



# Miles better

Miles Todd and his team have transformed the fortunes of Llandudno Maesdu Golf Club in 12 months. Steve Castle travelled to the unusual part-parkland, part-links in North Wales to find out how a Course Manager in his mid twenties has made such an impact



**Llandudno Maesdu combines two hugely contrasting courses in one. One side is lush parkland, but the second part stretching towards the Irish Sea is more of a links.**

Miles Todd – a Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year runner up in 2011- joined this intriguing set-up in April last year. From the very beginning, it was clear it would be a challenge. We toured the links part of the course on a misty day on the North Wales coast as Miles explained why.

“When I came here the course was below standard. The greens were poor. There was a big thatch problem and a big variation in grass species throughout the sward.”

To reduce the thatch levels, Miles devised a new comprehensive aeration and topdressing programme.

He explained: “I’m a believer in little and often when it comes to aeration and dressing. Greens were micro tined at 8mm twice a month followed by a dressing of straight sand. Our aim was 20 tonnes per month throughout the season.

“Sarrel rolling and star slitting were carried out on alternate weeks to keep the surface open. Verti draining with quarter inch tines

#### PROFILE

**Name:** Miles Todd  
**Role:** Course Manager  
**Born:** 26 November 1987  
**Handicap:** 12  
**Favourite Sports Team:** Liverpool  
**Hobbies:** Football (plays for Denbigh Town FC), golf

was carried out at the beginning and end of the season, followed by a heavy dressing of one tonne per green.”

The team verticutted greens up to three times a month to refine and reduce unwanted rye and Yorkshire fog which had crept in. This work also reduced the build up of organic matter and kept the surface as true and quick as possible.

Miles continued: “Fertiliser and water inputs were kept to a minimum. A 3.0.3 had already been applied before I started. An 8.0.0 was applied twice through the season and the last granular of the year was a 3.0.3 in October. Liquid feed, seaweed and iron were all used to trickle the greens along.

“A wetting agent programme was also put in place. The result of this work has dramatically improved the playing surface, thatch is diluting and the root system is thriving.

“This season we are using the Symbio Compost Tea system which will work in conjunction with our aeration and topdressing programme to reduce thatch levels, encourage finer grasses and reduce our fertiliser and fungicide inputs.”

So that explains how the greens have been transformed. But what

other issues needed addressing?

“There was no definition on the course. The fairways were straight edged with no shape, so we changed the height of cut and let the rough grow a bit to achieve some definition. The pathways needed redefining too.

“Some construction had been attempted near a pond, but the area around it had been damaged during the work leaving bare clay. So that area had to be rotavated, topsoil put in then overseeded. The grass did take a while to grow because we had such a cold spring last year, which wasn’t ideal weather for me to start with!

“The bunkers also needed work, they hadn’t really been maintained. Members complained there was no sand in them, so we had a good rake around and discovered all the sand had compacted at the back of the bunkers – the sand had never been redistributed or ‘fluffed up’. This also posed drainage issues and a couple even had algae in them.

“When I came in the committee handed me a ‘to do’ list! A lot of it was pie in the sky – they were good ideas, but first we needed to get back to basics. I had to convince them that we did have so much potential

here, but first it was essential to improve what we had. We had some potentially great features such as ponds and ditches but they hadn't made the best of them."

Just days after Miles joined, an official from the Golf Union of Wales arrived to view Llandudno Maesdu with the prestigious Aberconwy Trophy just weeks away - and warned him they were in danger of losing the competition due to the poor state of the course.

He said: "It was a case of getting everything in as good a shape as we possibly could. The official returned a couple of weeks before the Trophy in July and could see we had made some progress, and agreed we could stage it on the proviso that everything would be up to scratch next year. We continued to make steady improvements and successfully held the LGU Seniors Home International in September."

Miles heads a team of four with a seasonal greenkeeper added to the team in summer. It's clear there is plenty of competition for golfers' attentions in the area. Llandudno Maesdu is so close to North Wales Golf Club that the two are only divided by a small railway line which trundles along the West coast, and the much-heralded Conwy Golf Club is a mere three miles away, so it's essential for the course to be in excellent shape.

Another issue which Miles confronted head-on was poorly maintained machinery.

"The bearings had gone on some of the machines, and no grinding had been done. We didn't have time to do repairs as we were concentrating on the course so we had to spend quite a lot of money on servicing. We now look after the machinery ourselves and have already cut the maintenance budget by £4,000 which says it all - that money can be reinvested in the course.

"If we have a major problem, we've got a good relationship with the dealer Major Owen and they can usually get here the same day. Also, we keep records of the machinery maintenance we carry out so if something goes wrong, the club knows it's not due to neglect."

In April I spoke to Stuart Imeson, the 22-year-old Head Greenkeeper at Dunstanburgh Castle Links, to discover how he coped with a senior role at a relatively young age. So what is Miles's view on this?

"I was Course Manager here at 25 and I think at that age you've got to prove yourself twice as much. Some of the committee said to me straightaway "you're too young". That got on my nerves, especially



MAIN: The view of the 18th towards the clubhouse  
INSET: How parts of the course looked a year ago





for the first few weeks, and you feel a bit undermined. I asked them to trust me and give me time, and the team and myself would prove that we knew what we were doing.

"We've made gradual improvements but honestly, we haven't achieved anything like our potential yet. We have to keep moving forward because when I've visited other courses, it's clear to me that standards are improving everywhere as the market is currently so competitive. I like playing golf at other courses and think it's very important not to cocoon yourself in your own course, you need to keep up to date with what other greenkeepers are doing and compare your methods to theirs.

"Everyone here is now on our side, they can see what the greenkeeping team are doing and have faith in us all, they know we're an enthusiastic team.

"We're young and we want to prove a point. The members are complimenting the lads now, whereas before if they did speak to them it was generally a complaint. The feelgood factor is returning."

Miles admitted he left school with no real idea of his career path although he favoured the outdoor life. He played golf at Bryn Morfydd Golf Club (which has since closed)

and this led to a seasonal greenkeeping position. He then moved to Rhuddlan Golf Club while studying a National Diploma in Horticulture at Northop College.

After four months at Rhuddlan – a heavy parkland course – he was offered a full-time role, and switched his studies to an NVQ Level 2 in Sportsturf.

Miles recalled: "I worked my way up to Deputy at Rhuddlan. I learnt so much and had a good relationship with Course Manager John Morris, but there's only so much you can achieve as Deputy, I needed to progress and this place was nearby so it was ideal.

"I had the standard worries about moving up to Course Manager. You know if you don't succeed or something goes wrong, it's your head on the block. But to improve yourself you have to step out of your comfort zone.

"You have to lead by example, I go out and demonstrate what I want the team to do so there are no misunderstandings, and I don't ask anybody to do something I wouldn't be prepared to do myself."

Miles was nominated for Toro Student of the Year 2011 by Jenny Pitt, his tutor at Deeside College, and finished as a runner-up overall.



He credits this experience as a turning point in his career.

"I used to struggle with my confidence a bit, particularly when talking to older, more experienced greenkeepers.

"But it reassured me that my career was heading in the right direction and it gave me belief that I was doing the right things."

Miles is a talented footballer, and next season will be playing in the second tier of the Welsh football pyramid after helping Denbigh Town FC to promotion. After my illuminating visit to North Wales, I'm convinced that he's well on the way to restoring Llandudno Maesdu to the big league.

Follow the work of Miles and his team on Twitter @MaesduGolfClub.