

# Matt -trick hero

Matt Le Brun is head greenkeeper at the RJ National, a three-hole, GEO certified course on the outskirts of Ipswich. Kevin Marks visited him recently to see how he maintains the course for his employers, Ransomes Jacobsen, a BIGGA Gold Key Sponsor

**Matt is the head greenkeeper (and the only greenkeeper) looking after the three-hole golf course at the European headquarters of the international turf maintenance equipment manufacturer, Ransomes Jacobsen.**

Seasoned greenkeepers may think a three-hole course would literally be a walk in the park - but in just 18 months, Matt has made this job into a vocation.

He dreamed of becoming a professional golfer and recorded his first hole in one aged just 11 - but eventually realised he was not quite



up to professional standard.

So, he joined Milton Park Golf Club in 2005 as an apprentice professional, and began taking a real interest in the 'other' side of the business.

"I became more involved and more interested in what was going on around the course," he said, "so in 2007 I got a job at my home club of Ely. I subsequently achieved NVQ level 2 and obtained my spraying certificates, as well as gaining excellent experience of general greenkeeping duties.

"After a spell at Heijman's Contractors in the Netherlands I saw this job advertised on BIGGA's

website, and after a rigorous interview process I began my two-year contract in January 2011.

"Being a GEO certified golf course puts us in such illustrious company as courses at St Andrews, Celtic Manor, and the Montgomerie in Turkey."

The RJ National was the brainchild of David Withers, the managing director at Ransomes Jacobsen, now president at Jacobsen in the USA, who wanted to build a small golf course close to the company's manufacturing facility. He reasoned that if he could produce a course that had different grass species on each of the holes





and fairways, then it would be ideal for testing the company's mowers and demonstrating their capabilities to customers and prospects. He also wanted to use the course as an educational and training opportunity for young, aspiring greenkeepers and that's exactly how it's turned out.

He persuaded golf architect Howard Swan to design the course and with input from the STRI, who return every six months to evaluate the course, there was a determined effort to construct the course in accordance with the highest environmental principles. The ground was broken in June 2007, seeding commenced in the autumn and it was officially opened in October 2008.

"I inherited a young golf course following a very harsh winter with snow mould damage on the greens," Matt says. "But I'm not left completely alone to manage the course as I'm mentored by Norman Fenwick, course manager at Ipswich Golf Club.

"His advice has been invaluable. He's from Wearside with a very direct manner, but he knows the art of greenkeeping inside out. I can honestly say that I would have made more mistakes if it wasn't for him."

Matt has relished his unique chance to try out up-to-the-minute equipment on the course.

"One of the great things about this job is the opportunity to use some

of the latest and most innovative equipment in the industry. We have a large demonstration fleet, so I get to use a whole range of machinery from pedestrian mowers to large tractors.

"We have a close working relationship with Wiedenmann and they have been a great help with my aeration programme. After aeration I then top dressed with pure sand.

"In the first six months I was working long hours to bring the course round; I was scarifying and overseeding and I changed the fertiliser programme reducing the granular and introducing a liquid input.

"Because of the large number of customer visits and product testing I didn't want to leave granular fertiliser on the course and have it re-distributed by the footfall of visitors, so I changed to liquid applications.

"As part of my job I've been able to test the enhancements to the Jacobsen Eclipse 322 hybrid and all-electric riding greens mowers.

"I've evaluated all the GreenTek range – vibrating roller, scarifiers and de-thatchers and I tested the new three-wheel drive system, long before it went to market.

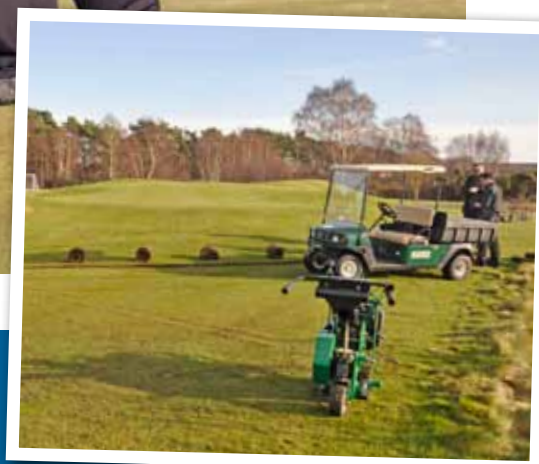
"One of the real highlights so far was a product video, filmed here. It involved a remote controlled helicopter filming from various angles.

"I had to drive across the course with the helicopter fast approaching





“One of the great things about this job is the opportunity to use some of the latest and most innovative equipment in the industry, from pedestrian mowers to large tractors”



and swooping over my head as I drove by. It was being controlled by a guy some 30 metres away and was quite scary!

“I’d like to think that under my short tenure, the course has become more established and has certainly got a lot more definition.

Without a doubt, it’s the best place I’ve ever worked; the people are so professional, everyone is willing to help and give their time and there is so much knowledge here.

From the engineering team, who keep coming up with new and innovative equipment, to the guys who actually build the mowers in the factory, the trainers who have collectively hundreds of years experience and knowledge, and the sales and marketing people who make sure that we keep putting the professional ace of the business to the marketplace.”

It’s very clear that despite only managing a three-hole course, Matt has thrown himself into what is a hugely varied and full-on role.

So, if you’re a young and aspiring greenkeeper, still on a college course with the aim of forging a career and you see an advertisement for this post, don’t hesitate; send in your application!

## The types of grass seed at RJ National

### Tee 1: Bar 10

45% Barlexas 2 tall fescue  
25% Perennial Rye grass  
30% Rhizomatosis tall fescue  
Trial grass that did not work as well.  
Overseeded with dwarf perennial rye grass and removing tall fescue

### Green 1: Bar 2

25% Viktorika slender creeping red fescue  
25% Barcrown slender creeping red fescue  
15% Barbride chewings fescue  
10% Barking browntop bent  
10% Heriot browntop bent

### Tee 2: Bar Platinum

30% Bargold dwarf perennial ryegrass  
25% Barpearl slender creeping red fescue  
25% Barcrown slender creeping red fescue  
20% Barbirdie chewings fescue

### Green 2: Bar fescue

25% Barbirdie chewings fescue  
25% Bargreen chewings fescue  
25% Barcrown slender creeping red fescue  
25% Barpearl slender creeping red fescue

### Tee 3: Bar 4

40% Chopin strong creeping red fescue

30% Bartwingo dwarf perennial ryegrass  
15% Bartender smooth stalked meadow grass  
15% Barpearl slender creeping red fescue

### Green 3: Bar all bent

50% Barking brown top bent  
50% Heriot brown top bent

### Fairways: Bar 5

30% Slender creeping red fescue  
25% Baroxi chewings fescue  
25% Bargreen chewings fescue  
15% Julius smooth stalked meadow grass

### Test area/Football pitch: Bar 8

35% Romance dwarf perennial ryegrass  
30% Barlennium dwarf perennial ryegrass  
15% Barcrown slender creeping red fescue  
20% Julius smooth stalked meadow grass







Andy Wood, Course Manager at the Robin Hood Golf Club in Birmingham, chats to Laurence Pithie of Turf Master One about the results of his drainage work on the greens, most of which was completed in 2009/2010

# Greens drainage ...a case study

**Like many courses formed over a century ago, Robin Hood Golf Club is not blessed with natural free draining soil. Originally designed by Harry Colt and opened in 1893, the club is located just five miles from Birmingham city centre.**

Although surrounded by housing and a primary school, this parkland style course of around 6,500 yards is largely tree lined yet does not feel enclosed. The club is a regular host for local tournaments with a desire to act as a future regional qualifying venue for the Open Championship.

## Challenges

With greens drainage in particular being the weakest aspect of this course, a report was commissioned in 2001, advising the reconstruction of all 18 greens. The club rejected this and for the next eight years, the greens gradually accumulated a greater level of thatch, which led to a worsening drainage situation. By 2009, the club was faced with the dilemma of having a shorter playing season, dissatisfied golfers and a gradual decline in membership numbers. It was in desperate need of a solution

to a problem that was not going to disappear.

Enter Andy Wood, a young Course Manager with the vision to take the course forward and a growing reputation from the likes of Andy Cole of the STRI who was urging the club to address this worsening situation. The 35-year-old had previously spent six years as a Deputy Head Greenkeeper at The Belfry before managing and improving the Cosby course in Leicestershire for a further seven years.

Andy said: "Soon after arriving and taking various turf and soil samples, it was apparent that drastic action was required. The greens contained a thatch level of over 60mm, a serious black layer problem, heavy reliance on fungicide applications and suffered closure due to waterlogging of between 20 and 30 days each year.

A Clegg hammer reading of 48 was one of the worst ever recorded by the STRI.

Previous efforts to improve drainage and reduce the level of thatch included the use of the Graden Sand Injector and limited aeration work. Even after just 10mm of rain, water would remain on the

surface for over a day, with prolonged rain leading to complete loss of turf."

## Planning and Approval

Soon after commencing work as Course Manager, Andy made a presentation to the club, highlighting the problems and then recommending a plan of action to address the issue with the greens once and for all.

After the inevitable questions being raised from the membership on the effectiveness of the plan, level of disruption, timescale and cost, there was a strong desire to overcome the problem in the most cost effective way possible.

Andy was given full club approval to drain 15 of the greens over the autumn and winter of 2009 and 2010.

"The first step was to locate suitable outlets for the drain water to exit the course or to be reused for irrigation water.

"The next requirement was to provide a series of main drains that would allow connection from the greens and then entry into

Turf Master One Ltd is grateful to Andy Wood and Robin Hood GC for their support in producing this article.



the outlets. Due to the layout of the course and elevation changes, the course was split into three zones but with just two outlets, one into a brook which traverses the course and the other into a lake which can then be recycled. The third part of the plan was to drain the greens themselves. Following various quotations, Delta Golf were appointed to carry out all three stages of the work, with the greens staff carrying out the more intricate turfing and remedial finishing work.

#### In Detail

"In the summer of 2009, approximately 2,500 linear metres of 300mm pipe were installed using an excavator and dump truck. Spoil material was stored into various areas for future mounding and tee construction.

With dry ground conditions, there was minimal damage and once the lines were back-filled with stone, sand and root-zone, all lines were seeded in early autumn. The total cost of phase one was around £40,000.

"With temporary greens prepared in advance and an AFT Sand Bander and mini-excavator purchased for in-house project work and secondary drainage, work began on the greens during September and continued up until the end of the year.

The plan included installing

drainage lines at between 1.5 and two metre spacing followed by sand banding at 90° angles at between one and two metre spacing.

This has provided a permanent matrix of drainage lines and channels which can move water quickly from the playing surface and into the drainage pipes previously installed. Connecting drains were added to link the greens drainage to the main line system.

The contractors worked from boards, consisting of large sheets of plywood which protected the greens surface from damage."

Details are as follows.

"Once the contractor installed the main drain lines, sand banding was completed by the greens staff using the AFT machine, again working from boards to avoid damaging the turf especially the edges. Once complete, all trench lines were

**"Soon after arriving and taking various turf and soil samples, it was apparent that drastic action was required"**

again consolidated and the turf replaced in the order in which it was removed.

Contractor work took approximately five days to complete each green, with a further two to three days required to complete the in-house work.

The cost to drain the 15 greens

#### GREENS DRAINAGE INFO..

Preparation .....Turf cut & rolled  
 Spacing.....1.5 to 2 metres  
 Depth.....550mm (22ins)  
 Width.....120mm (5ins)  
 Method.....Laser Guided  
                     Wizz Wheel  
 Fall.....1/8" Back to front  
 Pipe size.....100mm (4ins)  
 Backfilling 1.....2 to 6mm gravel  
                     - 250mm  
 Backfilling 2.....Root-zone  
                     - 300mm

#### SAND BANDING...

Spacing.....1 to 2 metres  
 Depth.....200mm (8ins)  
 Width.....25mm (1in)  
 Sand quantity..2 tons per green

was approximately £63,000 - around £4,200 per green. A further £25,000 was spent on installing connecting drains on the front approaches to link the greens with the main line system.

With various ancillary work completed by the contractors, the total cost of the project was in the region of £140,000.



Sand banding and subsequent top dressings was additional to this”.

**Surface reinstatement & ongoing surface improvement**

“Much of the first winter was spent on reinstatement work whereby drainage lines were constantly being raised, levelled or adjusted to ensure a smooth finish. Coring, deep tining and sanding of the areas between the drain lines were completed along with other work which included rolling and brushing in order to bring the greens back into play as soon as possible. By April 2010, this was achieved after a period of between six and seven months of work and recovery”.

During 2010, the greens and collars were sand dressed on average every two weeks, applying around 15 tons per application.

This amounted to almost 400 tons of sand being applied, followed by around 350 tons in 2011. At around £30 per ton, the cost in top dressing alone was £12,000 and £10,500 respectively for the two years. This year the amount is likely to fall to around 300 tons, reducing further to around 200 tons in 2013.

**Unfinished business**

Work on the 18th green had been deferred since other landscaping work to the bunkers and surrounds were required.

Before work started in September 2011, the club purchased an AFT Trencher which would allow the staff to complete all the necessary work in house.

Another member of staff was also employed since other project work was planned which included the reconstruction of the 16th green and the inclusion of a small timber edged lake.

The 18th green was drained in exactly the same way, the work was completed on time and the green brought back into play earlier this year.

The total cost of the project was around £2,250 inclusive of a connecting drain to the main line.

The remaining 6th green not requiring drainage had previously been rebuilt several years earlier to a modern sand based construction.

Nearly two years on from the initial work, the difference in playability and greens performance is remarkable.

The greens have drained very well with no standing water remaining

after heavy rainfall.

Following extensive aerifying, top dressing, brushing, grooming and rolling, the greens are firm, smooth and consistent. Stimpmeter readings on the day of this visit averaged ten and this pace has been maintained throughout the summer.

Recent data taken by the STRI supports the transformation in performance and a substantial reduction in Organic Matter content as seen in the green profile photograph. Nutrient input has been lowered from around 130kgs Nitrogen in 2008 to 105kgs in 2011 and less is expected this year, probably ending with applying around 95kgs of Nitrogen per Ha and a lesser amount of Potassium.

**“The club now has a small but healthy waiting list”**

Fungicide applications have been reduced to three per year, two being applied as a preventative.

In financial terms, there has been a halt in membership loss and the club now has a small but healthy waiting list. Green fee income has improved, although it has stalled somewhat due to the exceptionally wet summer.

One interesting aspect is that a small band of members give some voluntary time on the course for work such as pond clearance, divoting fairways, tree trimming and so on. Pride in their course has been re-established and there is strong desire to make Robin Hood Golf Club one of the best courses in the region.

**Conclusion**

The challenge of finding a workable solution to draining soil based greens will be one that is familiar to many within the industry.

Andy Wood accepted this challenge and with the support and investment from the golf club and a great greenkeeping team alongside him, they were able to deliver on time and within budget, while also raising the performance of the greens to a standard not witnessed previously.

His enthusiasm and commitment from start to finish, from planning and presentation to implementation and communication has been an







**ABOVE:** Greens drained via Wizz wheel trencher

**RIGHT:** Sand slitting and drainage completed before turf is replaced

**BELOW:** Newly installed drain lines at 2m centres

**ABOVE LEFT:** Green profile on 17th

**LEFT:** Putting on 18th green 10 months after drainage







Last year, Eddie Mills had a severe outbreak of Microdochium (Fusarium) Patch on his Penn A4 & G6 creeping bentgrass greens, which quickly took hold and proved difficult to eradicate.

Working with his Evertis Technical Area Sales Manager, Emma Kilby, they devised an iTurf integrated turf management programme that focused on improving the overall health of the turf and preventing disease.

The programme combines SierraformGT slow-release fertilizer, Greenmaster Pro-Lite granular fertilizers, Greenmaster Liquid fertilizers including Blade biostimulant and Effect Iron Fe, and Primo Maxx plant growth

regulator to provide optimum nutrition that meets the grass plant's requirement, encourages strong, healthy rooting, and helps maintain a healthy rootzone.

To prevent disease, Eddie also took advantage of Evertis's **Maximum Protection** packages, the first of which combines Banner Maxx broad-spectrum fungicide tank mixed with Greenmaster Liquid for proven results.

New research undertaken at STRI and supported by R&D at Evertis and Syngenta research facilities has demonstrated that, where there is a risk of Anthracnose attack, a rapid response with fast uptake fertilizer and fungicide inputs can effectively minimise damage from infection. The trials highlighted the synergistic effects of fast-acting Greenmaster Liquid fertilizer and







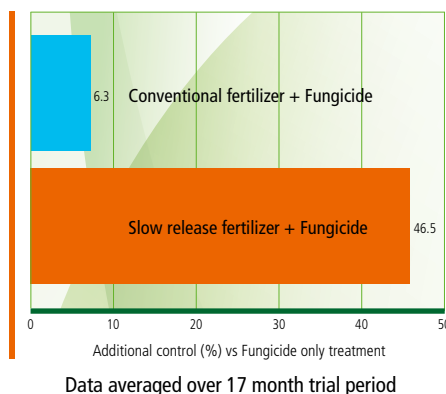
“Our iTurf programme has helped us set a new standard for our greens this summer, despite us experiencing some of the most challenging weather conditions in the club’s history.”

Eddie Mills, Course Manager, Edgbaston Golf Club

rapid uptake of Banner Maxx. When used together, the results produced excellent control of disease and improvements in turf health and quality.

This autumn, Eddie will follow up with an application of Heritage Maxx systemic strobilurin fungicide and SierraformGT with slow-release nitrogen and potassium plus Silica and trace elements. Data averaged over a 17 month trial period showed that disease reduction was increased by 46% when combined with a SierraformGT programme compared to a fungicide-only treatment.

#### Improved fungicide efficacy vs *M.nivale*



To discover what an iTurf programme can do for your golf course, contact your Everris Technical Area Sales Manager or visit [www.everris.co.uk](http://www.everris.co.uk).

For more information about the Maximum Protection packages, visit [everris.co.uk](http://everris.co.uk) and click on 'special offers'. Offers end 28th September 2012.





# A cut above



**When did you last try a different make of brushcutter? Brushcutters targeting professional users may have grown over the years, but for some brand loyalty sees a reluctance to consider anything other than just one make. Unless you try a range of alternatives, however, you may miss out on the tool that is best suited to your needs**