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From Belarus with love

When David MacIndoe was made redundant from his Course Manager role he became a Lawn & Sportsground Consultant – and one of his first challenges was a role as grow-in consultant for Belarus's first ever golf course. It's a nation where temperatures can drop to minus 20 with snow cover for a third of the year – and here he tells GI how he battled language barriers, snow mold and missing home



April 28
After securing a visit I've started work on a three month grow-in for the quiet lovely city of Minsk.
I've checked out the course with Mike Collins, owner of Minsk-Golf, who later built many courses in Eastern Europe, along with Head Designer Andy and his partner.
It's good to get an immediate feel for what appears to be a first-class project and golf course.
Howers, pine and silver birch trees dominate the site, a real headwind from the forest line and with good management could be as good as the best traditional courses that we take for granted in the UK.
The back-line is under construction, but the front ones which was constructed last year and sown towards the latter part of the year look like a desert. I've got a feeling this is not going to be successful.
The greens areas with Jacklin bent grass did not survive the winter. Some could dry out having snow cover for 119 days? 30 days later some can't even produce, while some can't even produce, they're just under snow. Some have to accept plant loss, after 90 days reports the snow is 117 days with one-work there in the middle of August. Some devastation is 90% of plant cover.
Then, lawns and roughs sown with a best/decide mix survived better, grass cover is around 70%, although some areas are thin, work and drained but at least I have something to work with. Snow mold issues cover all areas of the course, but it's not actually too bad and many with temperatures of 25 to 26 degrees.
Day two features full reworking of the fairway greens to be followed by the front fairway. The fairways need to be long cut in the shape of plenty of ripples and a quick application of the only fertilizer available – an agricultural balanced with a lovely soil of approximately 10mm. Great on fairways not quite so good on greens – but that will be adaptable and get on with it. So the first basic work has ended with grass and trees on the front area all inspected and finished.

May 13
My second week has been a mixture of 22 hours days, but very enjoyable and with temperatures now approaching 20 degrees, work on the irrigation system is the main focus. It requires a lot of work, with extremely deep wells and three big concrete pumps. On the main second hole, four hole academy course and during range they have recently been getting out 800 cubic meters a day. I hope they can cope when it rains again and raining.
May 27
I saw my second snake on the course – black with yellow markings. I didn't hang around to take a photo. The last snake I saw in the mountains as it was taken a bit of pressure off the course. It's good to be back on the course, things are settling down well. We've established a better routine and are cutting holes 1 to 13 plus the 18th hole and the 17th green.
We have received a consignment of 1.2 tonnes of green grade fertilizer. Several 10-20-5 fertilizers and murexium – not my first choice but they will just do in a second.
The greens have responded well compared to the agricultural products used previously so, for all you cynics out there, I really don't pay to

May 30
I have secured a second visit until the end of June – via an interesting overnight train journey there.

May 3
I shared an open carriage with three ladies. It was to my wife Sharon that it was all really annoying and they never shared some food with me.
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