



On the Soapbox

A new vehicle for people within the industry to express their viewpoint

Greenkeepers are prone to complaints, this is a harsh fact. I have come to the conclusion that this is an occupational hazard and one that we have to accept as an inevitable fact.

We endure the unrealistic expectations placed upon us by members who see tournament standards on TV and expect the same at their home club. When those impossible expectations are not met, they criticise. But most of us put up with it; we work hard communicating and educating them. We do this because we love the job and we are realistic and educated enough to realise that those high expectations and nonsensical ramblings that happen at the bar are just that... nonsensical.

Speed of greens is the prime example; ask a golfer how to improve the speed of the greens and what would he say? Simple - CUT THEM LOWER! Well, if only it was that simple. If greenkeeping was that simple then why employ an experienced and educated greenkeeper at all? Why don't we all just do what members tell us to do, get the 13mm spanner out and hey presto... quick, TV tournament greens? Sadly some do get the spanner out, and throw a spanner in the works for everyone!

Cutting lower increases stress, this is a scientific fact, not rocket science, just simple plant science. We all know that the plant leaf is used to gain energy from the sun. We all know shade and a smaller leaf restricts the energy source to the plant. Yet some still advocate cutting at 2mm. This is a quick fix, and a quick fix attitude in greenkeeping is dangerous. Cutting our greens at ludicrously low heights to satisfy the moaning member is not only placing pressure on your grass, more disturbingly it places pressure on other greenkeepers. We place pressure on neighbouring golf clubs and their committee members, and who gets the brunt of the pressure? The poor greenkeeper who is thinking long-term. The quick fix answer may take the pressure off your shoulders short-term, but the long-term damage has been seen many times, a 13mm spanner is not the answer.

At the moment most greenkeepers and golf clubs don't cut at 2mm. They don't because they are educated to know better. We have all read, we have all seen and heard of the problems, some (like me) have even inherited the problems and are now working hard to rectify those problems. I now have 100% poa greens, thatch &

disease problems, Why? Because for the past 20 years or so we have been under so much pressure to achieve the unrealistic expectations set on us by members who know no better.

Why do we listen to those who know no better? Why do we not listen to our own expertise? Why do we stop listening to the experts? Sadly we still refrain from listening to those same experts saying the same thing. Those educated folks at the STRI, the R&A, the seed producers, and the college education system and, of course, the late great Jim Arthur. They are the educated guys, they have seen more, they have learnt more and know more about fine turf than those guys at the bar will ever know. Maybe it's time we listen to those educated guys instead!

Why employ an experienced and educated greenkeeper at all? Why don't we all just do what members tell us to do, get the 13mm spanner out and hey presto... quick, TV tournament greens

I suppose many would answer, those moaning members pay our wages. Yes, you are right; however, they don't pay for us to be submissive. They pay for our expertise; they send us to college, pay for seminars, books and publications. So how can they expect us to ignore all what we know, and all that they have paid for? They shouldn't. We are custodians of the club, we have a responsibility to safeguard our club's future and communicate our methods back to them.

We, as an industry can bang on about poa being a good grass until we are blue in the face, but if we are claiming that it is only good at 2mm and as long as there is a reliable water supply, a reliable chemical and fertiliser supply and our budget will sustain the extra cost, then quite frankly it can't be that good. I work on poa greens and it can produce a good surface, but at what cost? Are we confident that the reliable water supply will still be with us in the future, are we confident that chemical and fertiliser will be freely available. Are we confident that the expectations from our members won't increase?

My belief is simple; members' expectations will increase. I believe no matter what standard your greens are

now, the expectations will still increase. If you are cutting at 2mm now, you may have reached your Utopia. Can you sustain that? Can you improve on that? In the future your members will demand more, then what? Can we ever truly fulfil the high expectations placed upon us? I believe you can't. I believe we need to steadily improve, year on year.

Let's benchmark our courses now, let's collect data, let's be honest with our results and let's have those results for future greenkeepers to use as scientific backup. For years we have tried to defy science and fight Mother Nature, and during those years I have never seen this being done with any long term success. When are we going to learn? Maybe we won't. But maybe it's time for change... finally.



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Paul Lowe

The views expressed within On The Soapbox are not necessarily those of Greenkeeper International