

The Back Nine

A column for writers and members to air and share their views on golf greenkeeping topics

As the golf season begins properly it seems many golfers will be struck by the highly contagious annual virus known as 'Augusta Syndrome'. Scott Corrigan, Head Greenkeeper at Greenburn Golf Club, grabs his stethoscope and searches for a cure

For golf course greenkeepers, Augusta National Golf Club and The Masters is a wonderful example of what can be achieved and created with unlimited resources.

I couldn't even guess at their annual course budget – but I reckon Greenburn Golf Club could comfortably survive for the next century on what they spend in a year.

We're now yet again approaching the start of a new golfing season which will inevitably be accompanied by the dreaded 'Augusta Syndrome'.

As we emerge from the wettest year on record off the back of two very wet years previously, the golf industry around the world again looks to a single date during the second weekend in April to signify the Masters tournament as the unofficial start to the golfing season.

Ever since the Masters was first televised in colour in 1967, golfers have aspired to what they thought was the next best thing, an emerald green golf course to play on every week. We all know of golfers who race out and expect their local course to be conditioned like Augusta the Monday after the Masters.

But as the average golfer settles down to watch the Masters on his 46inch widescreen HD television with the central heating on full, think of the struggling superintendent and his team at Augusta National who enjoys a mindblowing budget, enjoy the use of the world's best equipment to look after the course and have thousands of man hours available each week.

Then there's the under-soil heating and sub-air systems they have on the greens, and don't forget about the large fans and lighting rigs they can utilise on those dull days with little sunlight, and all this mentioned is just for starters! As Ron Dobson famously denounced: 'Augusta National is a television



Mowers run down the first fairway at the Masters, Augusta National Golf Club. (Photo by David Cannon/Getty Images)

studio on which a golf tournament is played in the spring'.

Augusta reportedly dye their ponds blue, paint the grass green, refrigerate or warm the azaleas to allow them to bloom perfectly for the Masters, and rumour has it that last year Hollywood set designers were brought in to hide damage caused by the use of weedkillers. Granted, the pressures to prepare Augusta compared to the average golf course are immense.

But here's an interesting exercise for you. Look up 'Augusta National Golf Club' on Google Maps to see it in its natural state, and when you zoom in you will find the true golf course.

You'll see grass that looks like natural grass, with bare patches and faded greens with dry ponds, a rather scorched appearance that people will not associate with the Augusta we know.

We greenkeepers love watching this tournament as much if not more than the next golf fanatic, but the expectations placed on our industry after the Masters is

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about the author



Scott Corrigan has been Head Greenkeeper at Greenburn Golf Club in Harthill, North Lanarkshire for four years, and in total has spent 23 years working at the 18-hole course which is a combination of moorland and parkland.

He studied at Oatridge College, and since last November he has been Chairman of BIGGA's East Scotland section.

enough to make many of us tear our hair out. So golfers - please spare a thought for greenkeepers in the real world who work tirelessly to produce the best courses possible with more and more restrictions imposed in the form of limited funds and reduced budgets, and with the minimal manpower available.

Also bear in mind the issues that come with working with ageing equipment and don't forget the unpredictable weather that we need to work with (eight inches of snow have fallen in March here already).

So this year, as spring approaches, I hope the golfers understand it's as realistic to expect the average golf course to look like Augusta National as it is to expect their own golf game to perform like Rory McIlroy or Tiger Woods.

The views expressed within this column are not necessarily those of Greenkeeper International