



Greenkeepers Report Spring 2019

The 2019 started reasonably dry and warm, whilst this has encouraged many golfers out onto the course it hasn't provided us with ideal conditions for recovering the golf course after the particularly hot, dry summer of 2018.

Greens

The relatively high temperatures experienced towards the end of February allowed us to press on with the greens maintenance in early March. This is an ideal time to get seed into the ground as it has a chance to establish before we pressure it as mowing heights are reduced for the summer months. Immediately after renovations it did however return to a period of colder weather and this resulted in slower than anticipated recovery. This slow recovery did allow the seed to establish really well as can be seen by the prominent seeding lines which will gradually fade over the coming weeks.

Disease pressure over the winter months was high yet the greens have resisted well. This is partly due to the finer grass species found on our greens which are far more resistant to disease than the annual meadow grass type greens found at many other local courses. We did spray once to halt the spread of the disease towards Christmas time. More and more chemicals continue to be removed from sale and please read separate report which deals with this issue.

Fairways

The dry hot weather last year did cause some fairways to suffer and lose some grass coverage. The worst affected are the 1st, 2nd, 7th, 8th and the 4th to the 9th on the Blenheim Course. The fairways and semi-roughs on these holes have been fertilised and as the rain breaks this down the grasses should gradually return.

Bunkers

Nearly all recently renovated bunkers are now filled with sand and are back in play. The sand is the same specification as is in the other bunkers but will appear a little 'fluffy' and needs time to settle and firm up. We will monitor the performance of the liners and if successful we will use the same on further bunkers over the next winter period. As time permits over the coming months the bunkers on the 11th and one on the 13th are hoped to be renovated.



Greens Fungicide Use and Upcoming Withdrawals

More and more chemicals used to control pests and disease on the golf course are having their licenses revoked and are being withdrawn from sale. Over the last two years we have lost the only truly effective leatherjacket control, chafer grub control and worm control products.

Fungicides used to control diseases found on golf greens can be classified as either preventative (those that are put on before disease is seen and aim to prevent attack) and curative (those that are put on at the first sign of disease and aim to halt the spread). Whilst both types destroy the pathogenic fungus they are also not too discriminate and will also reduce populations of good soil bacteria (those that help the growth and health of the plants). For this reason we have always tried not to spray too much and have took a curative type approach to disease control.

The last remaining curative type product is being removed from sale shortly and has a use up date of winter 2019. This leaves us with two options. Firstly we could use preventative controls, yet this I feel is far from ideal. There is no guarantee that you are going to get an outbreak therefore by applying these chemicals we could be wasting money and reducing the populations of the beneficial bacteria for no reason. Many golf courses also found over last winter that these products were not overly effective and meant they suffered bad disease scarring as a result of this. It is also not at all environmentally friendly to be applying 'just in case'.

This has led us as of now to adopt an approach of no chemical control, which numerous golf courses are in the process of doing. There are some alternative methods of control available to us and whilst not 100% effective did trial well with us last year.

What all this means is that we will possibly experience a greater level of disease than previously seen over the winter months. All chemical control has been withdrawn from Germany and many Scandinavian countries for a number of years now. Golf courses there have had to adapt and find alternative control methods.

The greens at Kirtlington should be reasonably well prepared to resist disease outbreaks. Most have good air flow around them and have good drainage which keeps them reasonably dry. The finer grasses which we have spent many years colonizing by seeding will be far more resistant to the diseases.

More and more chemicals will be withdrawn over the coming years and the approach that we are taking now will be commonplace in years to come.

Brett Moggridge
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