



# On the Soapbox

A vehicle for letting people within the industry express their point of view

## You say Course Manager or Head Greenkeeper, I say Superintendent but is that the only difference between the British and Americans with regards to golf course maintenance?

Let's start with semantics. Even though both countries speak English there are differences that make communication difficult. Certain words, phrases, and slang expressions that are used in the forum, articles etc sometime make it hard to understand. So how did sward become lawn, pitch become sportsfield? Other golf course words such as trolley and buggy instead pull cart and golf cart are also puzzling. Then there is the word to describe irresponsible golfers, my new favorite word from the UK by the way, is numpty - the British knucklehead.

One phrase that we commonly use is "Height of Cut" or HOC and I guess it is fair to say the Americans are responsible for the problems associated with low HOC's.

Over time Superintendents have developed maintenance practices that produce incredibly low HOC's. Because of competition between clubs in the large metro areas for new members, Superintendents have been conditioned to push the limits.

I am not saying you are not mowing at low HOC's, some of you are. But the heights mentioned are those that were attained in the early 80's.

In the UK the HGK tries to hold the line at a slightly higher or moderately higher HOC than the American Superintendent. My view is that it is a budgetary issue and also a traditional greenkeeping practice that I find brilliant. With the traditional designs and styles of club management there is a resistance to "go low" or even vary how the course is presented. American courses and Superintendents don't have that sense of tradition.

While I do prefer the "traditional" style of greenkeeping I have strayed off the path from time to time. If I need to make a point about who should determine what is right from the course, I have cut low and I mean shamefully low and after a few weeks of six hour rounds we return to sensible HOC's and I have proven my point.

While I am talking about me, I have a different attitude about the golf industry than everyone else. You may be in a service industry and provide course conditions for your members' enjoyment, but my boss is the golf course and I provide conditions that suit the course, and hope the golfers enjoy

it. In my opinion the members are objects to be worked around and problems to be solved. I bet you're wondering how I haven't been fired.

You, I'm referring to everyone on the east side of the Atlantic, only see what's on TV where there is a Tour event going on. Those events are almost always in large metro areas and are set up to test the very best players. The majority of the courses, in the US, have course conditions and budgets just like the UK. We, I am referring to everyone on the west side of the Atlantic, have medium to small budgets, decade old technology, and doctors, lawyers, and farmers bosses just like you.

As far as maintenance practices are concerned, it's basically the same on both sides of the Atlantic/pond we fertilize/fertilise, water, grow and mow.

Yes it's true that Americans use more fertilizer and water than you, but that is changing as the industry is becoming more globally responsible.

But the reason for the extra use is that we have to in order to overcome the wear and tear from golf carts/buggies. American golfers very seldom walk anywhere! The fact that British golfers will walk the course is a trait I admire.

And just as amazing to the British that we use too much chemicals and water, it is amazing to the Americans that the British will allow play on frost covered grass. When polled I could find no one who would say that they allow play on frost. It didn't matter whether it was public/pay and play golf or a country club we don't allow play on frost. It doesn't make sense to spend the time, effort, and money to get the course in the best possible shape and then allow play to set you back. Here in the States, depending on the region we are in, some courses will shut down entirely for the winter.

The last difference that I'll highlight is the way Government regulations are imposed on the UK courses. You guys have to bring in independent consultants or assessors in order to document everything you do. Take chainsaws, you bring in an expert and have training, then have a test and the employees get a certificate to prove they are competent

and it is another financial burden. If I have someone needs to use a chainsaw, I teach them myself. Maybe takes 20 minutes, then I watch them for a few more minutes and if they don't cut off a limb they are good to go.

The regulations you have to have in order to cross a road are comical. The financial burden in order to be "street legal" is absurd.

A three second run across a road doesn't warrant the licensing fees and the extra cost of road diesel. I can run my tractors three miles down the road to access my river pumps, without fear of getting fined.

No matter what the distance that separates the UK from the US, and the differences in the same language, and differences in regulations imposed on us by outside agencies, we have the same goals.

We all get up early and go to work with the intent of providing the best possible golf course with what we have to work with.

## You say tomato...



Sean Sullivan, CGCS  
The Briarwood  
Billings Montana, USA

Sean Sullivan

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