

Turf Professionals Talking Heads

	Question 1 How have the demands on your playing surfaces increased over the last few years?	Question 2 What one thing (product, machine etc) has helped you meet those demands and how?	Question 3 What one area of your job has changed most markedly in recent times?
<p>Name: Lee Evans Position: Head Groundsman Club: Millennium Stadium</p> 	<p>Professionalism in sport has increased along with increased television coverage. The public and playing professionals demand immaculate surfaces which also play to an incredible standard and this means that we are always researching best practice and constantly striving to improve playing surface quality.</p>	<p>Artificial lighting rigs have been an amazing advance and allow me to create an artificial micro-climate which negates some of the hostile environment and allows me to provide a playing surface which benefits the stadium.</p>	<p>Artificial lighting technology has transformed the ability to maintain sports pitches in stadia. We can now provide surfaces which compliment and hopefully enhance the occasion and ultimately result in a more rewarding time for professionals and watching public.</p>
<p>Name: David Cole Position: Course Manager Club: Loch Lomond GC</p> 	<p>Expectations for quality playing surfaces have never been higher. This is not a complaint or an excuse; it's a fact. In this economic climate customers want value for money. We set a target of trying to achieve outstanding playing surfaces every day throughout the season as we have an international membership.</p>	<p>If I had to select one thing, I would choose people. I firmly believe in surrounding yourself with like minded people who are professional, dedicated, enthusiastic, hard-working and most importantly, follow your vision. I think a good team is the biggest asset in any business.</p>	<p>Environmental management has changed for the better for all of us, not just in our work but also our home lives. Greenkeepers and club owners have a responsibility to not just manage the turf following a good IPM approach, but also to preserve and enhance the other parts of the golf course.</p>
<p>Name: Steve Birks Position: Head Groundsman Club: Trent Bridge Cricket Ground</p> 	<p>There are a great deal more televised cricket matches, more international games, and an increase in demand on practice in the middle, which can stress the grass out. And the weather is a constant issue.</p>	<p>The Hover cover, as you can cover the whole square in five minutes, whereas before it used to take 45 minutes. We can get it on and off quickly so the game gets started again. The new outfield drains at 25 millimetres-an-hour, so this is very important for international games.</p>	<p>I have to deal with the media a lot more, as there is much more interest in the sport and in the wicket condition. Also, the way in which the weather is dealt with now is very different from past times.</p>
<p>Name: Graham Kimpton Position: Grounds Manager Club: The Queen's Club</p> 	<p>Demands to our playing surface have increased over the last few years but the players all becoming bigger, fitter and more athletic. Not many tennis players are under 6ft 3 now. The technology of racquets and in particular shoes put extra stress on the grass surface.</p>	<p>I guess that the advance in grass breeding and technology has been a major bonus. The fine and dense varieties, particularly of Lollium Perrene.</p>	<p>The area of my job that has most changed in recent times is Health and Safety and also having to rely more on culture practices to try to 'manage' problems such as worms, as a lot of the effective products of yesteryear have been removed from use.</p>
<p>Name: Adrian Kay Position: Head Groundsman Club: York Racecourse</p> 	<p>Expectations within the sport have risen from all quarters. Even our own expectations have increased. With more technical knowledge and improved machinery that is available, come higher standards to go hand in hand with the expectations of the end users of the course.</p>	<p>The Verti-drain. This has allowed us the means to de-compact at different depths and heave, or fissure, so to compensate for the high levels of maintenance operations and the direct nature of horses running at 40mph over the racing surface.</p>	<p>Investment and I have very fortunately been involved with forward thinking Managers and Boards within the two racecourses that I have worked for. Without this investment in machinery, drainage, irrigation and most importantly staff, plenty of these sports surfaces would not be in the condition we find them today.</p>

Sports turf comes in many forms and each requires a very special range of skills to maintain it at its best. Compiled by Jim Cook.

Question 4 What one thing makes your particular job different from those of other sports turf professionals?	Question 5 What has been the highlight of your career to date?	Question 6 Have you found that those using your sports surface are becoming more critical and demanding?
<p>We have one of the most hostile conditions in the world in which to grow grass, due to the heights of the stands, the close proximity of stands to pitch and the fact that as a town centre stadium we are relatively 'boxed in'. This coupled with the fact that we have the only portable pitch in the UK.</p>	<p>Appointed at the tender age of 34, I have overseen four FA Cup finals, three Rugby Grandslams, and Rugby World Cup games. It's a real privilege to have provided surfaces for such iconic sporting occasions. Being a proud Welshman, providing the surface in 2005 which saw the first Welsh grand slam in 27 years was a personal highlight.</p>	<p>There has always been, and should always be, a quality standard requirement and failure to reach this will ultimately end in criticism. It's good to be able to have profitable conversations, with groundstaff, about how we can help the performance of all teams and ultimately give the paying public a more enjoyable experience.</p>
<p>The diversity of the role. Golf course management has evolved so much in recent years. Obviously greenkeepers need to have an in-depth knowledge of agronomy, but these days they also need to be well versed in ecology, arboriculture, wildlife and habitat management, best environmental practices, hydrology, golf course design and construction methods as well as people and business management.</p>	<p>There have been so many highlights in my career. Achieving the Golf Course Superintendent and Estate Managers position in 2008 at one of the finest golf clubs in the world has to be my greatest achievement and receiving accolades from PGA professionals, peers and members.</p>	<p>Yes, I think customers are more demanding in this competitive leisure industry. I would say that we welcome constructive criticism as it keeps us focused and inspires us to keep on improving. This does involve harder work and more hours, but together with drive and dedication this is crucial to ensure that we always have that special edge.</p>
<p>We have to work with clay and also have to work with a very fast draining outfield. I have to deal with the two extremes of soil, so water movement in the soil is most important. On two levels, one drains quickly and one holds the water. Both have their problems but that is what I have to work with.</p>	<p>It would be going to Buckingham Palace, when Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club received their championship winning medals in 2005. And also doing last year's 20/20 World Cup was a highlight.</p>	<p>Yes, definitely, because there are more games broadcast on television and a lot of people tend to listen to the commentators when they discuss the ground.</p>
<p>We are a members club, which gets transformed into a venue for a world class event. Our centre court for example has our pavilion on one side and two hard courts on the other for ten months of the year. For the championships it becomes a bowl full of 7500 seats. Three weeks later it's back to the usual layout.</p>	<p>The highlight of my career is probably passing the IOG National Diploma in Turf Culture and having Rafa Nadal come and shake my hand before he collected his trophy when he won the Aegon here at Queens.</p>	<p>Not sure if users have become more critical or demanding than in the past. I guess with so many less grass tennis courts around than in the past, the users, in particular the professionals, do not understand the idiosyncrasies of a grass court.</p>
<p>The one factor that separates horse racing from other sports is the extremes of damage following a race meeting in conditions that are not ideal. Imagine around 90, half-tonne horses running on heavy going in one day, then you repair it for the next and you have another one, two or even three days in the race meeting.</p>	<p>My first Grand National in 2000 as Head Groundsman was very special. Also being involved with the two-and-a-half million track project at York over the past three years. Winning the Neil Wyatt Flat Racecourse Groundstaff Awards for 2009 at York this year was incredible after winning the jumps division at Aintree earlier on in my career.</p>	<p>Most definitely, as more money becomes involved in any sport this ultimately brings more pressure to all involved within the sport. As with every sport, there seems to be a lot of experts who know a lot about our job and some love to air their views on television, without knowing the full facts.</p>