

# Letters



Please email your notes to: [scott@bigga.co.uk](mailto:scott@bigga.co.uk)

## Letters & Notes

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[scott@bigga.co.uk](mailto:scott@bigga.co.uk)  
before the 12th  
of the month

### PROVIDING SATISFACTION ON A BUDGET

Dear BIGGA

Chances are you have concerns about the current economic climate - but what's this got to do with maintaining your playing surface?

It is estimated that 40-60% of the overall cost of operating a typical golf course facility is related to turf maintenance. As a facility offering a natural playing surface, this may seem a reasonable balance and justifiable to you as Greenkeeper or Course Manager. You can't attract regular golfers without good quality greens, tees and fairways can you? In the current economic climate, that may not be your reaction if you're the owner trying to maintain revenue.

The ultimate natural playing surface is, however, the aim of every Greenkeeper. On an unlimited budget, life is certainly easier, but most Greenkeepers are working to a given budget and a surface requiring continual improvement. Recent weather conditions have stressed grass even more with heavy rainfall last summer, and rootzones stripped of vital nutrients in the autumn. Then the low winter temperatures and snow came to deplete grass carbohydrate reserves resulting in severe thinning of many fairways and greens.

Balancing the books, while maintaining a quality playing surface, has never been harder. It depends greatly on the Greenkeeper's relationship with club committees for them to understand what hurdles have to be overcome to deliver playability and visual appearance expectations. It also depends on the Greenkeepers' appreciation of budgetary restraints.

In the last 18 months just about every cost in managing a course has increased, whether they be machinery equipment and repairs, fungicides, fertilisers, seed, irrigation or increased environmental and health & safety issues that courses are required to operate under to meet regulatory compliance. Then add in the prospect of reduced cash flow down to more golfers operating on pay and play rather than the annual subscriptions and is it any wonder that turf management expenses costs are becoming an easy target for making immediate savings? On paper it looks like the sensible thing to do, but can you really afford to cut back on some of the essential inputs?

Greenkeepers and Course Managers are between a rock and a hard place trying to maintain member satisfaction in the playability of the course, whilst appeasing the secretaries by operating on a reduced budget. For sure, you'll have to make the budget go further, and look at ways to make savings. But it needn't be all doom and gloom. Somewhere there's a compromise, and some real opportunities exist for Greenkeepers and course owners to take a close look at their grounds management. So ask yourself the following questions:

"How can we become more efficient?"

"How can we produce a playing surface requiring fewer inputs, whilst maintaining quality?"

"How can we promote the environmental benefits to the local community and paying members?"

"How do we effectively communicate to members that changes in maintenance and playing surface are for the long term good of the club?"

We could start with playing the old 'sustainable' card, a buzz word in golf over the last couple of years, but does it actually mean anything? Your course is only sustainable if members don't vote with their feet. No members, no fees, no course-simple. So forget the sustainable trend. Instead you should assess your current grass regime consumables - Fungicides, Fertilisers and Seed.

Naturally as a seed company we are going to recommend regular overseeding programmes. It really is the way to introduce more efficient species and cultivars to your course. Without grass, you haven't got a course therefore the grass you maintain is the single most important material in your toolbox. Seed in real terms has not increased in price in the last 15 years so is not so much an issue. But it's the amount of the other constituents your mixture requires that consumes your budget and makes seed selection crucial. There are now cultivars that have improved wear tolerance, more disease resistance and reduced cutting frequency, all offering potential for saving money. Furthermore, those species requiring fewer nutrients lend themselves to meeting a club's environmental aims and removing the conditions that actually sustain predominantly annual meadow grass greens. Cutting frequency is also influenced greatly by the choice of cultivar. How often do we actually need to cut fairways? Daily cutting is not uncommon, but is it essential? Communication to members to reduce the expectation of close mown fairways is required however grass cultivars with high scores for slow re-growth can save up to 50% on mowing costs.

British Seed Houses have Grade 'A' mixtures especially formulated for Golf Course Greens, Fairways and Roughs - from A5, an all Perennial Ryegrass mixture, through to A27, an entirely All-Fescue one. However, Velvet bent grasses will produce the smoothest, truest, fastest putting surface a golfer will ever play. This is because velvet bent grass has the finest leaf texture and highest shoot density of all the fine turf grasses available to the UK Greenkeeper.

The plant requires very little nutrient input (as low as 25kg/ha N per annum is acceptable and anything over 100 is not necessary) which, combined with extremely high shoot density, also helps to limit *Poa annua* infestations. Velvets can also tolerate dry conditions and, on the flipside, there has also been a noticeable resilience to the wetter conditions recently experienced. Disease resistance is also an exceptional trait of the species, the highest of most commercial bents.

Most Greenkeepers work within a very tight window to complete renovation work and allow new seed to establish - they must get it right first time. Young seedlings are vulnerable and regular applications of soluble high salinity fertiliser can kill the emerging shoots, not only a waste of good seed, but costly too. In contrast, the use of a low salt BSH Floranid slow release fertiliser delivers a steady feed of the essential nutrients. Floranid can also provide a cost saving throughout the season by having to make fewer applications than soluble types. All in all they create healthy growth, less susceptible to disease, and therefore requiring less fungicide.

**Simon Taylor**  
British Seed Houses

## THANK YOU

Dear BIGGA

On Behalf of all at The London Club we would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone that was involved in the course preparations for the 2009 European Open. The pressure of a changing week was reduced a great deal by the help and quality of all the volunteers that travelled from all areas of the UK, giving up their own time to be part of what was again a very successful event. It was a pleasure working with you all, and hope that you all got as much out of the whole experience as we did. Once again a very big thank you, and look forward to seeing you all again soon.

**Ben Adams and Mark Bell**

## FEEDBACK ON NEW FEATURE

Dear BIGGA

Your new feature 'Candid in Camera' gives Course Managers the opportunity to come clean with their darkest thoughts without fear of exposure. Not surprisingly, the first instalment unearthed a charming specimen who describes his biggest problem as his staff and who elected not to stick up for them because he had a mortgage to pay. Presumably he was unconcerned about the mortgage of the "really nice bloke" whom he casually fired of his own volition with no pressure to do so from the club. He described himself as a manager rather than a shop steward but surely the best course managers combine elements of both disciplines? In my experience, managers who regard their biggest problem as their staff would be well advised to start by taking a good look at themselves. This bloke has got the staff he deserves.

**Mick Travis**

## THANK YOU

Dear BIGGA

I would like to thank the Learning and Development department at BIGGA, as well as David Withers and all at Ransomes Jacobsen Ltd, who have provided their time and funding for my Foundation Degree in Sports Turf Science and Management.

My Continuation of personal development and the step to higher education would not have been possible without Ransomes Jacobsen's kind generosity. I look forward to notifying you of my progress along the way.

Thank you once again for providing me with this opportunity.

**Greg Knight,  
Assistant Greenkeeper, Abridge Golf Club**

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Supplying the rural community

Countrywide is the leading UK business in the supply of products & advice to the rural community. We are a fast-expanding Company with a clear vision of where we are going and how we are going to get there.

### ■ TECHNICAL SALES REGIONAL MANAGERS, TURF & AMENITY

Due to the planned expansion of our growing Turf & Amenity business, we are seeking to recruit two area sales managers into the following trading areas of Central England covering: Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, East Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire, and Southern England covering: Hampshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Surrey and West London.

To join our team you will have an in-depth knowledge of the requirements of the modern sports turf professional, and be able to converse with them on an equal, practical and technical basis. A proven sales background is not essential as full training will be given to the successful candidates. Drive and self-motivation are essential and will ensure success in a competitive marketplace. These positions may suit candidates who currently work in the practical Turf & Amenity industry and are looking for a new and exciting challenge.

**Closing date for application: Wednesday 30th September 2009**

**If you feel you have the necessary experience, skills and enthusiasm to succeed in this challenging role, please send your CV to: Martin Townsend, Manager, Countrywide Turf & Amenity, Countrywide, Defford, Earls Croome, Worcs WR8 9DF, [www.countrywidefarmers.co.uk](http://www.countrywidefarmers.co.uk) Or visit us for a chat on Stand F40 at SALTEX this September.**

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## HARRY DIAMOND MEMORIAL QUAICH

Dear BIGGA

Looking out of my window, at 6am, to a dreadful miserable morning, my thoughts were of a wet days golf at Belleisle. I should have had more forethought. Ayr Belleisle is a good hour's drive from Henzie, and with the extremities of weather we get in Scotland, expecting the same weather 40 miles away, "and at the coast", is nearly asking for a miracle. Arriving at Belleisle, at 8.15am for the usual Shot Gun start at 9.00am, the weather had improved to the extent, that the golfers milling around before going to their respective tees, were more intent in covering their golf clubs than themselves. The Diamond Family were all in evidence, attending to the organisation of the usual Stableford Competition.

All the young Diamond Girls were assisting, to keep everyone on the move and in getting the Golfers to their allocated Teeing Ground, before the sounding of the starting horn. Another exceptional and pleasant days Golf, with golfers, young, medium and old, "some very old", remarking how much they looked forward to this day in particular.

The Après Golf took the same format as in past years, with free beer and a free raffle ticket given to all who played that day. I have to remark on the prizes presented at the raffle, not the usual bottle of wine, or a couple of golf balls - two nights at a hotel for two, bottles of Johnnie Walker Black Label whisky, an expensive wall clock and others, too numerous to mention. As usual, all Harry's family took part in the presentation, his daughters were to the fore, as were his Grandchildren, in the organisation of the whole event, Harry's two brothers, Hugh and Campbell, handled the prizes to the deserving winners. The Quaich was presented by Harry's wife, Jessie. Again exceptional scoring by the winners J. Dickson, B Ablatt, and M. Owens, who turned a remarkable 95 points. The Diamond Family, extend their thanks to all who participate in the Quaich, and a special debt of gratitude to the donors, or cash, cheques, and prizes, which is the backbone of any well organised Golf Competition. Another successful and enjoyable day to the Memory of and exceptional Greenkeeper and dear Friend, Harry Diamond.

**Cecil George, Lenzie**