

YOUR LETTERS ARE REQUESTED!

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Letters

A Fescue Debate?

I am writing to express my surprise at the lack of discussion that the recent excellently researched articles on fescue greens has started. I would have thought there would have been a certain amount of argument, but it appears that no-one (apart from people who are already growing fescue) is remotely interested!

I think cutting heights on poa greens have got so low, and green speeds have got so high, that it is now extremely difficult to transfer from "predominantly poa" to "monoculturally fescue". Gone are the days, even at the seaside, where people would cut at 4 - 4.5mm and have 50% poa with some fescue and some bent.

Nowadays it seems to be a direct choice between butchering the greens to 3mm all summer and putting on sponges all winter, or accepting the stimpmeter reading is going to max out at 9 (unless there's a drought) because you can putt on firm fescue greens that are as good in February as they are in July.

We could argue all day about the need for speed or the environmental issue, but as far as I am concerned, none of the greenkeeping arguments actually matter here at all. Surely the grass that we should be aiming to grow on our greens is the grass that the architect who designed our course intended for us to grow on our greens, or the grass that was predominant when the course was laid out.

If your course is laid out on a clay soil, with hazards tucked close into the fronts of the greens, then don't feel pressured into growing fescue because it's the "in" thing to do, because the architect understood that meadow grass would dominate and designed the course to be played with soft surfaces.

Likewise, if you are working on a 100 year old links course, then you will no doubt be doing everything in your power to keep your greens as firm as they were when the course was laid out, in order to protect the integrity and subtlety of the design. That's because we all know the only way to provide our members with year round golf (that's what they pay an Annual Subscription for, after all) on firm surfaces that repel all but the best struck approach shots is to plant and then encourage the growth of fescue and do everything in our power to keep the dreaded poa from invading.

And yes, I'm sorry, but that does mean cutting no shorter than 5mm (ever - apart from maybe club championship week, when you could maybe stick them down to 4.75). Keeping water and fertiliser input to a bare - and I mean bare - minimum, cutting back on as many mechanical treatments (verticutting, hollow coring, etc) as we have to in order to keep the fescue in control.

Top-dressing until we're sick of the sight of blunt soleplates, and accepting that we are going to get constantly harassed by golfers who haven't got a clue what they're talking about. But then you don't need me to tell you that, do you? Because as a custodian of one of this country's most prized and wonderful antiques, you would never dare not look after it properly....would you?

One other point in this whole non-existent debate has occurred to me, and that is the question of why none of the World's brilliant seed scientists has yet managed to breed an annual meadow grass plant that is more efficient? Regardless of how much Jim Arthur hated Perennial Ryegrass, even he must have been impressed by the improvements that were made in his lifetime. To turn a plant that in its original form and habitat takes on the appearance of an ugly green hedgehog squatting in a sea of fine grasses (and who hasn't come up against one of those horrors in the rough of our inland courses) into a beautiful, fine leaved grass that, when planted on a tee or a fairway, actually looks (but unfortunately still doesn't play) like fescue and blends nicely into a mixed sward.

So why can't this technology be applied to *Poa annua*, creating a multi-million pound industry in this country alone, as people rush to overseed their greens with new improved meadow grass cultivars? Is it impossible to alter its characteristics to make it finer-leaved, deeper rooting, less prone to thatch-building, and more resistant to fusarium?

Imagine the possibilities for the greens on our inland courses if we could grow a monoculture of such an improved poa plant, cut it down to 2.5mm, feed it, water it, and sit back with a pint and listen to hordes of members tell us how our greens are as good as Augusta's?

While I'm here, can I take this opportunity to thank Kerran Daly for his highly enjoyable Chairman's column (which made me laugh every month). Also to congratulate everyone involved with this magazine for somehow managing to keep the whole thing fresh against all the odds.

Simon Freeman
The Marchie, Isle of Islay

BIGGA For Life

I would like to thank BIGGA for the Life Membership. I appreciate this and feel proud to own and display it. Although I have been retired from Southerndown Golf Club for 26 years I still keep in touch with some old friends through Greenkeeper International.

On my 90th Birthday I received a great honour from Southerndown, by having gates that lead onto the course named after me – The Walter Jones Gates.

Walter Jones
Life Member

Legal Help

I would like to thank the Association for all the help they have given me with my case against my golf club for unfair dismissal and unpaid wages. A special thanks to Maggie for Legal Advice and Ian Horloran for travelling up for a grievance meeting and keeping the meetings in order. Also, for his good advice during that meeting.

S Butler

A Great Week

The new Harrogate Week has come and gone and what a great week it was. Were you there?

The week was packed with education to suit everyone along with some excellent fringe event seminars. I have to commend the National Board for listening and acting on the suggestion from some members to have a sustainable golf conference and open forum. The anticipation of the conference and open forum stimulated a buzz around Harrogate I have never witnessed before and I have been travelling up north for as long as I can remember.

I'm sure on the Thursday afternoon the members and the R&A, who pushed so hard for its inclusion, felt suitably proud as they looked into a full auditorium of around 280 delegates. The coffee break filled the conference centre with a very healthy buzz of debate and a frank exchange of views. Congratulations all round to the speakers and the delegates for supporting the two days and making it such a success!

The Show was excellent as usual and all of the Stands I visited had had a successful week, which was very important during a pivotal year.

The future of the Harrogate Week now lies in our hands. With uncertainty about who will be exhibiting at the Show next year it is down to us members to give our Association unprecedented support and make sure we attend next year making it even more successful!

I would like to thank all of our staff at HQ, who worked tirelessly in organising the week and then ensuring it ran so smoothly. Just like greenkeepers they work so hard and sometimes get very little recognition for all of that hard work. We should know better! Thank you all!

Alex McCombie
Parkstone Golf Club