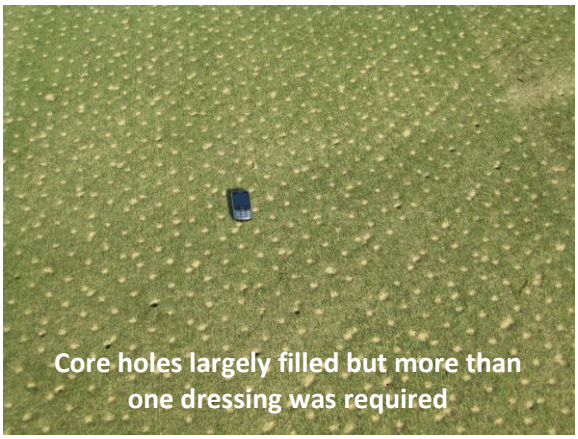
GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT: WORK DIARY - OCTOBER 2012

Overview

After a relatively dry first 3 weeks in September, rain returned with a vengeance to many parts of the UK, most notably in south west and north east England, although no part of the UK was spared. The tail end of an Atlantic storm dropped a month's rainfall in a couple of days to many areas, bringing flooding and road closures as well as inevitable washout damage to many golf courses, especially bunkers. Ironically, steady progress was made during most of the month, with varying degrees of renovation work being completed on greens, tees and fairways. This was also the last month for over-seeding, at least with any degree of success, since soil temperatures are now cooling down, especially on sand based greens and tees. Overnight temperatures took a tumble on several nights, with ground frosts recorded in many areas of the UK. This helped to slow down the rate of growth, which for many, never seemed to stop this season. The wet weather at the end of the month also brought an end to irrigation use after many courses in the south east required water to ease drought stress; a term that was seldom used in 2012. Disease pressure has so far been mixed with varying amounts of Anthracnose Foliar Blight and Fusarium Patch being reported, but not to any major degree. On some shaded greens and tees, algae has been an issue since surfaces have rarely dried out this year. This once again highlights the need for fine turf to benefit from adequate levels of sunlight and air movement. So what can be expected in October as the hours of darkness are greater than those of daylight? The month is often characterised by mild or even warm day time temperatures but cold nights, sometimes accompanied by early morning ground frosts, which can bring any recent late growth and seedling germination to a sudden halt. Over the past decade, October's have been a 'mixed bag' with well above average rainfall recorded in 2004, 2005 & 2006. However, the last three year's rainfall has been at or below normal. From a golfing perspective, the start of the month is often very good but as daylight steadily reduces, even a mid-afternoon tee time becomes too late for a full round to be completed. The main competition season usually ends on the first weekend of the month and that generally signifies the start of end of season renovation work if it has not been completed earlier. As the level of night time and early morning dampness increases and temperatures fall, there is an increasing risk from disease attack and for the remainder of the year; pressure from disease will be at its peak. This poses the biggest challenge for turf managers and one which requires constant vigilance. For those tasked with the responsibility of managing wooded or parkland courses, October also marks the start of Autumnal leave clearing which usually continues until the end of the year.

Greens



Core holes largely filled but more than one dressing was required

Rotating brush used to good effect to brush sand into the core holes

For many courses, October is still 'traditionally' the main month of the year when major renovation work to the greens is completed. This is largely a result of a full and busy playing season and with it, the risk that recovery from coring, tining and especially scarifying will be slow. Fortunately this now seems to be the exception rather than the rule, so a definite step forward in terms of turfgrass management. As soil temperatures decrease, growth is also in decline and it may take some time for the surfaces to recover, especially if overnight ground frosts occur. However, that is a choice for individual clubs/courses to make and all concerned need to accept the reality of a late season renovation program. It is a balance between revenue, agronomics and the quality of putting surfaces during early Autumn. Late deep scarifying should be avoided unless absolutely necessary, although a light pass at less than 12mm depth should still recover fairly quickly. Coring with traditional 13mm tines is the norm and unless root-zone conditions are wet, then this operation should be completed within a couple of days with a clean surface remaining. Top dressing with a

straight sand mix or with a 10 to 20% addition of organic material will follow immediately. On standard 50 x 50mm spacings and at 75 to 100mm depth, an average green will require nearly 3 tons of dressing in total to completely fill the holes. This may prove difficult at this time of year if surfaces remain damp, especially in one application. The material must be thoroughly brushed/matted/blown into the core holes. A further light dressing will probably be needed to smooth the surface and fill the remaining holes but care must be taken not to smother the surface and increase the risk of disease attack. Any amendments such as Axis can be added to the mix or applied afterwards; this being especially beneficial in shaded areas or in hollows that tend to gather moisture. The benefit here is the increase in pore space which improves drainage and air circulation within the root-zone. For those opting for deep tining, much the same criteria applies but even more material may be necessary but again there is a need for caution to prevent smothering. In all cases, periodic rolling will help to restore surface smoothness. Mowing frequency will steadily decrease and by the end of October the HOC should be at or close to 5mm but there are of course exceptions depending on the standard of course and grass species present. There will be a need to maintain a balanced nutrient level within the turfgrass, more so if the greens are to be renovated since this will aid recovery. However, too much Nitrogen and succulent growth, leads to an increased threat of disease. Any feeding program should contain a mix of low N, higher K plus a small amount of Sulphate of Iron. Other small additions of Calcium, Magnesium and Seaweed extracts can help to form part of the overall feeding program which gives the plant sufficient nutrient and helps to strengthen the plant cell wall; this being a key aspect for disease prevention. Another useful addition to any mix is phosphite as mentioned in last month's article; this acting as a mild fungicide. The same applies to using a dew dispersal product but these products are merely an aid, not a replacement for sound turf management.

Tees

Mowing requirement is likely to remain at twice per week to start with but probably reducing to a single cut by the end. Once the last main 'summer' competition is over, the teeing areas should be scarified or tined (possibly both) and then top dressed afterwards. Where dwarf rye is the dominant or preferred choice of grass for wear tolerance, then over-seeding can still be contemplated; perhaps more so in southern England. Once any renovation work is complete, then the HOC can be raised by 1 or 2 mm to give greater protection from wear. An Autumn feed may be required but this will be based purely upon the needs of the turf and largely dependent on when the tees were last fed. The standard requirements of low N and medium K should continue. Where earthworms are a problem, the first application of Carbendazim may be necessary although generally this is not usually required until the following month. An application of Sulphate of Iron, similar to greens may give temporary relief as well as enhanced colour. A common issue on small tees is the damage caused by the inside wheel of a triple mower. Operators need to avoid any tight turning and where damage has occurred, these areas should be re-turfed as soon as renovation work is complete. Shaded teeing areas are at greatest risk from wear therefore may need to be more intensively managed to maintain adequate grass cover.

Teeing surfaces cored and now being blown clear off the surface for collection and prior to top dressing

Surrounds

Collars and front approaches or 'aprons' may require end of season aerifying and top dressing and if so, this should be similar to that carried out on the greens. In general, this work is limited to key areas normally affected by drought stress such as ridges and mounds but unlikely to be the case this year. Care must be taken around sprinkler heads and the depth of tining must not be at risk to underground irrigation pipe. The main area of greens surrounds may require some limited tining and dressing, more so in worn areas or where traffic flow is restricted. In heavily worn areas, over-seeding should follow once the initial work is complete. Similar to tees and banks, worm control may be required if the course has a high presence of earthworms. The application of a sulphur based fertiliser may suffice but this must be part of a planned program to avoid over acidifying the surface, albeit unlikely on greens surrounds. The use of sharp sand in key areas is another best practice, especially if ground conditions tend to be heavy and wet during the winter months. October may also see the start of using traffic control measures for controlling wear around greens

and bunkers. The use of post and rope must be discreet and fortunately there are good product examples on the market which are unobtrusive to the golfer but give the desired effect.

Fairways

Damp early mornings are not the best time to mow fairways and surrounds

Mowing requirement should be reduced to being a weekly task unless growth dictates otherwise. However, the HOC should remain at between 14mm and 17mm for the majority of courses. Much will depend upon individual circumstances, current moisture levels and soil temperatures. With the pressure on mowing reduced, it should be less of an issue to choose a dry time for mowing and possibly spread over two days. A cleanly presented playing surface should be the priority at all times. Scarifying in October remains an option for those courses where a build-up of fibre has occurred, although this task is better carried out earlier due to a faster recovery period. However, the same criteria apply re depth and cleaning up debris as mentioned in the previous article. October is usually the month where deep tining or slitting can commence but again, this will depend upon individual course conditions and requirements. Leaves will start to fall in greater amounts as the month progresses, therefore periodic use of a blower will be needed to keep the main playing areas clear. With regards to fertilising, a few courses may benefit from an Autumn/Winter feed but this is likely to be limited to either high end properties or those on particularly weak or stoney soils and where grass cover is poor. Worm control could be required before the month ends but generally this is held back until November unless conditions dictate an earlier control. Bearing in mind a full course treatment costs around 1k, a second application can prove a costly hit to many clubs. The use of a wide multi-brush unit can be used when conditions are dry to disperse any wormcasts although this is no substitute for effective control.

Roughs

The mowing requirement will be reduced and many clubs may only need to cut the rough a couple of times during October; more so the band of intermediate rough if this is present. Management of deep or out of play rough should continue when time permits with a view to 'cleaning' and 'topping' all areas before the season draws to a close. Blowing leaves and debris clear will possibly gain in importance unless the course is largely devoid of trees. Any remaining weed will now have to wait until the following year but for most courses this should no longer be an issue.

Cutting and collecting grass from areas of deep rough at the end of summer

Bunkers

Maintenance will continue with regular edging and trimming but with growth fast reducing, there should be less routine work to complete other than raking and blowing sand clear from the surrounding banks or faces. As the month progresses and the main renovation work to greens and tees are completed, then a start can be made to any bunker renovations that are planned for the winter season. Such work will have been planned and costed in advance and should be part of a rolling capital improvement. This work is usually carried out in-house unless on a large scale project. With drainage, erosion and wash-out the likely key challenges to overcome, it is important that any planned changes are effective in over-coming such problems. There are many different methods of renovating and 'lining' bunkers so choose one that is relevant to the objective intended, within the agreed cost and with future maintenance taken into consideration. In general, too many clubs are spending large amounts of money maintaining 'hazards' and in challenging economic times, this aspect should be addressed sooner rather than later.

Other

Lakes/Ponds/Ditches: In October the main task will be a general trimming and tidying of water edges and ditch lines. This is also the last month where water levels are likely to remain low,

therefore planned excavation work should be completed before the month ends. See previous comments in September regarding this type of work.

Trees: Continue to remove any overhanging branches that pose a nuisance to both golfers and equipment along with any unwanted growth around the base. With leaves starting to fall, the need to clear these up will gain in importance therefore ensure that all blowers are ready for use. Where hedgerows are present and an integral part of the course, trim only straggly growth since these are important habitats for a multitude of small creatures and insects and should remain largely untouched unless causing a nuisance to play and only when absolutely necessary.

Watchlist:

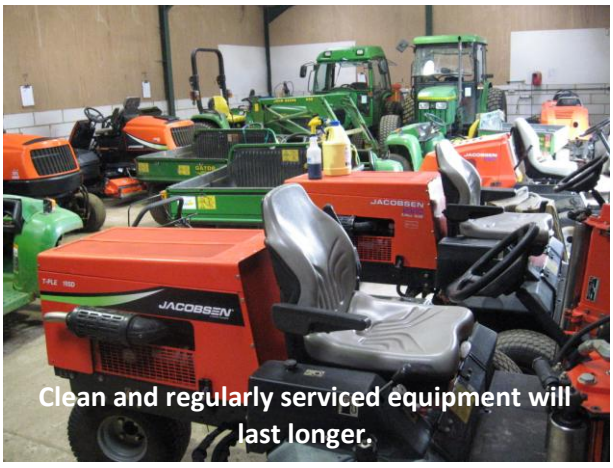
Disease: During October, the main threat of disease is likely to be Fusarium although if temperatures remain mild, Anthracnose may also prove troublesome if the turf has previously been under stress. With regards to Fusarium, this is the most common disease that affects turf in the UK and was covered in reasonable detail in last month's article. Apart from the necessary cultural and environmental practices that need to be in place as part of an IPM strategy, preventative action will include applying a mix of products containing the chemicals Tebuconazole (systemic) and Prochloraz (Translaminar) along with a Strobilurin, tank mixed with an adjuvant for better product performance. The more recently introduced active ingredient containing Fludioxonil has also shown to give good preventative control. While temperatures remain reasonably good at this time of year, the systemic or preventative route is the one to take if chemical control is necessary. Attention should also centre on any nutrient input listed earlier under 'Greens'.

Pests: The risk of turf damage from pests during October continues to be relatively low. However, as ground conditions become increasingly moist or even wet, then earthworms may start to pose problems on soils which are heavier in nature or are alkaline based. Low pH soils and those on sand are less likely to be affected. Only badly affected areas should be treated with Carbendazim this early in the season due to the cost of the product required.

Turf Disorders: Drought stressed areas should be few and far between this Autumn, therefore renovation work is unlikely. If Black Layer exists in the green then this should be treated as a matter of urgency with the key aim of oxygenating the soil by frequent aerifying and thatch removal. Applying activated charcoal will help to neutralise the hydrogen sulphide but the BL will return if the root zone conditions are not improved. Adding a soil amendment such as Axis following aeration work will help to remove excess moisture and create greater air space within the root-zone. However, it is important to treat the cause, rather than just the symptom.

Equipment:

Servicing and checking of equipment needs to continue on a daily basis, with the emphasis continuing on preventing oil damage from leaking or damaged pipes, motors and valves etc. Safety switches and cutting units should also be checked each week and any damage recorded & reported for urgent repair. Sharpness of cylinder reels needs to be checked since cutting with blunt blades can add to the risk of disease pressure if the grass is torn rather than cleanly cut..



Clean and regularly serviced equipment will last longer.

Irrigation:

In October, the system should no longer be in use and next month, it should be scheduled to be drained down for the winter. Any repairs to leaking valves, pipes, cable breaks and so on should be completed before being shut down, in order that the system is fully up to speed as best as can be assessed and to limit any down time at the start of the next season.

Compound:

As in previous months take any opportunity to tidy up external areas of the compound and to check on supplies of sands, gravel, fungicide & wormicide which are likely to be required over the coming months.

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