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Growing success

AUGUSTA SYNDROME – GREENKEEPING IN THE SPRING IN THE UK

As I'm writing this article we're all no doubt watching The Masters from Augusta. I'm sure you'll agree a fantastic event at a very special place. I was lucky enough to visit a couple of years ago and it really is as good as it looks on television.

It is a unique club and to have a comparison in the UK market is probably unrealistic and very few clubs could be looking to achieve their standards. I think it is down to us as greenkeepers to provide our memberships with some education in terms of labour costs and expenses that go in to making it such a great golf course, for our clubs to be asking UK greenkeepers to achieve that standard and quality in golf course really is quite unrealistic, and would cost a fortune, a cost that could only be met by memberships having to finance.

In the current climate we are certainly not seeing that type of investment and a lot of members clubs are starting to struggle as people start to make their choices in terms of offers along with internet exposure it is easy to play wherever you want to and at great rates.

I think this is probably the hardest time of the year in terms of greenkeeping. The Spring often throws up a number of variables, weather wise - snow, rain, cold ground temperatures, some warmer days it really is difficult, and golfers' expectations are high especially as we had an early Easter holidays.

Soil temperatures are down in comparison to 2007 and this adds to the problem, I know how hard this is myself as I have had to put on European Tour events for the first week in May for four or five years running and the challenge of achieving a tournament standard golf course through this period, is a challenge I have to say I don't miss.

The usual golfer complaints and bumpy greens, from spring grasses growing at their different rate, the poa, bent and fescue, it really is a difficult job from that point of view to produce consistent putting surfaces and recovery from high levels of winter golf that is responsible for wear and tear around green and tee surrounds that leave most of us open to the critics who do not understand that without temperatures in the soil for fertiliser and overseeding we cannot get the damage repaired.



We also have to do a lot of renovation work within this period as golfers don't want it to be carried out when we are in main season (end of May through September). We are in a situation where the lower green fees coincide with this time, however, the disadvantage is that the recovery time is much longer, but it is another point that needs educating to the masses.

All the planning and organising these dates in a resort while also allowing for golf; there are many problems that we come up against. Golfers don't have to consider that aspect of the decision making and usually it is financial motivation that sets the dates. Again, on reflection in the current climate it is a relevant point as we are all going through some interesting financial challenges.

I will be attending the RA conference at the end of April beginning of May, I am hoping for some good debates and will inform you in my next column from that event.

Budgets vs Costs are beginning to conflict, as fertiliser and chemical costs are rising, managing budgets for this is a struggle and trying to keep pace with rising fuel prices, along with sand, haulage costs, it is difficult, we all need to be good accountants in this current climate and efficient with our spending when managing our purchasing.

I would like to wish Chris Kennedy and his team along with the BIGGA Support Team a successful tournament at Wentworth. Also Jim McKenzie from Celtic Manor a successful Wales Open. As I said earlier, I know how difficult these tournaments are in May and I hope the weather will be with them, I'm sure the courses will look fantastic.

My best wishes to all greenkeepers for the season, and hope that we see an improvement in the weather through to the summer.



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