



DIARY OF A GOLF COURSE: IT NEVER RAINS

As seeding of the first nine holes gets underway at Clandon Park Golf Club, attention switches to the Growing In of the new course, and Peter Jones looks at the pros and cons that a wet spring and summer have brought to the project, and helps to co-ordinate the handover of the course to Dale Hand – Head Greenkeeper, who will be responsible for managing the first phase of the course through to opening in 2009.

At the time of writing the article in early July, the weather over much of the UK remained unsettled with frequent showers and intermittent bouts of heavier rain, somewhat reminiscent of July 2007, and not at all the summer weather that we all wish for. But fortunately, this pattern of weather had been almost ideal for growing in newly seeded areas and maintaining healthy grass on un-irrigated surfaces, and the seeded fairway areas on the first four holes were already being mown with a rotary deck mower.

The worst aspect of the frequent rainfall was slowing down the rate at which the topsoil heaps dried out, making it difficult pass through the stone screener, as this material was required for placing around the green surrounds and approaches, and for mixing with sand on the tees.

Moist soil is also more susceptible to compaction, which on one hand is useful when wanting to pack the soil in place on slopes around bunkers and prevent erosion from wind and rain, but not so good when it comes to creating a friable seed beds with rakes.

Timing of operations to make best use of the weather was therefore the key to making good progress, with the fairway areas becoming ready

for seeding well ahead of the greens, tees and bunker complexes. As a result the completion of the course took on the image of a partly completed jigsaw puzzle, with sporadic areas of bright green grass already being mown, and other areas of bare white chalk, glaring in the sun.

Of course, delays caused by weather are a natural occurrence in the greenkeeping industry, and therefore easy to adjust to. Not so, the delays caused by local government officials in their Mafia-style approach to their work, resulting in frustration and more grey hair for mere mortal men, such as I.

The construction of the 8th green (see top picture) was delayed by several weeks, with this whole area having only been released by the Archaeologists at the end of June following a mind-boggling list of restrictions (or should I say 'demands'), not to mention the added expense incurred by the client. I feel it would have been fitting to bury a horse's head under this particular green as a tribute, and it would have at least provided something vaguely interesting for the future archaeologists to dig up.

It is planned that all of the greens, tees and approaches will be sown at the same time in late July following the commissioning of the irrigation system, thus making it easier for the greenkeeping staff to treat all the greens exactly the same.

The part-time greenkeeping staff will be headed up by Dale Hand - Head Greenkeeper at the 18 hole sister course at Aylesbury Park GC who anticipates that autumn 2008 to be a very busy period for him and his team as they cover the maintenance on both courses. Full time staff will be taken on next year.



Peter Jones, Geoffrey Legouix and Dale Hand discussing the proposed maintenance regime for the greens.

To keep initial building costs as low as possible, the maintenance operation will be run from a securely fenced compound with machinery housed in steel containers.

The sympathetic design of the course and the choice of grasses has been created with 'ease of maintenance' in mind, ultimately enabling all areas to be mown with ride-on equipment to improve maintenance efficiency.

Dale's proposed choice of machinery includes:

- John Deere 2500B Greens mower
- John Deere 8700 Fairway mower
- John Deere 2653b Tee's mower
- John Deere 7400 Rotary
- John Deere 220c Hand mowers
- 2 x John Deere 3720 (44 hp) Tractors
- John Deere 1200a Bunker rake
- John Deere Aercore
- Lastec 11' Articulator rotary

It is planned that Phase 2 of the project (the back nine holes) will commence next spring, seeing the 18 holes, clubhouse and maintenance facilities fully constructed for autumn 2009.