

WHAT A MONTH!

Times in the year can be stressful in our chosen occupation at the best of times! With long days and even earlier starts than normal, my staff and I have been tested to the extreme. Mix in a member golfing calendar that reads more like a timetable for the British Rail network and you might just about be getting close to how things have been for us at Tyrrells Wood during the last month or so. Course closures for major club events, shotgun starts at ungodly hours of the morning, big days booked with the best intentions for a weekend in July being postponed to a Monday in September because of bad weather - All of this takes its toll on us as a greenkeeping team.

A time of the year that should be manageable has become, because of high rates of growth, the complete opposite of the expected norm for this time of year. It seems like only yesterday we were all being challenged in 2006 as to how best to recover our courses, to grass cover after the worst drought in years, it would seem almost normal therefore, regardless of how the weather has been, we do at this time of year find ourselves slightly worse for wear. Another factor I almost forgot is of course staff holidays that have been booked to give the team a well deserved break after a long summer stint in the world of greenkeeping, before we set to on the next busy schedule of events with on course renovations and continued course development projects to start. Just to put into context how well the grass has been growing, we have had three day a week cutting programmes turn into a daily operation and those bunker and tee bank maintenance programmes becoming not weekly, but full time operations in an effort just to keep them at bay. We have carried out machinery overhauls mid season that would normally be done at the end of the main growing season and without exception these overhauls will still have to be done, as normal, at the end of the growth we are currently going through to put the equipment back into good order for the next seasons work.

It might seem that all these factors have got us down, well, in fact, the opposite has been true, we have enjoyed a course this year better than we have ever been able to have in many a long year, we have used very little fertiliser and our consumption of irrigation water is at an all time low. Our fuel bill has almost doubled and we have had had a fairly intensive repair



programme, nothing more than could have been expected with the higher wear and tear put onto the equipment. On another financial note, our current account spends are at a higher level than we would normally expect at this time of year with machinery maintenance and wages being the main areas of growth within our day to day spend lines, but will I'm sure, not be a problem in terms of balancing the accounts as we have of course had some cost centre savings on other nominal codes overall.

So what's the fascination with this tale you might ask? As far as the golfer is concerned it's just another normal year and in some cases the focus has just changed from dry grass last year to wet grass this and no matter what the weather has to throw at us as greenkeepers we are expected to perform regardless. I wonder if the average golfer could comprehend the diversity of skill changes required to manage and maintain a golf course, I would hazard a guess not, all they seem to want is to have a good golf course in spite of the challenges given to the greenkeeping staff at anytime, with regards to weather or financial restriction. How often is it we hear the course was better last year or the grass was too long and why is the course so untidy with lumps of dead grass everywhere. In fact, not only have greenkeepers today become masters in the art of cutting grass, but also in the art of getting rid of what would

have been deemed normal on course debris conditions in extremes of growth conditions. We have become used to collecting clippings, this year in particular on fairways, managed roughs without many dry conditions outside the play pattern's, have had to employ vac's and blowers to the extreme - Adding to our list of daily tasks in an effort to meet the very exacting standards expected by today's golfer. A well-planned course maintenance operation with the right weather to support, it is without exception an easy thing to both manage and achieve to the required standards. However, a heavy period of rain with no light at the end of the tunnel, of a break in this unexpected onslaught of extreme weather, does in fact in the mind of the golfer make us look pretty ineffective sometimes about a factor we have no control over. The only recourse we in fact have to combat is poor weather conditions, to temporally postpone these necessary works until the weather conditions are more favourable and of course taking a planned operation outside the terms of opportunity afforded us, within a busy golfing calendar with all its associated problems, to get things done on time within budget and to the required standard.

This month's topic is, and has been, inspired by meeting many members that have been between a rock and a hard place this year, me included, to manage our affairs with all the weather has thrown at us as custodians of the greens. So to those among the golfing public that feel it necessary to bemoan their lot and condemn the best efforts of their greenkeeping staff under extremes of weather I would say this - You can never compare eggs with eggs and to create an omelette you first have to crack a few eggs. There are no normal conditions, we live in a world of many dimensions and it takes great dexterity, skill and experience to achieve the intended goal of excellence, that's not expected today, but demanded by you, the golfing public. I, unlike a minority of golfers am impressed beyond belief by the level of skills that the modern course manager has to master to ply his trade today.

So it's been just another normal month as you can imagine, for me, your Chairman, as I'm sure it has been for all of you. Right now that's off my chest time for the kid's I think.

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