

ON COURSE

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Don't let headlines mislead you

“Reduce inputs of fertiliser and water thus encouraging finer grasses to grow and your greens will be more sustainable in the future.” Those are the headlines we may have recently read, but it is a very dangerous message to take literally.

Anyone wishing to rise up the sustainability ladder must embrace the whole story not just the headlines. The story says that by reducing inputs of fertiliser and water you will certainly create the ideal environment to stress out annual meadow grass. But do the bents and fescues automatically take its place? Definitely not. It will be necessary to put a number of other factors in place before those grasses can be relied upon to properly establish.

One of the most important of these is to define your requirements for green speed and how cutting height will influence this. It has been said that fescues/bents should not be cut any shorter than 4mm. This, for many, will require a change of mindset from previous management regimes.

Many courses particularly those inland and on heavier soils have produced good putting surfaces for much of the playing season by successfully managing Poa Annua (a naturally self generating grass) to its optimum. Its “cause and effect” principles have served us well. Vigorous growth is obtained by adding nitrogen, drought is prevented by adding water, fusarium is treated by applying fungicide, dry patch is kept at bay with wetting agents, regular verticutting improves putting surface quality and height of cut (sometimes down to 3mm or lower) determines speed of the greens. This regime has, in the main, produced good playing surfaces, particularly in Summer and Autumn.

Even the odd blip in late Winter and Spring when greens may not be at their best has normally been tolerated by players. It is also true to point out that managing Poa Annua in this way has proved to be a practice which most Course Managers have been able to identify with and carry out. This is probably because it is clearly defined as to how the various operations are implemented and when.

So why change? Well it has been shown that where the environment is suitable for growth of bents and/or fescues then a change to these grasses can produce putting surfaces which should not require such generous inputs of fertiliser and fungicide and also may well be more consistent all year round. Indeed we now have examples of courses where this transition has successfully been made.

There are however three key requirements when making this transition. The first is to ensure the conditions are right to support growth of fescues and bents. This entails severely minimising thatch, getting the drainage right and allowing plenty of light.

The second requirement is to liberally overseed with these grasses and the third is never to cut below 4mm.

Then, when the finer grasses have taken hold, only then can you risk stressing out Poa Annua by reducing inputs.

Management, both in its quality and quantity, is perhaps the key when comparing the Poa Annua regime with the fescue/bent regime. The Poa Annua method is an easier one to manage when you have all of the necessary resources, e.g. ample water, fertiliser and fungicide. For some, therefore, this could prove to be the most sustainable path to take. The fescue/bent way may offer greater long term rewards, but will require a high standard of management, particularly through what can be a difficult transition period. Once achieved, this too will need to be maintained for the long term. There will be pressures from Poa Annua to regain its dominance; for more receptive surfaces; and for faster greens for that special day (and hence reduced cutting height). It will be necessary to deal with these pressures and this will require a strong commitment. In addition, it is essential to read much more than just the headlines, it is the full story which counts.

David Croxton, Chairman of English Golf Union's Golf Services Committee and Proprietor of Cold Ashby Golf Club. David also represents the EGU on the GTC Board of Directors



Training on the job

Recently the GTC went to Luffenham Heath Golf Club in Rutland and interviewed David James, Deputy Course Manager, Jamie Pack, an apprentice, and Richard Barker, Training Support Officer for sports turf students at Brooksby College.

GTC – David, why and how did you become an Assessor?

DJ – Well having taken on an apprentice and been through the NVQ system myself on levels 2 – 4, I felt in a position to become involved in the assessment of one of our new recruits. I completed the Assessor course through Plan it Training assisted by Richard Barker, which made sense as Richard was my link at the college.

GTC – Has it helped you?

DJ – Very much so. Although I meet on a fairly regular basis ie 8 – 10 weeks, with Richard from the college, I am in charge of Jamie's progress and I'm able to schedule work commitments, weather etc, around Jamie's progress through his manual. It also allows me to confirm Jamie's knowledge base by working alongside him and realising the depth of his knowledge.

GTC – Has it worked for you Jamie?

JP – Yes, I was never very fond of school and wanted to get to work but the thought of going back to college was not very appealing, so to learn whilst doing the job was fantastic. Although I did have to go to college for a few days to do key skills, first aid and a spraying course, but the system suits me very well, plus I am also being paid!

GTC – What is your role Richard?

RB – Originally I was the assessor until David was allowed to assess, so now my role is really to assist the assessor in the workplace and make sure Jamie's portfolio is referenced correctly. I also have to complete college paperwork and am involved in regular meetings with David and Jamie to plan the progress prior to the next review. Although I am not an Internal Verifier I am aware of what the IV is looking for and through helping David we can reference the portfolio correctly to help the IV in his assessment. I also believe that regular meetings with David and Jamie form part of David's CPD and standardisation of the assessment process, although we aim as a college to have a standardisation meeting on an annual basis.

GTC – When do you do most of the work David?

DJ – All of the practical tasks are done as part of our normal work routine, and as Jamie becomes proficient in one task I will move him on to another. If Jamie does a new task I will obviously show him and explain but ask him to read the level 2 learning materials to back up what I have told him.

With regard to his knowledge, we will use wet days or days when we are unable to get on the course, and over a cup of tea we will cover certain topics – maybe weed idents, chemicals and fertilizers etc.

As for gathering evidence, I mainly use assessments (plan and feedback sheets), witness testimonies or ask Jamie to complete a written job sheet. We try and keep it easy and enjoyable.

GTC – Would you be happy for the college to complete all assessments David?

DJ – Definitely not – what is the purpose of me being an assessor! I am the one that knows my student best as I work with him 40 hours a week. Although Richard is more than capable, I am the one that knows his strengths and weaknesses and will not sign him off until I am confident he has reached the National Standard. After all it's my name and reputation at stake.

Done properly the assessment process is straightforward and I feel too many guys pass the buck onto somebody else. The greenkeepers are in a very fortunate position to have gained this award and should use it wisely for the betterment of our profession.

GTC – Would you do the same again?

DJ – Yes, I have just signed up another student. The system works extremely well but it is important to remember that all parties must be involved ie employer, student and the college. That's why it's called Work Based Learning.

Mr John Ingleby, Secretary at Luffenham Heath Golf Club, added: "Here at Luffenham Heath Golf Club we are very supportive of staff development and in having David qualified as a work based trainer/assessor, we have seen how other staff members, including Jamie our young apprentice, are enjoying the on-the-job education and training programme.

"We believe a well-trained workforce will ensure our members and visitors will enjoy playing a well-maintained golf course for years to come".

Flexible learning



From left: apprentice Jamie Pack, Richard Barker and Deputy Course Manager at Luffenham Heath Golf Club in Rutland, David James.

New GTC Board members – Judy Ganz and Kerran Daly

The GTC Board recently welcomed two new members, Judy Ganz from the Golf Union of Wales and Kerran Daly, a past Chairman of BIGGA, who returns to the GTC as the BIGGA representative who has already served the GTC on the Technical Committee.

Both Kerran and Judy have a passion for greenkeeper training and hope that more golf club employers take an active interest in their staff development and use the programmes available through the GTC's work on qualifications and its approved training provider network.

"As a greenkeeper of some 35 years standing, the one thing that is apparent to me is that for the game to prosper, the courses it is played on must be in long-term sustainable health and presented to an ever-increasingly high standard." Kerran said. "The key element in achieving this is education of the Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper. It goes without saying that for him/her to achieve anything, then the staff must also be trained and skilful. The GTC seems to me to be the most influential body which can ensure this happens.

"Most importantly the GTC fully involves both the employer and the employee,

as well as the training providers and the games governing body, the R&A".

He added. "The history of industrial relations teaches us that mutual respect and co-operation are far more productive than distrust and single-mindedness. I therefore welcome the opportunity to represent greenkeepers at the GTC and look forward to supporting the Golf Unions, the R&A and the training providers in delivering relevant and targeted education and training to an ever-increasing circle of UK golf clubs."

The Golf Union of Wales, the first joint Union for men and women in the British Isles, came into existence on January 1 2007.

"It is both my privilege and responsibility, as chair of the Golf Course Management Committee, to represent this new organization on the Greenkeepers Training Committee." Judy said. "Having spent almost all of my working life in education, I am aware of the advantages of, as well as being committed to, the furtherance of education in all walks of life, this mission clearly including all those who wish to pursue a career in greenkeeping at whatever level.

"The science of Golf Course Management grows increasingly complex by the year, greater use of facilities provides additional challenges and there is the expectation that these large areas of our beautiful countryside are managed by more sustainable methods." She added.

"If all of us involved in the promotion of golf, the National Unions, the employees representatives and the R&A are to meet these expectations and challenges, there is the need for a forum where issues can be debated and standards set. The Greenkeepers Training Committee provides such a forum." She said.

"I look forward, therefore, to representing the Golf Union of Wales in this forum. We, in Wales, have a long tradition in encouraging learning for all kinds of purposes, and I intend to ensure that through the promotion of learning and training, the golf courses in Wales become not only amongst the very best in the British Isles, but that they also provide a fulfilling environment for all who work and play on them." Judy added.



New board members: Judy Ganz from the Golf Union of Wales and Kerran Daly a past Chairman of BIGGA, who returns to the GTC as the BIGGA representative

The new revised and updated – "Health and Safety in Golf Course Management and Maintenance".

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the GTC have worked closely to combine all health and safety resources into one simple document. Health and safety advisor, Jon Allbutt, reports on the much needed improvements to health and safety guidelines for golf courses.



GTC & HSE "Joining forces to help employers and employees"

definitive guide to managing health and safety on golf courses. The GTC became aware that by 2000 there were so many changes in legislation that it was time to speak to partners about revising and updating the guide. The high number of sales, together with feedback over the years was evidence enough that this was regarded by employers and managers as an important part of developing policies and procedures that are directly relevant to the site and the work. In particular

there was concern about the need for more in-depth guidance on using work equipment. Although the continuing excellent record of the safe use of work equipment is reflected in the low numbers of serious accidents reported, there have been some accidents that give cause for concern.

Early meetings were not encouraging as budget cuts within HSE made it difficult to finance the project. Both partners continued to discuss a way forward and it was agreed that the guide would cease to be an 'HSE Guide' with ownership passing to the GTC, but that HSE would continue to be partners and editors and the new document would carry the all important HSE logo.

1994 was a turning point for the health and safety management of golf courses. It was when the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the GTC worked together to produce the first edition of a

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The Amenity Forum chaired by Jon Allbutt is very pro-active with the Pesticide Safety Directorate, the Government body which represents the UK within the European Parliament. The GTC, BIGGA and the STRI have representatives on the Amenity Forum and in this article a leading Course Manager, Ken Siems, at the Loch Lomond Golf Club, looks at the impact on sports turf should a ban on the use of pesticides be introduced in the UK.

Impact of pesticide ban to golf courses

Turfgrasses have been recognised for their importance to the quality of life for over 2000 years. Today, turfgrasses are cultured in nearly all inhabited regions of the world. Turf species and cultivars of the family Poaceae (Gramineae) are remarkably adaptable, some of them having adapted to sub arctic regions and others to equatorial regions. Turfgrasses serve us in many important ways. As an ornamental plant, they add beauty to the environment and improve the aesthetic value of our lives. By serving as playing fields for many sports, they provide recreational needs and help to limit injuries common to vigorous sports.

Turf management of golf courses has been ongoing for several hundred years and although the game has changed (better equipment, more athleticism, greater numbers playing the game), the principles of how the turf on a golf course is managed have not. Greenkeepers around the world are educated on utilising best management practices to ensure long-term, ecological sustainability of their environment. Turf managers are leaders in utilising the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach. IPM is a concept with a primary goal of optimising pest control in an ecologically and economically sound way. IPM practitioners follow basic pest management principles to develop strategies that integrate cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical techniques to control plant pests.

Pesticides are only used as a last resort when there is no other alternative for controlling a problem.

The UK already has long standing statutory and voluntary restrictions for the use of pesticides in all amenity areas and in this respect we are leaders in Europe. Users of pesticides in the UK must have Certificates of Competence and follow the Approved Code of Practice. It is already illegal to sell pesticides approved for amenity use to anyone else other than a competent professional user.

The introduction of a total pesticide ban to amenity turf would have a devastating impact, not only to the golf course industry, but all sports and other managed amenity turfgrass areas throughout the country.

The following are just of the few potential negative impacts:

- **Negative economic impact** – Golf Courses in the U.K will not be able to compete with the other regions of the world in terms of producing high quality turf that golfers around the world now demand. The result will be a loss of the foreign golfer travelling to the UK to play golf. A ban of pesticides could result in **no professional golf tournaments being played in the UK**
- **Job losses** – Inferior turf conditions will result in clubs being forced to make severe cutbacks.

Players will not pay for turf conditions less than what presently exists.

- **Increased public obesity** – The risk is increased if present turf conditions drop. The enjoyment of the game will reduce and fewer people will be taking the game up
- **Golf club closures** – The potential for golf clubs to financially exist is at risk. Existing courses will most likely be sold off for development of housing or other less environmentally uses
- **Negative environmental impact** – Golf courses have been proven to be extremely beneficial to the environment. Turfgrass is used widely to control water, sediment and wind erosion. It provides utilitarian cover around houses, and public and commercial buildings and in parks, cemeteries, and other facilities. Turfgrass adds value to property and reduces air and noise pollution, heat build up and glare.

The impact of a total pesticide ban to amenity turf areas could potentially cripple the golf course industry within the UK. Golf courses should be applauded for their environmental benefits and recognised for being leaders in the preservation, sustainability of Mother Nature. Golf club employers who share our desire to provide the highest standards in golf and preserve our already restricted use of pesticides should contact their local MEP, who will be voting on this matter in late October, and urge them to vote against any withdrawal of pesticides for amenity use.

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The GTC immediately took the responsible approach and commissioned H&S advisors Jon Allbutt and John Davis to review the original dated booklet and their draft work has been circulated for comment by both HSE and GTC representatives. Employers and greenkeepers from within the GTC committees have given very valuable feedback and the work is now nearing completion. As inspection and enforcement for most golf courses is the responsibility of the local authority, Environmental Health Officers have also been included in the consultation process.

The document is now in final draft form and the new guide will be published on the GTC website www.the-gtc.co.uk on or before the beginning of November.

The new guide is packed with information and guidance on all aspects of golf course management:

- education, training,
- the all important matter of risk assessments,
- occupational health,
- priority on the course,
- working alone,
- investigating accidents and incidents,
- managing events,
- emergency planning,
- employing volunteers,
- the safe use of work equipment,
- the use of pesticides.

Included in the guide are web links to other sites where more information can be downloaded on specific subjects; where appropriate there are also references to publications and other guides by HSE and others.

The guide particularly refers to other resources already available to employers and managers. These are the 'tools of our trade' and as important as that new mower or tractor; the GTC Training Manuals; the much used and recently reprinted GTC Training Wallchart; the excellent work by BIGGA/GCMA to produce their Safety Management System and many other publications. The employer cannot claim that there is a shortage of information and help with getting the basics of health and safety management right. The new guide pulls it all together in one document.

The new guide is directly relevant to the management of health and safety in all types of golf course business and sets the standard expected by both our industry and the enforcers HSE and local government Environmental Health Officers.