



Immingham GC

PREPARING FOR A RAINY DAY

Scott MacCallum meets two head men who had to cope with an exceptional situation last summer

There you are preparing for one of the biggest events in the club's calendar and the weather turns against you. Not fine, but I'm sure it's a situation most of you have had to deal with at some time or other. However, what faced Rob Welford, of Cleethorpes GC, and Steve Beverly, of Immingham GC, last June, is far removed from anything all but an unlucky handful of you will have ever encountered.

Let's face it how many of you have taken out a boat and rowed along the very fairways on which you'd normally be looking for a nice tight lie in June?

The golf clubs' location and the month will perhaps have given some of you a clue but Rob and Steve were in the middle of the horrendous flooding which engulfed much of the Humberside area in the height of last summer and from which some unlucky residents have still not recovered. While the area hit the national news the flooding also arrived just a few days before the clubs hosted a pro-am and Club Championship respectively.

June was, indeed, a bizarre month with two separate deluges each of which on its own would have created turmoil on any golf course at any point in the year but in June was all the more remarkable and high quality evidence that our climate is undergoing quite an upheaval.

"We had 245 mil of rain in June against an average of the last five years of around 60. The year before in the drought we only had 11 mil so we went from thinking about putting down wetting agents, and relieving stress, to the absolute opposite. Our course was closed for two days following torrential rain on the 15th of the month and then we followed to weather forecast and could see another load of bad weather coming," said Rob.

Steve's situation was even worse.

"We had 331 mil of rain in June, that's 13 inches, while we had 126 mil on the 25th alone – five inches. We knew there was going to be a lot of rain but when the forecasters say that you don't expect that much. You maybe expect about an inch," said Steve, who recalled that it started pouring at 9pm on the Sunday night and didn't stop until 9pm on the Monday.

Both men were helpless as they saw the rain set back all their plans for the big week ahead.

"All we could do was watch the water levels rising. You'd see puddles, which were 30 yards apart, joining up and making bigger puddles and seeing rivers running through the course and with our pro-am due we were trying to work out what to do," said Rob.

"As soon as it stopped on the Monday night we started assessing the situation. Can the event go ahead? If so will we play the full course or will we have to shorten some holes. What's the best way to get rid of the water?"

"It's not a situation you deal with on a regular basis... thank God! The Heads of department – Secretary, Pro, Catering Manager and myself – met and the first thing to decide was whether we could go ahead because, with 42 teams and 168 golfers coming, we had to decided whether to cancel the order for food and drink and give all the players, many of whom were already calling to ask what the position was, warning.

"We looked at the long range forecast and it wasn't too bad so we felt that as long as we could get the greens playable we would go ahead," explained Rob.

The priority was getting the fairways playable and using a pump borrowed from Immingham to supplement their own they began pumping.

“We had both pumps running 24 hours a day so obviously we had to have guys coming in late at night to refuel them but eventually we got 99% of the water pumped off the fairways and there was only one hole, the 314 yard 6th which we had to shorten to a 150 yard par-3,” said Rob, who added that the bunkers remained GUR.

“It all worked very well and on the day people were pleasantly surprised at how well we had got the course into play and we had pictures up showing them how the course had looked just a few days before.

“We were still able to double cut the greens on the day and they were putting at around 8.5, normally we’d be hoping for around 10-10.5 for a pro-am but green speed wasn’t the priority – getting the course open was.”

While Rob was working miracles to get Cleethorpes open for the Friday pro-am Steve had made the decision to cancel the Club Championship on the Saturday, hence they were able to lend the pump to their neighbours.

“The members were fairly understanding. For me to have 15 holes open for Saturday was less important than Rob having his course dry for the pro-am,” explained Steve.

“It was an Act of God and when it comes from the sky people are more understanding.”

Having witnessed the non-stop rain and knowing the course’s predilection to flooding anyway Steve was more than concerned when he set out on a course inspection. Little did he know then that he’d finish the trip in a boat!

“It was morbid curiosity more than anything to see how bad it really was. Down at the bottom end there is normally a small pond but it had flooded over the pathway, up to the tee and onto the next green while the force of the water had washed away the pathway on top of a culvert. It also washed away about six to eight feet of the bank making it much wider.”

Steve and his team kept walking but were met by a remarkable scene.

“It looked like something from the Lake District. You couldn’t see any grass while a drainage dyke was flooding back towards us pouring water onto the course. The only way to continue to the inspection was by boat and we had shovels for oars. It was one of those scenes you could either laugh or cry about and we just took the comical approach.”

Despite everything, the team had nine holes open on the Wednesday and about 10 members played while others arrived with their cameras to record the scene.

A major casualty of the flooding and discovered when the water levels receded were the leather jackets with hundreds of them lying on the surface having drowned.

“Some areas lay wet for two to three weeks after the second flooding and not having dried out fully from the first meant that they had been wet for over a month so it was a case of how to reinstate them and reduce the chances of it happening again,” said Rob.

“We raked off the debris then because the grass was just rotting we dressed out the areas and reseeded. On some of the hollows near we raised the area so it wasn’t such a pronounced hollow and less likely to puddle.”

One consequence of the high moisture levels in the soil profile was that



in July and August grass grew, as Rob points out “like stink”, which meant men who would normally be doing other course duties were permanently attached to their mowers.

“It was a very stressful time as in June you are looking to get the course at its best but because of Mother Nature we couldn’t do it. Normally praying for a bit of rain at that time of year. I found that quite demoralising.

“Our priorities changed and instead of looking at the whole course it was a case of let’s get the greens as good as we can and later in the year we’ll turn our attention elsewhere,” said Rob, who has recently found the ideal sand for the course after trialling as many as a dozen varieties.

“Being so flat and exposed we needed sand that would remain in the bunkers and having done 12 bunkers we’ll be doing the remainder of the 76 bunkers over the next three to five years, sorting out the drainage issues as we go.”

At Immingham Steve, who, in his 18 months at the club, had worked hard to improve the drainage on the 11th, 12th, and 13th holes which were built on solid clay saw that work begin to pay dividends.

“When the fairways were three feet deep in water in the middle of summer you did wonder what it was going to be like in the winter but, although some members were saying the holes wouldn’t be open again for the rest of the year, we had them open a week later. That proved to me that the work we had done was working,” said Steve, adding that they also received a goodwill payment from the neighbouring oil refinery after what looked like a film of oil appeared on some fairways.



Cleethorpes team with a Chairman of Green, John Stanley (second right)



The Immingham water boys

Steve, who joined Immingham from Cleethorpes, has had a baptism of fire in the job.

“Like many I was dubious about how I was going to cope with everything in a first Head Greenkeepership but, although I’d had numerous issues to contend with, I feel I’m coping.

“We had the driest April on record with five mil of rain and our irrigation pump broke down. In May we had a Ransomes triple stolen and joy ridden around the town causing £3000 worth of damage– it’s only just been returned to us. One of our greens was dug up on the eve of Invitation Day. Last Friday a horse got loose on the course and we had to repair hoof prints on a couple of greens while there was another attempt to break into the sheds last night – we even get plants stolen from out of the ground,” revealed Steve.

Driving up to the course you see static caravans which still contain families unable to return to their homes.

“It puts it into perspective. I certainly wouldn’t swap and have a dry golf course and flooded home but we still have to face our problems when we arrive at work,” said Steve.

With such a close friendship Rob and Steve always have someone to share their problems with and help each other out.

They met at Reaseheath College, living two doors apart when we were doing the HND in Golf Course Management, and sharing many a pint and although they went down different paths they kept in touch. Steve did his year out at Forest of Arden and before taking an internship at Pinehurst. He returned to St Pierre before Rob tipped him off about the



Deputy's job at Cleethorpes when Rob moved to Immingham.

Rob did his placement at East Sussex National and was offered a full time job there after finishing his course and then answered an interview for a Deputy's job at Cleethorpes.

"Course Manager, Les Howkins, and I hit it off immediately and a 45 minute interview became two hours. I got the job and then 18 months later Les was doing some consultancy for Immingham and recommended me for the post of Head Man. I then contacted Steve about my old job," said Rob.

When Les moved to Cotgrave Place G&CC Rob returned to Cleethorpes and six months later Steve moved in the opposite direction to his first headship at Immingham.

"Taking over from a guy (Les) who achieved his Master Greenkeeper while at the club was not easy. It's far easier to go into a job where you can make an impression quickly but I learned a lot from Les and he has returned to play golf and complimented me on some of the changes I've made," said Rob.

Steve also learned a lot from Les but is also quick to give credit to Bill Lawson, of Heswall, who was the man responsible for him entering the profession.

"I did work experience with Bill and then worked for two summers at Heswall. He was the man who encouraged me to go to college," said Steve. Both Rob and Steve have learned well and have experience which will stand them in good stead the next time they have to prepare for a rainy day!



Casual water at Immingham



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