

GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT: WORK DIARY - JUNE 2013

Overview

The Met office confirmed what most turf managers suspected, that Spring 2013 was the coldest for 50 years. Considering this followed a wet winter with prolonged snow cover, it has been a tough start to the season for both golfers and greenkeepers. However, rainfall has been varied and there has been no explosion in growth. The main challenges have been with general 'transitioning' from winter to summer; given that soil temperatures have remained low, giving little opportunity for real growth. Recovery from winter wear, especially on tees and walk-off areas has been slower than normal but this has now largely been overcome. Uneven performance of putting surfaces has probably been the greatest concern since bent, poa and fescue have been growing at different rates, more so on swards with mixed species. However even greens with 100% poa have been subject to different bio-types growing and seeding at different rates. The dilemma faced by many course managers was on lowering the height of cut to reduce the unevenness versus placing additional stress on the turf while soil temperatures remained low. By using a mix of cultural practices such as light dressings, brushing and grooming, while applying low amounts of Nitrogen along with a PGR and possible silicate solution for more upright growth; helped to alleviate the situation. Outbreaks of Fusarium were also recorded on some courses as cool temperatures and high humidity levels 'triggered-off' this disease. CM's were faced with the delicate decision of whether or not to apply a fungicide and/or an iron solution to prevent the risk of any turf damage. At this time of year, growth is usually strong enough for any sign of Fusarium to be nothing more than a passing nuisance. A lesser problem has been the proliferation of weeds, especially daisies on some courses. Mid May is generally the time to commence weed control in the UK but this has been held back due to temperatures being too low on many courses. Herbicide uptake for effective control needs to be when there is active growth which is about two to three weeks later this year. With at least the first few days of June likely to be drier and warmer, the question is, will it herald a change for the better or will it remain unsettled and cooler? Last June and again in 2007, the county suffered a deluge of rain and few will forget the scenes last year of the river pageant to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, when it was both cold and very wet. Apart from those two very wet years, June has been relatively dry with above average temperatures. It is traditionally one of the driest months of the year therefore water management may well be a greater priority as the month progresses. Hours of sunlight are at or about their highest for the year and on the basis of there being sufficient moisture in the ground, growing conditions will be at their peak, therefore mowing and controlling growth will be a key factor this month. Members and visitors expect courses to be at their best in mid-season and with daylight at or close to maximum, playing surfaces should be at a premium. Playing levels are almost certain to be very high in June, since many clubs hold key competitions at this time of year. Therefore the key challenge is to deliver good turf quality and presentation while still carrying out necessary cultural and routine maintenance tasks while at the same time guarding against possible drought stress later in the month.



Golf in a natural summer environment

Greens

The main emphasis will be on quality, smoothness and consistency of the putting surface in June. Mowing is likely to be 'daily' and the HOC will vary depending upon what grass species is present and what the current objectives are. However, most courses will be mowing at 4mm or slightly below, with a triplex mower, supported by a mix of regular brushing, grooming & verti-cutting to help reduce lateral growth and prevent further thatch accumulation. Rolling the greens, using a turfing iron or vibrating rollers will negate the use of the mower for 2 days per week, thus saving on fuel and triplex wear. Rolling will give increased pace and smoothness to the putting surface without having to further stress the turf from mowing at too low a height of cut. A very useful ploy, especially if greens are prone to Anthracnose or Nematode damage! Applying light and frequent top dressings of around 5 to 6 tons per 19 greens every 2 to 3 weeks will help to provide good playing surfaces, protect the crown of the grass plant and without any real interference to

play. It also helps to prevent thatch build-up since the surface layer is continually being diluted. Aeration can be carried out more towards the start of the week using needle, micro or star tines, perhaps followed by one of the regular light rolls. The use of sarel rollers is also beneficial in preventing any 'capping' of the surface. With regards to feeding and watering, the former should only be via a foliar tank mix containing a low amount of Nitrogen, a slightly higher amount of Potassium and various amendments such as seaweed, amino and humic acids. These are helpful in combating any drought or heat stress that may arise during the month. Wetting agent should be applied as required, possibly as part of the tank mix and supplemented by hand watering to any high and exposed areas on the green: this in addition to lightly aerifying the surface to ensure maximum water penetration. The use of a Plant Growth Regulator (PGR) applied at no more than 400ml per Ha and tank mixed with a small amount of feed, will give the turf added density and may even reduce the amount of water required. Applying at half rate every 2 weeks is another option favoured by some CM's. Before applying any such mix, it is best to check on application rates as well as compatibility for all proposed tank mixes. There are a few products now on the market containing silicon or Potassium Silicate and they help the leaves to grow more upright, thus giving a cleaner cut and improved ball roll, as well as strengthening the plant's cell wall. Again this can be applied as part of the tank mix. It must be noted however, that these products are an aid to turf quality and do not replace the basic principles in turfgrass management.



Light 'dustings' help to maintain a firm and smooth surface

Tees

With playing quality and presentation being at the forefront this month, mowing should be at least twice per week at a HOC between 10 and 14 mm but tournament venues & resort style courses will be set lower. Most courses now tend to mow at around 12mm using tee triples or greens triplexes with boxes, but as always there are variations. Apart from regular mowing and clipping removal, the main requirement is to ensure that divot filling takes place as often as possible and that tee markers are moved daily, with surfaces blown clear, especially on the par 3 holes. A good clean surface is essential and attention to detail for bins, ball washers and signage is part of the presentation process. Smaller tees may require on-going over-seeding, either using non rye or rye based mixes, followed by a compost based dressing to aid germination. Fertiliser and watering should be as required but both applied sparingly to encourage good root depth. The former is most likely to have been applied in April with good longevity, while irrigation should be applied **d**eeply, **i**nfrequently and **e**venly (the **DIE** principle of watering turf). Using a PGR will also lead to a denser turf quality and should reduce the amount of damage from divots, since the plant's energy is more directed to the roots. If doing so, then best to add a small amount of Nitrogen to give improved turf density as well as maintaining good colour. If dry patch or drought stress becomes an issue on sand based tees then apply a wetting agent and treat as per greens.

Surrounds

Regular mowing, usually at a height of about 37mm (1.5ins) will ensure good playing quality. Courses on heavier or more fertile sites may have to mow twice per week. Ride on rotaries are generally preferred but cylinder reels are just as effective; more so if the grass species present is non-rye. Some selective weed control may be necessary, so use a product with different active ingredients to give a broad spectrum control ie clover, daisies and dandelion. Only use traffic control measures if necessary at this time of year and if so there are good examples of discreet turf protection using post and rope or other devices. If any bare or weak areas still exist, then over-seed and dress but ensure the seed has good seed to soil contact and kept moist where possible.



Full concentration required for mowing collars when near water

Fairways

With definition and presentation being key requirements at this time of year, mowing is likely to be twice per week for most courses but this will vary upon grass type, rate of growth and desired standard of presentation. Stripe mowing using ride-on machines is probably the most favourable but 'block' mowing is just as effective and costs less in terms of fuel usage and machine wear. Fairways are generally mown at between 14 to 17mm but again this will be lower on the high end properties or those who have the benefit of fescue dominated swards. Those using gang mowers are just as effective but care needs to be taken when turning at either end of the fairway. Apart from selective weed control and divot filling, only a minority of courses will require further work such as irrigation, solid tining and over-seeding etc. For courses with yardage posts, ensure that they remain upright and clearly visible.



Block mowed fairway and a band of intermediate rough on this excellent links

Roughs

Since growth is likely to be at a peak in June, mowing is likely to be an on-going requirement for many courses unless on fine fescue links or heathland. Most roughs are mowed with rotary mowers, either trailed or ride-on; the latter being the most popular. Many courses now grade the rough with a narrow 5 metre band of intermediate rough cut at around 25mm, then standard semi at 50mm. Out of play roughs are often left uncut but this will depend upon individual course policy. This is also the month best suited for controlling unwanted weeds. However this should be limited to the main playing areas and every attempt should be made to designate areas of the course for natural grassland. Depending on the amount of growth present, the extent of the rough should always be under review and a careful watch for areas regularly subject to lost ball searches. In such circumstances, 'easing' back the rough will help to speed up play and be appreciated by the golfers.

Bunkers



Routine edging of bunker using blade attachment

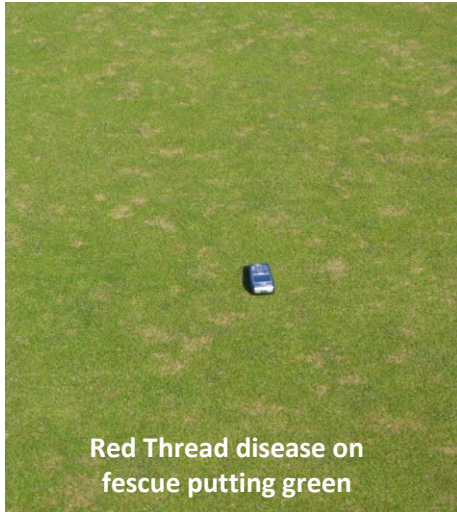
Regular raking, edging and trimming to ensure good presentation will be an on-going requirement, along with the re-distribution of sand to ensure an adequate and consistent depth of sand. Some topping up of sand is likely and to some extent will depend upon individual requirements. Where wash-outs are common on high sand faced bunkers, then removal and replacement of sand is more likely. Grass faces require regular brushing or blowing, especially those close to the front of the green. Stone removal and possible glyphosate treatment for weed encroachment to sand faces are also to be considered as part of the monthly routine.

Other

Lakes/Ponds/Ditches: The need for strimming and general tidiness is paramount on the latter. Some algae control via the use of pre-arranged barley straw may be required; an alternative being the use of a bio-product such as 'Pro-crystal'. If weed persists, best to seek advice from the Environment Agency on species and method of control since these areas are likely to fall under environmental regulations and most if not all aquatic herbicides are no longer available.

Equipment & Irrigation: Since mowers and other turf maintenance vehicles will be in maximum demand during June, it is essential that regular servicing and checks on hydraulic pipes, guards, mowing units and so on are carried out by a qualified member of staff. Irrigation, even if not in regular use should be checked for leaks, performance and coverage and adjusted accordingly. Hand watering should supplement automatic usage to ensure all areas are targeted accordingly. The importance of record keeping is also a must, with equipment servicing carried out as per recommended guidelines and a log of water usage maintained to satisfy EA requirements; the latter being ever more important for those using 'mains' water.

Watchlist:



Disease: June should be free of any real disease pressure but best to keep a watch for any signs of Take-All Patch, especially if pH levels are high or the water supply is more alkaline. Any sudden increases in alkalinity can have a negative impact on turf since the desirable grasses benefit from lightly acidic conditions. Corticium Red Thread could also be present, especially if heavy rain has leached out nutrients. A light application of Nitrogen will quickly restore the balance. Dollar Spot could be present in June but unlikely as long as high temperatures, surface dampness and high humidity doesn't prevail. There is however always the risk of fairy rings. The fungal group Basidiomycetes may be present in the soil and if considered to be a nuisance in fine turf areas, then some relief may be achieved using a mix of a suitable wetting agent with Azoxystrobin & Propiconazole fungicides.

Turf Disorders: With unpredictable weather patterns, nothing can be ruled out. Drought stress and dry patch are the more likely problems to overcome at this time of year but it is largely down to each course and knowing its strengths and weaknesses. Where these turf conditions exist, fairy ring disease may precede or succeed these turf disorders.

Weeds: As mentioned above, this is the best time for selective weed control, with daisies, plantains, buttercup and dandelion likely to being the main targets on fairways, surrounds and in 'managed' rough. Out of play roughs may suffer from thistle and dock and this too can be treated just as effectively. There are numerous products on the market from the main suppliers but best to apply a mix of active ingredients to give different modes of action for best control.

Mowing: Avoid cutting when wet and if necessary, revert to afternoon mowing by alternating staff start times. Ensure that there is always two staff on duty to minimise any risks of lone working. If faced with continuous wet weather and strong growth, then following behind with a tractor mounted blower may be the better option but obviously more labour intensive.



Stock Control:

It is good practice to keep a check on fast moving machine parts, irrigation joints, wetting agent, turf conditioners and so on, replacing those that have been used.

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