



# On the Soapbox

A stage on which people within the industry can express their viewpoint

## The 'Green Illusion'

**Are you familiar with Augusta home of the US Masters, which for many players is the classic example of a perfectly manicured golf course?**

Before the season starts at Easter, many northern European golfers dream after seeing 'The Masters' on television, of perfect, manicured greens, which is, unfortunately, far from reality. To think that their own golf course may provide the same opportunities for so called 'perfect playing conditions', causes members to question how their course is being maintained.

This situation can bring the greenkeeper into conflict with the membership. Because the golfers demand something from him that is unsustainable and, yes, unrealistic.

If not resolved such differences can lead to serious conflict. On most newly built courses, *Agrostis / Festuca* grasses are chosen for ecological and economic reasons. Because the greenkeeper tries to please the members by providing green, holding surfaces Annual Meadow grass (*Poa Annua*) becomes the dominant grass species after a few years.

This grass is to be found on the greens of most of the golf courses worldwide and dictates the greenkeepers maintenance programme. The result is turf prone to disease as well as having very limited tolerance to stresses such as heat and cold.

The solution to this problem is clear: Anyone who wants green grass usually uses water, fertiliser and chemicals. Now the responsible, straight thinking greenkeeper faces this dilemma: He pleased the members in the short term, but in the long term he let the wrong grasses strengthen. If he follows his conscience about sustainability and its ecological requirements, he will have to make a difficult decision regarding his approach to course management. There is need for more information.

If the greenkeeper does not change the way manages his turf the golfers will soon meet difficult conditions. Soft, green and slow putting surfaces make the game less attractive than firm and not so green surfaces. Such surfaces will not be playable throughout the whole year.

The golfers wish for a good putting surfaces is well known, if the greenkeeper tries to fulfill the idea that a lush green putting surface is good, the quality of the green usually falls by the wayside,



certainly 'green' greens will never provide to faster putting speeds demanded these days. Because of these procedures, the very shallow rooted spring seeding annual meadow grass (*Poa Annua*) is susceptible to disease. On top of that, *Poa Annua* needs multiple chemical applications each year, just to protect this undesirable grass from total failure.

In this situation many golf clubs have to deal with increased costs in addition to the mechanical maintenance and an additional expense for fertilizer, water and chemicals. All this is not in the interest of the members, committees and golf associations at home or abroad.

To break this vicious circle, it needs hard work and targeted use of, for example, hand watering. However, this is only possible by adequately staffed greenkeeping teams, but it is here that spending of money will be saved.

The question remains, what happens if the EU bans chemicals for the golf courses, as the national authorities in Denmark already have done? What lies ahead are probably restrictions on water consumption.

Unfortunately we lack the arguments that might help in the long run. A logical consequence for this problem is for

the Greenkeeper to go back to more sustainable, ecological and economic golf course maintenance.

For the golfer this results in a new color palette, a mix of green, yellow and brown color than green grass, which is usually better as well as a healthy alternative putting surface that the 'Green Illusion' offers.



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