haspell and Henry Bechelet. In support of both these articles I have put together some notes on how we manage our greens at Royal Portrush GC in order to encourage the development of fescue, at the expense of undesirable grasses like poa annua. Granted, it may not be appropriate for all courses, but keeping Greenkeeping simple really does work.

As a Greenkeeper of over 30 years experience, on parkland, heathland, and links courses, I have lived through the time when high levels of nutrients and water, combined with preventative applications of fungicide, were advocated by "advisors". This resulted in poa dominated soggy bogs.

Alarm bells started ringing in my head when at a meeting with other Greenkeepers, myself, and Alan Strachan, Course Manager of Royal County Down, found ourselves defending our policy of trying to grow fescue and bent greens, as opposed to Poa greens.

Another alarm call was when one of my young trainees was told at college, that invasion by poa annua was inevitable, and to "just live with it!"

In general what follows has, and is working for us. Yes we do still have some poa in our greens, but it is our declared intention to rid ourselves of this pernicious weed, and not just "live with it". Our STRI agronomist visits in the autumn, and has seen a continuous improvement in the botanical composition, in favour of fescue and at the expense of poa annua. We play on our main greens all year round, (we don't have temporary greens, only frost holes on the fairway)

FERTILITY

We have a sandy mineral soil, with a p.h. of 7.4 which although free draining, has good nutrient retaining capacity.

This relatively high p.h. (as far as bent grass is concerned) is very conducive to micro-organism and bacterial activity. This helps to convert organic matter into nutrients, and helps to keep the dreaded thatch at bay.

In general I would regard 5 grams of N per sq metre per season as being fine for us. (Last year we only applied 4 grams of N per sq metre) This is normally applied at 2-3 grams per metre in the spring. The nutrient source is split between sulphate of ammonia, and an organic source. The remaining 2 grams of N is spread over the rest of the season, generally in half a gram per sq metre applications or less.

We also apply 5 grams of K per sq metre. This is divided between spring and autumn, prior to our overseeding operations.

In addition, we apply 10 lts of liquid seaweed per hectare mixed with 10 kg iron sulphate at about six week intervals winter and summer.

MOWING EQUIPMENT

We use both triplex and pedestrian mowers. For the most part the triplex mowers are used on our Valley Links, the pedestrian mowers on the Dunluce. The ideal would be to use pedestrian mowers on both courses, however our present staffing level prevents this. (15 men, including myself and a mechanic, for 45 holes plus putting green's and practice areas).

Our height of cut is 5-mm during summer and 6-mm during the winter. Frequency of cut is seven days a week during summer, and as required during the winter.

My feeling is that this 5-mm minimum height of cut is of paramount importance in the development of fescue. If fescue is cut below this height, it does not have sufficient leaf area to photosynthesise effectively and therefore dies. The resulting bare/thin areas are then colonised by poa annua, with all of its faults and failings.

Our green speed would normally be around 9 ft during the summer. Speeds of 10-12 ft are produced for competitions by double cutting and or light rolling.

We have changed our pedestrian mowers from units that had a clip rate of 120 clips per yard, to units that have a clip rate of 225 clips per yard. These units have increased our green speed without having to lower the height of cut.

AERATION AND OVERSEEDING

We use a variety of aeration methods, which include the VertiDrain, Toro ProCore, Toro Hydroject, sorrel rollers, and a ProSeed.

We hollow core at the beginning of September, using the ProCore fitted with 6-mm tines, to a depth of about 60-mm at 30-mm centres. This is combined with our autumn overseed operation, as follows: Hollow core, remove cores from putting surface, overseed and top-dress, using the ProSeed. (This machine has a spiked roller, followed by a seed hopper, followed by a top-dressing hopper, followed by a contra rotating brush.) The ProSeed machine is then used in two more directions without applying any seed or top-dressing. This makes thousands more holes, and brushes the seed and top-dressing well into the surface. We have found this method gives a great initial strike and long term establishment. The putting surface following this is quite good and has not as yet resulted in any complaints from our membership. The seed mixture we use is as follows: 50% Barcrown, 30% Bargreen, and either 20% Lance or Heriot, at 15 grams per sq metre.

Deep aeration of greens and aprons is carried out in December/January using the VertiDrain, to a depth of 250-mm at 55-mm centres with 12-mm tines.

The greens and aprons are then solid tined with our ProCore unit fitted with 6-mm tines, during January/February. The next aeration is again with the ProCore fitted with the 6-mm solid tines, prior to our spring over-seed. This is the same procedure as in the autumn but without the core collection.

The Hydroject is used about six times during the spring and summer. More if the weather is dry!

VERTICUTTING AND TOP-DRESSING

Verticutting takes place about every two weeks, depending on the weather conditions. Light grooming about once or twice a week, again depending on the weather. Caution is required with these operations, as over use can adversely affect the fescue. We have very little thatch anyway.

During this coming season I will do more brushing as opposed to grooming and Verticutting, as I think this is less damaging to the fescue.

Top-dressing is carried out about 5 or 6 times during the year, at about 750 grams per sq metre, slightly more when hollow-coring. We use a mixture of our own dune sand and an anaerobically digested compost at a ratio of 8 sand 1 compost, we also add 10-15 kg of composted seaweed meal per cubic metre of top-dressing.

IRRIGATION

My aim is to encourage deeper root development, in order to improve drought resistance. The Hydroject has been a great help in this.

Our low nitrogen inputs also reduces the grass plants requirement for water, and has the added benefit of producing a harder wearing turf.

I also feel that the use of liquid seaweed helps with this, by stimulating root development, and by toughening the grass plant.

During the last five years we have only watered our Dunluce greens on three occasions. Our Valley links has manual take off points behind the greens, and has not been watered.

This said I would not let the greens die through lack of water, as I have a wife, three children and a dog to support!

DISEASE MANAGEMENT

We have very little disease. However, any we do have is very minor and does not require any fungicide. We have not used any for at least the last five years.

We occasionally get the odd bit of corticum, this is because of the low nitrogen input. This generally occurs in late summer if the rainfall has been high (Nitrogen being leached). Increasing the aeration gets rid of this without recourse to fungicides.

Fusarium is not a problem as again this is due to the low nitrogen inputs, and the very low percentage of poa annua in the sward.

WEED MANAGEMENT

We don't use any weed-killer on our greens or aprons, as these chemicals will kill or at the very least stunt the developing seedling grasses. Weed control on greens is by hand weeding, apart from spot treatment of the odd bit of clover.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

We have the full support of our Links Committee and keep them informed about what we are doing, and rely on them to pass on the information to the membership. I also encourage my staff to talk to our Members and Visitors, informing them of our policy, and what they are doing.

Fight the good fight.

Sorry about this being so long winded but I felt the above mentioned contributors deserved some support for their opinions.

Joe Findlay, Head Greenkeeper, Royal Portrush GC

Thanks

May I take this opportunity to thank all the Bernhard representatives for the excellent organisation and friendly welcome to us all on this excellent trip to the GCSAA show in Atlanta. The week was very hard mentally and physically but it was well worth it for all the new friends and associates that we made individually and as a group.

I would like to thank BIGGA also who assisted Bernhards in the selection process and also the planning of the week's programme.

Ten greenkeepers from different courses, locations and different backgrounds all came together as one team and I thank you lads for making it a very enjoyable and successful week.

Jeremy Hughes, Course Manager, Vale of Llangollen GC

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I would like to thank all concerned with the recent trip to the GCSAA Show in Atlanta. A big thanks to Stephen Bernhard for his kind sponsorship of the trip which is very much appreciated, to all Bernhards staff Kim, Janet, Bob and Sam who were absolutely fantastic and your hospitality was second to none.

The trip was very well organised and very informative and which every greenkeeper should try and participate in at some time in their career, I would highly recommend any greenkeeper to attend GCSAA at sometime in the future.

A worthwhile experience!

Many, many thanks.

Gordon McKie, St Andrews

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I would like to thank Bernhard's for the great experience I had while representing BIGGA at the GCSAA show in Atlanta.

The Bernard's staff were very helpful and sociable even though they had an extremely busy week with other work commitments. I would also like to thank the other greenkeepers who were also chosen to go. The group got on well together and I think did our association proud.

I would finally like to thank those who chose me to be part of the delegation, allowing me to experience such a great event, I got much out of the experience and gained some friends along the way.

Colin Mackay, Head Greenkeeper, Vejle Golf Club, Denmark

Work Plea

I send this letter to you with the purpose of requesting you if you can to consider the possibility to accept me as internship or scholarship holder at the maintenance department in some golf course into your association. I suppose that you will know many golf course managers, all superintendents or some person and related company (desing, construction, services, etc) who can I contact.

I am an Argentinean technical professional and I went to Europe to specialize in management and maintenance of golf courses.

I have been carried out a master in Golf Courses Management and Maintenance, and I have just concluded also a salaried internship during two years in the Golf Club Valderrama, in Spain. I possess the certifications and respective written recommendations. I'm qualified, but I must learning more your language, so important in the world golf. To achieve this, I consider necessary to work in a golf course in your country.

I wait and I yearn an affirmative answer to my application, so if that is possible.

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