

The beauty to behold at Medinah Country Club



“Golf courses will get over this recession, we have to find ways to tighten our belts – and this must not mean laying off skilled men”

Tough at the top

New BIGGA chairman Tony Smith may be 64, but his passion for greenkeeping has, if anything, increased over a remarkable career spanning nearly half a century. Steve Castle met him at his pride and joy

“In summer, this can be the greatest golf course.”

The new BIGGA chairman’s words could be mistaken for those of an enthusiastic teenage greenkeeper as he takes me on a whirlwind tour of Teesside Golf Course.

The incredibly flat site – with a natural fall of just eight inches from its highest to lowest point – has been Tony’s workplace for over 30 years.

He poured his heart and soul into the role of Head Greenkeeper. He planted a staggering 32,000 trees by hand, obtained a tipping licence to create a six-metre high mound to screen the course from nearby roads and constructed ponds and bunkers amongst countless other innovations.

On an idyllic sunny day, so rare this atrocious summer, it’s easy to see why Tony describes the parkland course as “beautiful” as he poses for photos close to the picturesque pond, teeming with carp, which crosses the first and last fairways.

However, he’s honest enough to admit they’ve suffered terribly with the relentless rain this year and he’s equally candid on all issues, particularly the desperate economic climate. It’s clear he intends to bring this openness to the chairmanship.

He says: ““This is the toughest time I’ve ever known. We did have difficult times in the mid seventies when we had a bad winter and people were laid off. Also, in the late eighties and early nineties we had a lull in membership, mainly because of the boom in golf courses being built. It was all pay and play with nomadic golfers playing a different course every weekend instead of paying membership.

“But the last few years have been the worst, and the amount of rain this year has just topped it off. I know it’s been the same for every-

one in the country, not just here.

“We’ve had floods before, but in April we even had a burst sewage pipe we had to sort out, and we’ve repeatedly had to close holes because of the damage the water has done to the fairways. It’s been one thing after another.

“Golf courses will get over this recession, what we have to do is find ways to tighten our belts – and this cannot and must not mean laying off skilled greenkeepers.”

These are not just empty words. Like many clubs, Teesside has had serious cash flow problems – so Tony came up with a radical idea.

“We had a meeting with every single member of staff invited, from the cleaners to the pro, to come up with ideas on how to save the golf club money.

“We had a few brainwaves such as selling land but they weren’t sufficient for the amount of money we were trying to save and it was clear we were looking at one or more redundancies.

“So I suggested they make me redundant, and I could then work part-time two or three days a week

until retirement – and that’s what we agreed. I was lucky in a way because I’ve only got a year before retirement so it was something I was able to offer, but you sometimes need to look for more unusual solutions.”

So, in a role reversal, Tony now reports to his previous protégé Gary Evans – who is now Head Greenkeeper.

“I thought it would be odd stepping back and letting Gary take over but it’s not – in fact he’s been here a year longer than me. He probably found it strange at first telling me what to do, but it works well. We’ve been able to save money

FACTFILE

Name: Tony Smith

Born: Sheffield, 20 August 1948

Marital Status: Married to Lorna with a son, daughter and three grandchildren

Handicap: 14

Hobbies: Amateur dramatics – recently played ‘Buttons’ in Cinderella!

Favourite Sports Team: Sheffield Wednesday





“Driving membership is the number one item on the BIGGA agenda”



BELOW: Gary Evans, Head Greenkeeper, is second from left, with his team



and go forward in the right way.”

Born in Sheffield, he learnt his trade at various golf clubs across Yorkshire, surviving a redundancy in his twenties. He cites lack of education as one of the reasons behind this early setback, which goes some way to explaining his passion for greenkeeper learning and development.

He admits: “I was appointed Head Greenkeeper at Hallowes GC near Sheffield when I was just 21, vastly inexperienced and big-headed. I didn’t get on with the captain either and eventually was let go.

“I worked at Abbeydale Golf Club twice, Hillsborough Golf Club, and spent a brief period fitting swimming pools after Hallowes until I saw the job of Head Greenkeeper advertised here in 1979.

“I turned up for the interview and my only qualifications were two STRI certificates and one night school certificate – that was it. There was no proper formal training available. I managed to get the job and I’ve been here ever since.

“Our biggest asset, without a shadow of a doubt, is education. Whenever I speak with young greenkeepers now I urge them to take advantage of BIGGA’s many educational opportunities.”

Tony’s formal training began in the mid-nineties when he attended supervisory management courses organized by BIGGA. At that time sessions were held annually, and covered a range of training areas essential for any greenkeeper such as managing people, resources, course development and IT skills.

He explains: “I wanted to improve my skill range and make myself more employable. I wanted to become a wiser greenkeeper with a greater understanding of my staff, golfers’ needs, the environment and also understand issues like budgets and health and safety, and this is how it turned out.

“This was absolutely crucial and all stood me in good stead throughout the rest of my career, I couldn’t have done without it.”

Appropriately, Tony officially replaced Andrew Mellon as Chairman on the first day of golf’s biggest weekend – The Open, held this year at Royal Lytham St Annes. He couldn’t be clearer on his main priority – membership and increasing member engagement.

“Driving and engaging the membership is the number one item on everybody’s agenda, as it should be. And it is down to our current membership to encourage the next generation to join.

“BTME is buzzing, HQ is buzzing

and we’ve got terrific RAs inspiring the regions. But we don’t brag enough about what we do and our successes. I want the members to tell everyone about the education we offer, and examples of what they’ve been doing. I want the members who went to The Open to shout about how great it was. I want them all to be talking about BIGGA.

“As long as we have members the association will always be there, we shouldn’t lose sight of that, and in the past I think we have. I’m not afraid to shake things up to get us where we should be.”

Tony began his rise in the Sheffield section in the early part of his career, in a bid to increase his involvement and also gain a greater understanding of the theories behind greenkeeping.

He then moved on to the Cleveland section committee where he organized tournaments and attended meetings and lectures, continuing to develop his knowledge. Eventually he took over as chairman of this section before joining the board after a brief period as a deputy to the board.

Is he surprised to have risen to the role of chairman?

“I’m gobsmacked really, for a lad from my background. Several people who know me from outside greenkeeping say ‘Why you? There must be someone from St Andrews or Carnoustie who would take it on!’

“We’ve reached a stage where Teesside Golf Course is in first-class condition, there’s a fantastic team in place here so I have the capacity to take the role of chairman on, and I’m delighted to do so.

“The team have been 100 per cent behind me throughout my time here – although they’ll have to put up with me for a little while longer! They’ve looked after the course when I’ve been away on Association business and have done a superb job.”

He admits that some of his social activities – he treads the boards in panto and also enjoys tutoring young actors and actresses, as well as spending time with his wife Lorna and his grandchildren – will have to be scaled back now he’s chairman.

“Being on the board is not as easy as some may think. We give up a lot of our own time and holidays. I wouldn’t like to know how many hours I’ve given up with my various roles at Section, Regional and National level.”

With that, he takes instructions from the Head Greenkeeper Gary and heads off to work on his beloved course.



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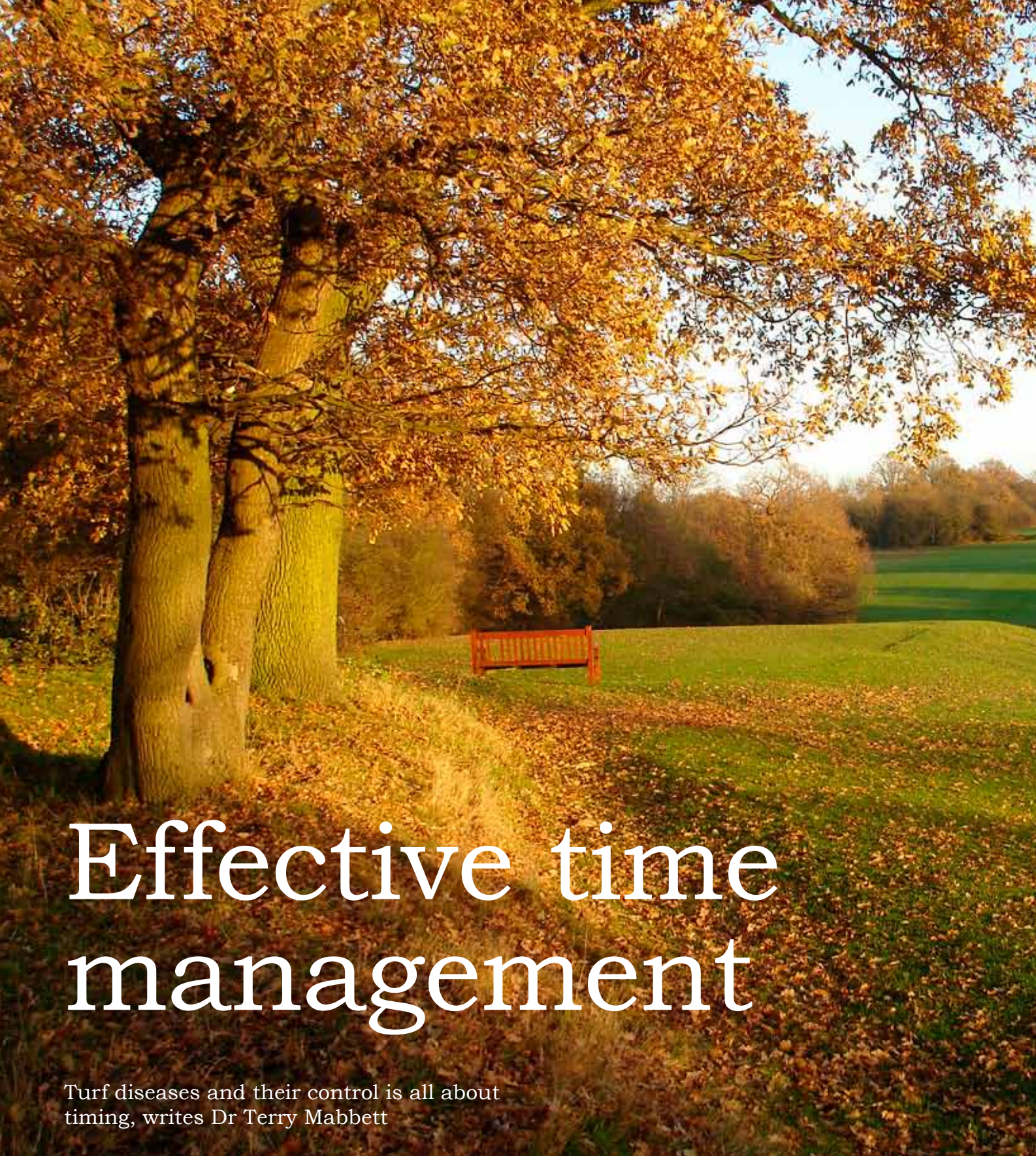
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Effective time management

Turf diseases and their control is all about timing, writes Dr Terry Mabbett

It never ceases to amaze why professional sports turf is so prone to disease. Why a sward of prostrate plants with shallow fibrous root systems and green foliage mown and manicured to just millimetres in length is such a worthwhile target for so many fungal diseases appears at first sight to be a mystery.

The answer is deeply embedded

in professional turf's role and function as a sport playing surface, a sequence of events taking place and conditions experienced throughout the calendar year. Unlike swards of green plants grown in agriculture, fine turf grass plants are trampled on and acutely injured on a very regular basis by the blades of the mowing machine.

Like all green plants, turf grasses are least able to fight off fungal

pathogens and manifestations of disease when an 'open door' (cut ends of grass leaves and shoots) is presented for fungal infection against a background of general debilitation (stress) which means grass plants can't mount an effective fightback.

Replenishment management practice including nourishment with nutrients (fertilization) and water supplementation by irriga-

'A' was for anthracnose always appearing in autumn. Fusarium and fallen leaves often appear together although the roots of this disease would have invariably been put down during the previous summer of high traffic and drought



tion, aimed at the recuperation and regeneration of grass, can unwittingly trigger plant pathogenic fungi into action on the rapidly growing, lush and highly attractive turf grass plants.

These are clearly important reasons for the prevalence of fungal disease in turf but the primary underlying reason for sports turf's

proneness to disease is the ever-ready presence of fungal pathogens on the thatch. Thatch as the name implies is a layer of entwined dead and dying grass stems and leaves strategically placed in between the actively growing green grass plant and the soil surface.

Main components of professional sports turf are perennial grasses (persist from year to year). The few which are not (e.g. *Poa annua* – annual meadow grass) seed, germinate and regenerate so easily and quickly that there is essentially no seasonal gap in the sward as a whole.

Accumulation of dead and dying plant matter in such a long term perennial and persistent sward is unavoidable. What's more, thatch is an essential part of the sports playing surface as a cushion and is therefore encouraged up to a point of optimum depth and density. The fungi which live and feed as saprophytes or very weak parasites on the readily available supply nutrients contained in and released by thatch are also encouraged, albeit unavoidably.

Some of these fungi are highly versatile feeders able to 'step up to the plate' as full-blown aggressive parasites and pathogens, when the environmental conditions (e.g. temperature, humidity and surface wetness) are right and the state of turf-grass growth (e.g. soft and lush nitrogen-fed growth) is ripe for the taking.

Thatch is home to many different fungi but the two most damaging to professional sports turf, and specifically golf greens, are *Microdochium nivale* and *Colletotrichum graminicola*, the causal pathogens of, respectively, Fusarium Patch and Anthracnose.

Once upon a time no other disease could match Fusarium Patch on UK turf in occurrence or damage caused. Anthracnose was a purely autumn problem and essentially confined to *P. annua* as a basal stem rot disease.

Fusarium patch is still 'top dog' disease on UK turf. Meanwhile anthracnose has 'spread its wings' and is now seen in summer as foliar blight on a broader range of turf grass species, in addition to its traditional position as a basal rot of annual meadow grass in autumn.

Underpinning the position and status of both fungal pathogens as the most damaging diseases of UK turf is a permanent presence in thatch and a capacity to 'cash in' on favourable sets of environmental factors, including microclimate conditions inside the turf canopy

and largely created by the thatch component.

Facing up to Fusarium Patch

The status of Fusarium Patch as UK's number one disease of sports turf is unquestioned. Surveys show over 90% of all UK greenkeepers can expect to come face to face with Fusarium Patch in any one calendar year. Over 50 per cent of all professional football pitches record Fusarium at least on an occasional basis and even 20 per cent of local authority sports pitches where disease monitoring is less.

A similar picture unfolds on the disease control canvas with four fifths of all fungicide applications made to UK sports turf primarily targeted at Fusarium, although given the broad spectrum activity built into contemporary commercial product other diseases including Anthracnose, Dollar Spot and Red Thread are clearly controlled at the same time.

A whole raft of factors combine and contribute in sending quiescent populations of thatch dwelling *M. nivale* into turf disease causing mode and invariably with roots in a particular period of summer stress before the disease actually shows in earnest in autumn.

M. nivale is present in thatch year round in saprophytic feeding mode (dead decaying organic matter) or in a weakly parasitic mode. The fungus can spring into intense pathogenic activity over the widest range of temperature is (21 °F [-6 °C] and up to about 86 °F [30 °C]) which means greenkeepers can face Fusarium on turf at any time during the calendar year of a cool temperate climate like the UK.

Last but not least is its ability to infect right across the turf grass species spectrum (*Agrostis*, *Festuca*, *Poa* and *Lolium*) and a liking for fertile soils, especially where autumn fertilizer applications heavy on nitrogen give a burst of soft green growth after the summer drought. Simultaneously occurring cool temperatures, mists, dews and accompanying high humidity of during this autumn period are ideal for infection and disease spread.

Slow growing turf over deep thatch later in late autumn/winter provides the ideal substrate for *M. nivale* especially under cool wet conditions (32 to 46 °F [0 – 8°C]) and when turf grass is covered with snow, when Fusarium symptoms often display a characteristic pink coloured tinge.

Conditions that promote the spread of *M. nivale* include dew, drizzle, mist, fog, frost occurring



on previously dry and compacted summer stressed turf suddenly refreshed by autumn rains and flushed with fertiliser. Grass growth resumed in earnest but so did the anthracnose fungus having lain 'dormant' in the thatch during the dry summer months. That has changed, with a new and additional form of anthracnose disease (caused by the same fungal pathogen) now first appearing during the summer months as a foliar blight on a much wider range of turf grasses.

Anthracnose is now firmly established as the second most important disease of UK turf after Fusarium Patch. Contemporary Anthracnose is much heavier, presents problems over longer periods and on a much wider range of turf grasses. The measures needed to avoid, manage and control Anthracnose, including use of fungicide sprays, have been reassessed accordingly.

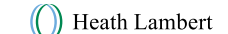
The foliar blight form of Anthracnose was widespread in North America long before it took off in the UK. Infection occurs, symptoms show and disease spreads during spells of high humidity with temperatures over 22°C, especially on turf struggling to grow over a dry root zone. Summer irrigation or watering to alleviate drought stress may aggravate the Anthracnose problem. Water unable to percolate through the dry compacted soil lays on the surface to soak the thatch and generate high humidity, the very conditions which set scene for anthracnose.

night after night with alternating daytime thawing and also snow cover. Poor drainage favours Fusarium Patch as does long uncut grass leaves becoming matted down to create a humid microclimate within the turf grass canopy.

When Fusarium patch strikes in autumn the greenkeeper may look back and see how the 'seeds' of disease were set in summer but that is of little consolation or use until the next time round. More than any other turf pathogen *M. nivale* and Fusarium Patch disease requires an integrated turf management programme that covers and caters for the entire calendar year.

'A' was for anthracnose and always in autumn

'A' was for anthracnose always appearing in autumn as a dark-coloured basal (crown) rot of *Poa annua* (annual meadow grass)



This article comes to you courtesy of the BIGGA L&D Fund.

TOP: The foliar blight form of anthracnose which can appear as early as July (Photograph courtesy Syngenta)

BELOW: Early development of Fusarium Patch from thatch (Photograph courtesy Syngenta)

BOTTOM RIGHT: Timing is the key to preventing infection with Fusarium Patch disease. Close up on symptoms of a well-established Fusarium infection shown here. (Photograph courtesy Vitax)

Affected patches of turf are yellow at first, then bronze with affected grass assuming a dull and darkened appearance. Annual meadow grass and creeping bent grass (*Agrostis stolonifera*) are the prime targets but smooth stalked meadow grass (*Poa pratensis*) and creeping red fescue (*Festuca rubra*) are also affected. This foliar blight stage creates inoculum (spores) for more infection as basal rot in the autumn.

Thatch residing diseases nipped in the bud

Dozens of different turf fungicides have come and gone including classic contact-protectant fungicides, which must be on the leaf before infection takes place, and systemically acting curative chemicals that can enter the grass plant to eradicate established infections.

These pathogens continue to place sports turf under considerable disease pressure but commercial fungicides are under equally considerable pressure from the regulation authorities and related to all aspects of use and environmental loading. These are versatile, fast-moving diseases with greenkeepers invariably waking up to find an unexpected existing infection. Established infections take a lot longer to control with more sprays and larger amounts of fungicide.

Insurance sprays of purely contact-protectant fungicides are all very well but turfgrass is frequently mown. Every time the grass is mown protectant fungicide on the clippings is lost leaving new unprotected growth with severed ends as prime points of entry and infection by pathogenic fungi.

In a completely new departure from traditional thought and practice in fungicide activity and application, Syngenta have introduced a new product called Medallion TL based on the fungicide fludioxonil. Fludioxonil not only targets spores of *M. nivale* and *C. graminicola* on green grass leaves but also in the thatch and soil. These disease problems are therefore nipped in the bud with spores destroyed before they have time to germinate and infect the living grass leaves.





A Fusarium Patch trial which shows a heavily diseased control plot which has not been treated with fungicide. This is surrounded by a large treated kept 'clean' by targeting the thatch with fungicide to prevent leaf infection
(Photograph courtesy Syngenta)

Tackle Anthracnose more effectively

Syngenta and Everris have published a Turf Science in Action guide: An integrated approach to Anthracnose control.

The booklet explains why we need a new approach to Anthracnose control, information on the key products to use to protect against infection and advice on when to apply treatment. It's also packed with details about combining fast-acting nutrition and fungicide applications plus results of STRI research into Anthracnose.

A copy of the guide can be downloaded from the GreenCast website, or email caroline.scott@syngenta.com to receive a copy.



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Close up inspection by Keith Kensett and Allen Blizzard, Course Manager Royal Blackheath 14 days after Graden Sand Injection and Overseeding Works

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at The Grandstand, Royal Windsor Race Course

BIGGA is delighted to have once again, been invited by the IOG to present a series of seminars at SALTEX 2012. This year we will be bringing you some of the greatest hits from the extremely successful **Continue to Learn at BTME 2012**.

10.15 am – 11.15 am
Managing Winter Kill

David Cole, Golf Course/Estate Manager,
Loch Lomond Golf Club

In the winter of 2009/10 the greens at Loch Lomond suffered from devastating winter kill. This session will give an insight to the damage that occurred and the precautions that were taken in 2010/11 to prevent similar problems.

11.30 am – 12.30 pm
From Grazing to Scottish Open Status in Five Years

Chris Haspell, Course Manager, Castle
Stuart Golf Club

In this session Chris will discuss his experiences of building a links golf course and it's grow in. He will also describe the journey towards the Scottish Open 2011, the event, the rain and the recovery.

1.00 pm – 2.00 pm
Organic Matter – Friend or Foe

Paul Lowe, Technical Sales Manager,
Symbio

Measuring organic matter levels is becoming very popular, almost an industry standard procedure. This information can be invaluable to green keepers and grounds men. However, how do we decipher between thatch and organic matter and why it is important to do so. This seminar will discuss the various differences between problematic thatch and beneficial organic matter, the problems with working to a figure, the difference between drainage and percolation rates and how you can turn the thatch to your advantage.

BIGGA CPD Credits

0.5 CPD credits are available for each seminar.
A CPD register will be available at the end of each seminar.

