

PITCHCARE

ISSUE 109

JULY/AUGUST 2023



PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

WAGES, THE COST OF LIVING AND PROFESSIONAL
RECOGNITION ARE CONTRIBUTING TO A SKILL
EXODUS FROM THE TURF CARE PROFESSION

PLUS

●
SEED MIXTURES
WORTH THEIR SALT

●
IN TUNE WITH NATURE
AT WENTWORTH CLUB

●
TOP TIPS - VERTICUTTING
VS SCARIFYING



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Editor Kerry Haywood

INDUSTRY SHAKE UP?



I recently celebrated ten years with Pitchcare, but I joined the industry twenty-two years ago, and then I was part of the team to launch Greenkeeping magazine (still a respected title all these years later).

Throughout my time in the industry, I have seen many positive changes such as innovation in machinery, legislation improvements to increase health and safety,

social media advancements and more women coming into the industry (well the media side at least). All this has occurred in a time when applied agronomy and plant science has advanced tremendously. However, on the flip side, team motivation and recognition of the industry seems to be at an all-time low. Is this down to the aforementioned social media presence - meaning we hear more moans - or does our industry truly need a shake up? In our cover article (page 8), we addressed the sentiments of many, and which is heavily focused around pay and progression. With the cost of living and interest rates soaring, we talk to both the GMA and BIGGA, and look at why simple labouring and low skilled job roles have tracked better against inflation. We also have viewpoints from within the industry on what can be done to attract and keep qualified and experienced staff.

As The Championships at Wimbledon drew to a close, we caught up with Head of Courts and Horticulture, Neil Stubley, to discuss the preparations and challenges for this year's tournament (page 32).

Also in the issue, Technical Manager for DLF, David Rhodes, discusses the impact of salt on turf and highlights how the world's largest breeder is providing research and innovation to deliver more salt tolerant seed varieties (page 36).

Our regular features also offer some interesting reading including Top Tips - verticutting vs scarifying (page 46), a wellbeing insight from Dartford Football Club Head Groundsman, Jay Berkhauer, on bouncing back after falling short in the playoffs, plus the increasing significance of rain rate with our industry expert Mark Hunt (page 40).

Enjoy!

Kerry

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FOREWORD



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Get ready for **GROUNDSFEST**

● **GroundsFest is set to be the largest, annual, free must-attend event for grounds staff, greenkeepers, landscapers, gardeners, local authorities, estate managers and contractors.**

Taking place at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire on 20th-21st September, here is a snapshot of what attendees can look forward to.

Hundreds of brands and demonstrations

If you want to dig it, move it, cut it, mow it, climb it, mulch it, or build it, it's ALL at GroundsFest. The event will give you the opportunity to not only see a wide range of machinery in action but get up close and personal with it.

Practical training sessions

Carried out by Grounds Training, the programme will feature free hands-on, training sessions on a range of grounds care topics.

Register and be in with a chance of winning a prize

There are multiple prizes of over £6,000 worth of battery powered equipment up for grabs. All you have to do is register. The prizes include Etesia and Pellenc pedestrian mowers and Pellenc telescopic and fixed-poled pole

Plus

- Retail area
- Free education and CPD points
- Landscape zone
- Free on-site parking and free shuttle buses

saws. Don't worry if you have already registered – you will automatically get entered into the free draw which is taking place on the second day.

Live music festival

There will be great selection of DJ's and live bands taking to the stage and there will also be beer tents and drink stalls. The festival will start at 5pm.

Accommodation and camping

There are lots of accommodation options nearby. Stoneleigh Park also has a dedicated area for camping, motorhomes and caravans.

Register for free at groundsfest.com

GCSAA TO FUND TURFGRASS RESEARCH PROJECTS

● **The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) is to fund four new research projects at universities across the USA.**

The projects will receive a total of \$170,064 (£136,000) from a GCSAA Foundation block grant with an additional \$117,500 (£94,000) in matching funds from participating GCSAA chapters and the Oregon Turfgrass Foundation.

The four projects that will be funded are:

- Comparing wetting agent application strategies for efficacy and longevity in sand-based putting greens; by Wendell Hutchens PhD, University of Arkansas.
- Suppressing dollar spot through adjustment of leaf surface pH; by Paul Koch PhD, University of Wisconsin.
- Effects of moisture management on annual bluegrass weevil movement, oviposition, larval survival and turfgrass damage; by Benjamin McGraw PhD, Pennsylvania State University.
- Influence of nitrogen rate on growing degree-day models for plant growth regulator re-application intervals on annual bluegrass putting greens; by Alec Kowalewski PhD, Oregon State University.

BIGGA teams up with Women in Golf Awards

● BIGGA is working with the Women in Golf Awards to offer a new prize that celebrates women working within the turfcare industry.

The 2023 awards will take place on 8th August at Walton Heath Golf Club, host club of the AIG Women's Open, just before the women's final Major of the year tees off on the 10th.

BIGGA Chief Operating Officer Sami Strutt said: "BIGGA is proud to support the Women in Golf Awards and we are delighted to introduce an award for those who have led the way for women working in turfcare - whether greenkeepers, scientists or other industry experts.



During last year's inaugural awards, Wenvoe Castle head greenkeeper Lucy Sellick was presented with the Trailblazer Award in recognition of her incredible achievements leading the way for female greenkeepers.

Find out more and nominate someone here womeningolfawards.co.uk

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Kubota UK team

KUBOTA INVEST

in the groundcare industry

● Media spanning sports turf, landscaping, amenity and equine were recently given a rare insight into the ‘behind the scenes’ workings of one of the most recognisable brands in groundcare, as Kubota UK opened their doors for an update event.

The overarching theme of the two days was Kubota’s ongoing investment into the industry - with press updated on recent acquisitions and new initiatives in the areas of warranty and recruitment, while also having the opportunity to get ‘hands-on’ with some of the latest products from across their mower and compact tractor portfolios.

The sun was shining as Kubota UK Managing Director David Hart and General Manager for Tractor Business Unit (TBU) Henry Bredin welcomed members of the press to their Thame headquarters in early June. After learning about some of the corporate history and more

recent global developments, such as the new £0.5bn Kubota Institute of Technology opened in Osaka Japan, attendees were treated to a tour of the facility where many questions on the challenges of worldwide manufacture, logistics and alternative power sources were answered.

Also covered was the Kubota Apprenticeship programme, offered in partnership with Coleg Cambria Llysfasi, and designed to address the skills shortage in the industry. The four-year practical-based training scheme enrolled a record 13 students in 2023, setting the apprentices up for a career in engineering and progressing them into positions within Kubota dealerships across the UK.

For more information on the Kubota range and new initiatives visit:
kubota-eu.com



Media representatives

Appointment

to raise GMA and SALTEX profile

● Jen Carter is the new head of communications at the Grounds Management Association, supporting the GMA’s five-year strategy which covers all the sectors of the groundcare industry, including the membership organisation’s flagship event SALTEX, with an expanded communications team.

Jen and her team’s work will focus on supporting the GMA to achieve its three long-term goals: to attract new talent and accelerate the growth of a diverse workforce; to support sustainable business growth and protect the sector’s interests, and to build the industry’s reputation and promote the sector’s contribution to society and the economy, and that cannot be done without the support of SALTEX.



EVERTON STAYING PUT

● Everton may stay at Goodison Park for a further two seasons after confirming their new dockside arena will not be ready for the start of the 2024-25 campaign.

It was originally anticipated the forthcoming season would be the last full one at their current home, with the £500m Bramley-Moore Dock venue ready in late 2024. However, newly appointed chief executive Colin Chong has disclosed that the current timeframe could be revised because it may be impractical to move mid-season.

Because the new facility will be complete midway through the 2024-25 campaign, it guarantees Everton will be starting the next two seasons at Goodison.



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Daniel Spencer, Letchworth Golf Club

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a demonstration
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Turf management or burger flipping?

Wages, the cost of living and professional recognition are contributing to a **skill exodus** from the turf care profession.

Talk to any course manager or grounds manager, and their biggest challenge in the last few years has been attracting and keeping hold of skilled workers. Similarly, the sentiment from many team members is often heavily focussed around their pay and progression.

With the cost of living and interest rates soaring, we talk to both the GMA and BIGGA, and look at why rewards - from even simple labouring and low skilled job roles, have tracked better against inflation and get viewpoints from within the industry on what can be done to attract and keep qualified and experienced staff.

Finally, we got a perspective from a new course manager who has switched his twenty-year plus office job to working outdoors, where every day is different.

COLLEGE
VIEWPOINT

Recruitment crisis?

Recent research highlighted that the industry is in need of new recruits to join the sector - but we all knew that, didn't we!

The GMA survey highlighted that currently 40% of the workforce is over fifty years-old and, without an influx of new recruits, this could result in a significant employment gap within five years.

Sport simply could not take place without the contribution of grounds management and, without

quality grass pitches, not only will our nation's health and local communities suffer, but so will our talent offering when it comes to professional teams and leagues.

If improvements were made to existing grass pitches, almost 1,400,000 (1,376,252) more children could play rugby or football every week and 489,859 more could play cricket every season.

Having worked so long in education, I have been able to see young people come into the college and, by completing qualifications, advance in the industry to high ranking jobs - with major responsibilities (and salaries).

When asked to reflect, they are all clear that having the qualifications to back their applications was far more valuable than just having experience in a job. Employers can't easily quantify experience on a CV, but a qualification gives them a feeling of certainty about an applicant.

My advice for those starting out in the industry would be to have a vision of what they want to achieve and then look at what it will take to get there (e.g. Level 2/3 Diplomas or apprenticeships, pesticide application certificates etc.)

I would also say find a good employer who will support your CPD and then be prepared to work hard in that job. Network as much as you can and, if possible, take jobs that offer advancement and ability to pick up new skills - rather than ones that just pay more. In short, I would say focus on the end of the game rather than the warm up!

Andy Wight - Oaklands College

MANUFACTURING VIEWPOINT - KUBOTA UK

In times where we find ourselves with an ever-increasing skills gap, finding the right people to fill vacancies in aftersales departments is one of the biggest challenges Kubota dealers currently face.

What we do certainly isn't the '9 to 5 job' some desire, and it can be a labour of love at times, however, there are many things to enjoy about working in this industry too!

Progression of technology and witnessing the industry diversify to meet the demands of our evolving world is really exciting to be a part of. This, combined with the variety, new experiences, daily challenges and even the simplicity of just being in the great outdoors are all reasons to consider this as an excellent career choice. Ultimately, there are so many great people involved in what we do, but we need more.

To help conquer this challenge, Kubota have focused efforts on our apprenticeship scheme - supporting our dealers to develop home-grown talent within their businesses.

In conjunction with Llysfasi College, we offer a manufacturer-led apprenticeship in Agricultural and Horticultural Engineering. Our courses integrate hands-on experience with the latest products and diagnostic equipment, combined with a practical and online learning programme.

Looking to the future, the Kubota aftersales team have signed up to collaborate with our dealers to work with schools to inspire young learners aged 7-14 by attending curriculum linked sessions and careers events to further promote what our industry has to offer.



Tom Lockwood

Field Service
Manager, Aftersales -
Kubota UK



Jason Booth
Chief Operating
Officer at the Grounds
Management
Association (GMA)

Respect and understanding

Industry **representation** and **workforce development** are core pillars within the GMA's strategy – we hope that through the delivery of our five-year strategy that the grounds management industry will have a viable pipeline of **skilled talent** for generations to come.

A huge part in raising the profile of the sector is done through campaigns like #GroundsWeek, - our annual awareness campaign, now in its third year - which celebrates the incredible work that grounds volunteers and professionals undertake to make sport possible.

Last year, we created a big buzz during #GroundsWeek reaching 52 million people on social media and securing high-profile national media coverage. This year, we saw unprecedented engagement and support right across the industry and beyond with 14.3% increase from 2022 in web searches, reaching different audiences with over 81% of website visitors 'new' to the GMA/sector.

Our increasingly close partnerships with the sporting National Governing Bodies (NGBs), including ECB, RFU, RFL and FA/Football Foundation, provide us with more influence in gaining support for the grounds care community. By continuing to highlight the importance of grounds staff, as well as the struggles faced, we're working to identify solutions with the NGBs so that the role of grounds staff is embedded in the wider sporting operation.

Since 2014, the GMA has been successful in securing more than £9 million investment from NGBs, specifically focusing on raising awareness and upskilling volunteers via its GaNTIP & Pitch Advisory Service programmes. Approximately £21m of funding has been invested in football alone per year, along with £15m per annum across RFU, RFL and Cricket.

Reward and recognition

It has previously been difficult to attribute a 'one-size fits all approach' to reward and recognition, due to the variance in job titles, roles and salaries. For example, in grounds management across sport, two people can have the same title of 'Head Grounds Manager', but one might be at a top-six Premier

League club and the other might be at a grassroots facility. One could manage a single pitch with one member of staff, or they might oversee a site of twenty pitches with a team of half a dozen. Equally, there are many other factors to consider when it comes to salaries, from performance to CPD.

To assist with simplifying and consolidating this, the GMA recently launched the Grounds Management Framework (GMF) – which sets out the national standards for natural turf across sports including football, cricket and both codes of rugby.

The GMF aims to legitimise and professionalise the industry. For the first time, it sets out a clearly defined pathway and progression in the sector, whilst providing clear development and lifelong learning opportunities for those already employed or volunteering within grounds management.

The GMF combines benchmarking qualities, skills and knowledge, and resources required to maintain natural turf sports surfaces into one easy-to-use framework. By grading the standard of a playing surface, from basic to elite, grounds staff, employers and key stakeholders will be able to understand the level of expertise required for the pitch's maintenance.

The next stage of the GMF is aligning salary bands with each level of the framework so that grounds staff and their employers can understand what the appropriate salary would be in recognition of their professional expertise.

Working with the NGBs, our aim is to embed the GMF into the sports standards so that it becomes a key reference point which aligns pitch quality, experience, skills required and ultimately the associated salary for those maintaining that standard of pitch.

By launching the GMF, we are inspiring the next generation and future-proofing the industry by beginning to address the current recruitment



crisis in the industry and closing the gap in an ageing workforce.

Cost of living crisis and salaries

For members, we're developing and expanding the resources and assistance available to them to gain more professional recognition. We're working with experts to produce guidance that will support grounds staff with essential skills, such as work-based negotiation tips. We continue to work with all sporting bodies (including NGBs, Premier League, Sport England etc.) to find a solution to the salary and recruitment issue.

For the industry, we are continuing to tailor our Learning LIVE seminar programme at SALTEX to suit the needs of today's grounds care sector.

Conclusion

We accept that we face a significant challenge to improve professional recognition. It will take time to address these changes, however, we are making good progress. The value of the industry should not be underestimated; currently the industry employs over 37,000 people with 45,000 volunteers, supports over 5,000 businesses and holds an approximate economic value of £1 billion.* This is a huge achievement.

At the GMA, we'll continue to build on positive developments such as the GMF, our work with the sporting National Governing Bodies, and efforts to improve resources available to members and wider industry so that, as an industry, we can weather the storm and come out the other end thriving.

** Figures taken from GMA's 2019 Sports Vital Profession research.*

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Making a better place for greenkeepers



Jim Croxton
CEO, BIGGA

The recruitment and retention of staff is a topic many of our members have raised with us in recent years. While it's important to understand this is not an issue that is limited to the sports turf industry, we're aware that working towards a solution is of vital importance to the ongoing health of our industry.

In the past year, we've undertaken two major surveys that looked directly at workforce-related issues. The results were hugely powerful, providing hard data on life at over 500 clubs.

There were three key findings:

- Since 2018, team sizes have increased by an average of 1.5 people, so golf clubs are prepared to invest in staff given the additional income provided by the post-pandemic golf boom.
- Salaries at the higher end of the industry are increasing and, until the recent cost of living crisis, they were outpacing inflation. But, at the lower end of the industry, there is still a need to offer attractive salaries.

- The number of golf clubs using the 'Committee for Golf Club Salaries' for guidance when setting salary levels has tripled since 2018, meaning that golf clubs are increasingly comfortable asking for advice when setting salary levels.

These were positives, but there were also several worrying elements. It's upsetting to know that one in three greenkeepers is actively looking at other careers and that only half are happy in their role. Generally, greenkeepers love their jobs, so the reasons for that unrest must extend beyond the role itself. The very best companies put staff first on their agenda, but golf clubs have rarely done that, prioritising instead the wants of their members.

The surveys indicated that over half of clubs had vacancies they were struggling to fill. An advert on the local noticeboard isn't enough anymore and every decent sized company is doing outreach to promote their brand. That process takes golf clubs out of their comfort zone and so this year BIGGA recruited a Workforce Project Manager, Jenny Bledge, who is developing resources that help clubs play a more active role in their community.

Jenny's role is a fundamental shift in the activities of BIGGA. We've always looked after our members, but we now believe part of that support comes via encouraging people to join the industry. If there aren't enough greenkeepers on a team, and so they aren't able to achieve the expected standards of course preparation, it will cause undue stress.

People today make their career choices from a position of heightened awareness, having





“

One in three greenkeepers is actively looking at other careers

undertaken extensive research in their various options. They want to ensure the working environment will live up to their expectations before they pursue a career, and so golf clubs have no choice but to bring themselves up to scratch. Following the post-pandemic boom, many clubs have money in the bank, but how many are spending those reserves on making their facility a good place to work?

First Green programme

First Green is an American programme developed by the GCSAA and now being introduced by BIGGA to the UK. We believe First Green to be hugely important in the coming years as a means of attracting the attention of a diverse young workforce. First Green brings groups of young people – particularly schools – into the golf course environment, where they undertake STEM learning activities and discover more about the golfing ecosystem. Sitting alongside our other projects, such as advertising greenkeeping to those looking to change careers, First Green is an exciting opportunity for every golf club to tackle the challenges of recruitment head on.

There's a secondary point to First Green, too. How many golf clubs could say that if a group of young people was visiting their facility tomorrow, they would be proud of the greenkeeping facility and comfortable with the conditions they expect their team to work in? First Green is another means of raising awareness of the need to be a good employer.

The message from BIGGA and the wider golfing industry is clear: if you want people to work for you, your facility must be an attractive place to work.

It's a job seeker's market, so you must make

your offering more attractive than all the others. That means looking at working hours, working conditions and welfare facilities and making sure you have the flexibility required so that if someone comes to you with the correct attitude and willingness to learn, you aren't turning them away. It's also about ensuring that the greenkeeping team is protected and able to undertake their duties in a way that is free from undue criticism, which can often amount to bullying or harassment. We're pushing alongside the Golf Club Managers Association for the introduction of a code of conduct for staff welfare that golf clubs must adhere to.

While these long-term projects are undertaken, we're aware that there are times when members struggle to cope, whether due to difficult working conditions, the cost of living or any number of other factors. That's why BIGGA is training a nationwide network of Mental Health First Aiders, who can offer help and advice to anyone who needs it.

We also work with Andy's Man Club and other wellbeing partners and provide a confidential lifestyle counselling helpline for our members. There is a dedicated mental health page on the BIGGA website and the Continue to Learn programme features more mental health-related content than ever before.

We're still a greenkeepers' association, here to support our members. But how we deliver that support has evolved over recent years and we now work with a vast array of stakeholders to strive towards fundamental changes in the golf club working environment, while retaining those vital one-to-one relationships and sense of community that so many of our members have come to expect.

FOOD BANKS

According to a survey by the Food Foundation, in September 2022 9.7 million adults experienced food insecurity, 18.4% of households compared to 13.4% in April 2022. Among those receiving Universal Credit, 53.8% experienced food insecurity.

In the UK, food banks saw a sharp increase in demand for food (because of unemployment, reduced wages, inadequate welfare payments, etc.)

“

Most people my age are leaving the industry to go and earn £15/16 an hour stacking shelves

A CHANGE OF CAREER



Stewart Marshall

Course Manager,
Dudley Golf Club

That is exactly what 44-year-old Stewart Marshall has done. Last year, Stewart opted to move from his **office job** to working in the **great outdoors** as he became the Course Manager at Dudley Golf Club.

Stewart talked us through why he joined the industry and what he has enjoyed throughout his first year.

He started by outlining his previous job. “I was an operations manager for GKN. It was an office-based job and the money was very good, so I was fortunate to pay off my mortgage. I couldn’t have afforded to take the salary reduction if I still had those responsibilities.”

He explained the motivation for change: “I had no sense of satisfaction. We were turning over millions of pounds, but it was all just numbers. Now, at the end of each day, I can see what I have contributed to. Visitors and members appreciate your efforts and it’s rewarding when they make nice comments about the course.”

Buy why greenkeeping?

“I have always loved the outdoors and gardening. For fifteen years I wanted to start my own gardening business, but I never knew how to do it and I couldn’t afford to start at the very bottom in terms of salary. I knew two guys who were already working at Dudley Golf Club and, during the pandemic, I was able to

offer them a helping hand. The club said they would love for me to join them, so after a few negotiations, I was delighted to accept the position as course manager.”

Stewart expressed his enthusiasm to learn about the industry: “I’m 44, so it is certainly different to join the industry at my age. For me, it is all about learning; I’m at college, I volunteer at other clubs in order to learn about the industry and I sign up to every seminar going.”

Stewart went on to highlight what he has enjoyed so far: “I have been forwarded for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year and I never thought that would happen. Most people my age are leaving the industry to go and earn £15/16 an hour stacking shelves at Aldi. I just feel like I have the enthusiasm for the job, it’s a cliché, but I feel like I have found my calling. I am so motivated; I can’t wait to come to work in the morning.”

Stewart has fully adapted to life as a greenkeeper: “A lot of people say it’s a stressful job. I took no holiday last year, but I just don’t feel like I am at work when I am here. It is a lifestyle that I enjoy.”

Rising **cost** of living

Increases in the costs of consumer goods, underpinned by supply chain bottlenecks, have been one factor behind rising inflation and more reasons for people to seek better pay by considering a new career.

In a recent Government survey (period 1st to 11th June), the most commonly reported issues continue to be the cost of living (91%), the NHS (83%), the economy (75%), and climate change and the environment (62%).

Commonly reported reasons among adults who said their cost of living had risen were: an increase in the price of food shopping (97%), in gas or electricity bills (64%), in the price of fuel (39%), or an increase in their rent or mortgage costs (23%).

The average wage rise in Britain in 2022 was 6%, so it's no wonder that many people are struggling with day to day bills and subsequent mental health and wellbeing issues.

It's encouraging to see that BIGGA are training a number of mental health first aiders and the GMA are encouraging anyone who needs assistance to reach out to them for support. However, the economic situation is bleak and it will be a long time before things settle down - how many skilled professionals will the industry have lost by then?

ACROSS THE POND

Golf course superintendents and their teams in the USA are being recognised for the value they bring to their facilities and communities. The average salary for superintendents has climbed to \$109,621 (£88,000) annually

The new average salary is an increase of 12.6 percent over the 2021 report.

The average age of a superintendent is 47.1 years, with 16.6 years in the profession.



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IN TUNE

with NATURE

Wentworth Club comprises four courses overseen by Golf Courses and Grounds manager **Dan Clarke**. Phil Helmn caught up with Dan to discover why woodland management is so important.

Below
Left
 Dan and the team
 in high spirits.

Right
 Log habitat.

The Wentworth Club is a privately owned golf club and country club in Virginia Water, Surrey, on the south western fringes of London, not far from Windsor Castle.

The hallowed turf

Wentworth Club comprises the East, West, The Edinburgh (initially the South) and the 9-hole Executive courses. The East course is an absolutely stunning track, 6,201 yards, ranked 45th best in England. The West, 7,284 yards, designed by Harry Colt in the early 1920s and opened for play in 1926. The West course,

ranked 20th in England, is the most televised golf course in Britain hosting a multitude of tournaments dating back decades. The West can boast the first historic match between Great Britain and the U.S.A. in 1926, recognised as the precursor to the Ryder Cup, through to the present day with the annually contested European Tour PGA Championship.

The East and West courses are tough acts to follow, and when Wentworth Club identified 150 acres of land between the existing two courses and its neighbour Sunningdale, the pressure was on to create something special - the South





IN THE BEGINNING

It all started in the 19th-century, circa 1850, with the house 'The Wentworth' (now the club house) as the home for the brother-in-law of the Duke of Wellington, being purchased by an exiled Spanish army general, Ramón Cabrera.

After the general's death, his widow bought up the surrounding lands to safeguard the wildlife rich meadows, brooks, heathland and woodlands to form what has now become the heart of the Wentworth Estate. In 1922, the estate was purchased by developer Walter George Tarrant, who bought the now famous and iconic house and two hundred acres of land for £42,000, and then asked renowned golf professional turned designer, Harry Colt, to design an 18-hole golf course (the East course).

course. The South, 7,004 yards, was designed by coach and former Ryder Cup player and captain John Jacobs in consultation with nine-time major champion Gary Player and the Club's then professional Bernard Gallagher. Together, they paid homage to one of Harry Colt's enduring design philosophies, specifically that a course should test the best, but at the same time be playable and enjoyed by club golfers.

A wide selection of teeing areas ensures that golfers can play the course at a length that suits them, while generous landing areas offer the freedom to hit the driver, one of golf's elemental pleasures. Although the idea for a third golf course at Wentworth was conceived in the late 1970s, it wasn't completed until 1990, with His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh performing the opening ceremony, naming the new course 'Wentworth South', this being later changed to the Edinburgh Course in respect of His Royal Highness. The Edinburgh has hosted the annual Wentworth Seniors Masters tournament for over the last 25 years. To name just a couple of winners, Gary Player picked up first prize in the inaugural event in 1997, and Sam Torrance in 2004.

Naturally, The Edinburgh

Interestingly, Jacobs and the team were intent on creating a course that was sympathetic to its surroundings, one that would leave a 'soft' footprint on its environment, and this has, in time, become one of the Edinburgh's greatest strengths. It's a haven for wildlife, a sanctuary for the area's flora and fauna with sustainability and a sympathetic management style as an ideology that Dan and his greenkeeping team have championed over the years on the course. "The Edinburgh is a beautiful golf course in its own right," explained Dan. "It has a very natural feel to it as you play, and it has given myself and my team a great opportunity to get back to nature a little more with our management practices."

One such task the team have embarked on is woodland management. As previously mentioned, the original course was created by 'cutting through' the extensively planted estate which gave a wonderful golfing journey through the holes. Thirty years on, and these woodlands now need some thinning to help reduce shading, improve air and light movement, and support regeneration of the more delicate flora and fauna of the area.

"We have begun removing the large silver



Below
Heather
flourishing
on
the course.

birch population from our woodland areas,” revealed Dan. “They have rapidly self-set over the years and, by removing this species, will significantly help the Scots pine and Oak saplings which we have discovered in the understorey. As a trial, we have cleared a couple of areas on the course.”

Dan went on, “to the right and back of the 14th green and an area between the 6th and 4th holes.” Dan explained that the 6th and 4th area was simply cleared and left to its own natural devices; whilst the cleared area behind the 14th green had ‘strulch’ laid as a carpet to measure the effects/benefits of a natural weed suppressant layer.

“Strulch is a straw compost/mulch” described Dan. “It’s a first for us, and so far not only does it look good, it seems to be helping in reducing weed growth. The concept is that with light and air to the woodland floor, the

heather regeneration will increase. We’re not only interested in heather, we want to see pine and oak flourish which would otherwise be smothered, we want a good diversity of recovery.” This trial is proving popular with members, admittedly though not at first, but as Dan explained, “Change management is difficult, we did receive a little initial resistance, but once the trial area was completed it met with universal approval. Trials like this are a terrific way to convince people of the benefits once they have experienced what it looks like and can see the results.”

Other benefits of this type of management are compounded when you consider the reduction of maintenance. “Aside from the agronomic benefits, the maintenance and resources used

“

We are more environmentally positive, and improving our ecology practices





Left Strulch is reducing weed growth.

Below Heather growing back on the reserve.



in the upkeep of these woodland floors can be huge. Less strimming and less chemical applications are all things which we have considered, which then reduces our impact on the environment,” clarified Dan.

When walking around this beautiful course, it was plain to see that the team’s work was paying off. The newly created vistas across the golf course enhanced the aesthetics and theatre of the holes. As Dan I and walked, it was pleasing to hear that it wasn’t all about tree removal. Dan explained that as areas became

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“ There is no substitute for good nutrition

Above
The nature reserve and strulch.

open, they discovered pine and oak saplings which were now being transplanted around the course so that they too would flourish in better positions. “This too is a fitting example of sustainability and reduction of our footprint on the environment, using what we have in a sympathetic way.”

Dan and his team would like to embark on a greens’ renovation programme in the near future. “The Edinburgh greens do have a high percentage of annual meadow grass, as you would expect after thirty years,” Dan confessed, “we also have approximately 8% to 9% organic content as well. This combination does increase our disease susceptibility and we would like to remedy these figures in the near future.”

Dan explained that the idea would be to intensively remove the organic content through

the usual aeration methods, and overseed with a mixture of colonial bent, fescue and a creeping bent seed (varieties still to be decided). “We believe that a mixture of this type will give greater disease resistance and enhance the performance of the surfaces for our customers,” explained Dan.

With all this work, let’s not forget fairways and rough areas! The team hope to overseed fairways too, receiving a fescue/rye ‘top up’, but the rough as Dan explained is in decent shape. “One positive outcome of the existing irrigation systems coverage is the lack of water to the rough areas. The irrigation system has never covered the rough areas, and as a result the fescue content is pretty high. We plan on simply carrying on treating these areas as we always have, and watch the fescue thrive,” informed Dan.

On my visit, the club’s sustainability awareness and ethos shone through in everything we discussed. The newly created Forestry team was proof of this again. “We recently employed a guy to concentrate on not only clearance but producing wood chippings. We can now reuse all our own wood chip for weed suppression on all the landscape beds around the estate and clubhouse areas, and is proving hugely beneficial, not only in cost reduction but increased recycling.”

We did use to burn our felled trees and brash, and then buy in mulch, but now that is a thing of the past,” Dan illustrated. “Not only are we more environmentally positive, we are improving our ecology practices. Where we can, we leave fallen dead trees for insect habitats, other areas we stack timber to create bug hotels and some of our timber is recycled and used across the estate for biofuel.”



As you would expect, with such a vast area of fine turf to maintain over the estate, the machinery fleet is pretty comprehensive and is served by an impressive fleet of John Deere equipment. “It keeps the three mechanics very busy,” explained Dan, “servicing and repairs and, of course, grinding with the latest Bernhard grinders is high on their daily routine.” Needless to say, the maintenance area has a four-bay waste to water recycling wash down bay, and all chemicals are stored and then recycled via an outside contract company.

The nursery

Wentworth Club can boast (although they never do) having their very own heathland nursery on their special estate which is an extension of the Cobham Common. That said, it wasn’t actually planned, more like just happened; but as we all know, nature usually finds a way and the team have embraced the results to create something special. Dan tells the story, “It all started in

the summer of 2019, during the Justin Rose Ladies series tournament we were hosting,” Dan reminisced. “It was a particularly hot and wildfires were popping up everywhere over on the common adjacent to our land and, as the wind direction changed, sparks started a fire on our land which spread incredibly quickly. The fire brigade were amazing, but struggled to keep up and a large piece of our heathland was burnt to the ground! Trees, large gorse and heather plants burnt to a crisp!” Dan went on, “However,

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CAREER PATH

Dan moved from his native Holland to the UK at the tender age of eighteen, initially to study for his National Diploma in turf.

Dan explained, “Not knowing much about the turf industry, I just wanted to move to a new country and, as I played a bit of golf at the time, greenkeeping looked like something I could get into. I’ve always enjoyed working with my hands, or using machines and I enjoyed science.”

Dan started his career at the All-England Lawn Tennis Club (Wimbledon) in 2005, and after a successful couple of years moved to Harbour Town Golf Links. “Working at both these amazing venues really got me excited about tournament preparation and the buzz and excitement around major events,” explained Dan. “I decided I wanted to continue to study and wanted to get my BSc Sport Turf Management

under my belt (which I did) and graduated in 2011.”

From there, Dan landed the job at The Belfry as assistant greenkeeper and progressed up to deputy head. Then Dan’s first big step up came when he got the opportunity to work at the prestigious Abu Dhabi Golf Club as assistant superintendent in 2014, working for the European Tour/Rolex series events. Fast forward three very enjoyable years, and Dan got the calling to join the team at the world-famous Wentworth Club as Golf Courses and Grounds Manager in February 2017. Dan mused, “This role is by far the most challenging I have ever experienced, but equally the most rewarding I have ever had to date. The history attached to the club is amazing and to play a small part in the ongoing history of Wentworth is a privilege and an honour.”

four years on and the result has meant that what was once a dense woodland with overgrown shrubs has now started life again, with fresh young heather plants growing quickly in the charcoal filled soil.”

Dan and his team are working closely with The Surrey Wildlife Trust to manage this area so that recovery sustains at its incredible pace. “This piece of land is classed as a S.S.S.I. area and, as such, we have a mixture of lowland heath and wetland marsh. It’s an extremely important piece of land rich in biodiversity. As such, The Surrey Wildlife Trust and the estate are working closely together to maintain this area correctly. This involved keeping birch and gorse under control, and when harvesting the heather, it is done so in rotation and then left fallow whilst putting back harvested seed for years to come.”

Dan was rightly proud to point out that greenkeepers up and down the country are guardians of vast swathes of land that are beneficial not only to flora and fauna but also wildlife. “We are delighted to be working closely in partnership with local bodies to safeguard the environment for the future.”



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Money makes the world go round?



We spoke to volunteer groundsman, Tom Banks, to find out what it is like working on a budget and the importance of grants from The Football Foundation for grassroots clubs.

Tom has been the volunteer head groundsman at his local football club for the last eight years and he reflected on how tricky it is to manage work, rest and play as a volunteer.

“I would say the main challenge of a volunteer is the time you get to prepare for a game. For example, if the weather is bad, the pitch could sit all week without being prepared until the morning of the game. Throughout summer, I need to cut the pitch every three days, which can be a big ask for someone who works a full-time job and has a family as well. Some people don’t realise how much you have to do in your own time. The team turn up play and leave, but I am sometimes there three hours before.”

He expressed the importance of remembering that the club is grassroots level and not Wembley: “You need to be mindful that you are a grassroots club and not a Premier League club, plus I am a one-man team at times. I think all grassroots volunteers do a really good job and sometimes that isn’t appreciated.”



Tom is busy doing renovations at the moment and he analysed how it is going so far. "The renovation side of things is pretty stressful. You kind of have to align the stars when you are getting contractors in. Preparation for renovations has gone well and, thankfully, the weather has been on our side this year. We got the sand down as soon as that arrived, and contractors came and spread it for us, before seeding and subsequently waiting for some rain."

He spoke about how The Football Foundation grants have helped greatly with resources and offered support. "We started off by getting a one off pitch grant for £2500, which was amazing as we have never had anything like that before. It allowed us to do things like scarification and verti-draining, which we could never undertake because of budget."

"From that we got into the grant scheme; we got a machinery grant which allowed us to buy a new tractor and other bits of useful machinery. The Football Foundation funded about 75% of that and they are such a huge help for grassroots clubs. Before the grants, we had to beg, steal and borrow anything we could to maintain the pitch. It is nice to see some money filtering down from elite level football."

"Allowing youngsters to play on quality pitches will hopefully help them fulfil their potential and develop local talent."

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Riding high

at Naunton Downs Golf Club

At first sight, **golf and racehorses** could be uneasy stablemates, although the two do **co-exist** on a number of racecourses, with the golf providing income and a good use of the centre course area.

Above:
Left Ben watches one of his racehorses on the hill gallop, which runs through the centre of the course.

Right Ben Pauling Racing's training yard co-exists happily with Naunton Downs Estate's golf course, and plans for the future are aimed at taking both to the next level.
© Harry Gladwin

But, developing a purpose-built racehorse training facility alongside - and in fact, through - a golf course?

It was, however, the perfect vision for trainer Ben Pauling, when along with wife Sophie, he was looking for a new base for his growing business. Formerly assistant trainer to Nicky Henderson in Lambourn, Ben's stable had already scored at jumps racing's holy grail, the Cheltenham Festival, and he was ready to progress.

Rather than just find another stable yard - with which his home in the Cotswolds is well-blessed, both long-established businesses for some of the legends of the business as well as state of the art new premises - the couple wanted to create a sporting and lifestyle destination.

Three years on, rapid strides are being made in that direction.

Naunton Downs Golf Club, an 18-hole members club which is part of a 200 acre estate between Stow-on-the-Wold and

Cheltenham, was developed some 34 years ago from farmland, and had come onto the market in 2019.

"It's situated at one of the highest points of the Cotswolds with shallow soil over stone," explains head greenkeeper Shaun Kench. "The course was rather run down when Ben and Sophie purchased it, and I was asked to apply for the role at the start of the project to redevelop it in 2020."

Shaun began his career by switching from being an aspiring pro to a greenkeeper at Heythrop Park where he worked his way up to assistant course manager. He was then headhunted by Magnolia Park, venue for the EuroPro and Jamega Professional Tours and which even hosted the World Cup of Footgolf.

"I'd gained experience of developing a golf course at Heythrop Park, and went on to be course and estates manager at Magnolia Park, so it felt like a natural progression to come to Naunton Downs and I was very excited by what Ben and Sophie had in mind," he says.



Left Furlong and fairway.



Above Cut heights have been raised by 2mm to encourage the development of a thicker sward which can withstand wear and tear better.

Below Head Greenkeeper Shaun Kench.

An early task was to assess the machinery that had come with the club, refurbishing and upgrading the equipment to bring the course back to life, before planning investment in new machines. Jacobsen greens and fairway mowers have been joined by a Toro Reelmaster and Pro Core - described as a vital piece of kit - plus a Toro Groundskeeper 3500.

“We had no way of cutting the sloping roughs previously; we hire in a Trimax Snake periodically for large roughs. I’ve got lots of experience with Toro equipment and in my view it’s hard to beat.”

Then the redevelopments began. Ben worked with architects Courtingtons to design a training complex that would not only offer the highest level of welfare and preparation to produce winners, but also offer an experience to the owners of

the horses not commonly associated with the equine world.

There are 94 modern stables, welfare barn with equine hydrotherapy spa and solarium, schooling areas and trotting ring, all designed in a horseshoe shape around the gallops.

The site for the complex was at the time occupied by the 15th and 16th hole.

“In fact, this was the worst draining area of the course, and we were able to identify other areas of the course better suited to two new holes,” explains Shaun. “For example, the landscape at Naunton Downs benefits from many belts of mature trees, but ash dieback had taken its toll and in one particular area the Forestry Commission backed our proposal to take the affected trees out and create a new hole.”

Another major change was the development of the training gallops.



“Members were a little perturbed initially, but they love to see the horses working



It was a leap of faith and a considerable investment

a natural tree line. Members often stop the jockeys for a chat about their prospects on the way back to the yard!" comments Shaun.

His attention then turned to a new greenkeeping regime to suit the course which has the feel of an inland links, and to be sensitive to the fact that it sits in the Cotswold AONB.

"It's a very dry area, and there's about 2in of soil over the Cotswold stone. I've increased the cut height by 2mm to help to thicken the sward, allowing it to withstand wear for longer. We focus on the presentation of the greens, which are USGA spec and have irrigation."

Above Grass mixtures for overseeding include all-bents for the greens and a rye and meadowgrass mix for the surrounds, approaches and tees.

A two furlong round sand gallop adjacent to the stable block is used for routine work, but at the rear of the stables, a six furlong carpet gallop dissects the golf course and snakes up the hill, providing the workout for legs and lungs needed to build the horses' stamina.

"This was the perfect site for it, running along

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GOLF

Away from the greens, a more natural look is being fostered.

“There’s more play in the greens than on the surrounding areas and it’s more productive to allow some growth on the roughs, plus it adds to the course’s appearance and benefits wildlife.”

Rye and Meadow Grass varieties from the original build have been retained, overseeding with DLF’s Greenscape 51 for tees and approaches and Masterline PM15 Green AllBent on the greens boosts populations.

Fertiliser goes on in March and October before aeration, with a light granule application in June

to extend the life of the greens in the busiest – and driest – part of the year.

“We’d aim for something like 4:0:4, but fertiliser is hard to get at the moment so sometimes it’s what’s available. As well as wetting agents, I also make use of humic acid, seaweed and foliar mix for colour.”

Piles of logs from tree work are creating ‘bug hotels’ to encourage beneficials and wildflower planting enhances the surrounds.

To replace trees lost to ash dieback, 2000 saplings have been planted, creating new habitats and adding challenge to the course.

Above

Left Ben (centre) with members of new partners The Wigley Group, his wife Sophie (third right) and Mark Schofield (right) of the Kershaw Group.

Right The new stable yard offers excellent facilities for racehorse owners, including a bird’s eye view of the round gallop.

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FUTURE PLANS

When purchasing Naunton Downs, Ben and Sophie's intention was always to make the most of the scenic estate, and planning permission for a 500sqm events barn was part of the deal.

Hospitality specialists Kershaw Partners were engaged to investigate the commercial opportunities and partner Mark Schofield explains: "Naunton Downs Golf Club had a dwindling membership, a course that needed investment and a clubhouse in need of updating. The food and beverage side has huge potential and is a long term plan that is intended to produce a viable business not just for Ben and Sophie but also for their daughters."

Refocusing as a leisure estate rather than as a golf club will include taking the course down from eighteen to nine holes.

Shaun is looking at how to reconfigure the course for this ready for a relaunch in October; using different tees golfers can still play 18 holes, while the larger greens could house two flags.

Courtingtons is on board once again for the build, and another project for the busy team at Naunton Downs is the development of a new grass gallop for the racing yard. This will run alongside the all-weather hill gallop, offering the opportunity to train horses on turf footing.

The existing irrigation system has been upgraded with a new computer control system, auto pressurisation of the pump, and additional heads on five tees.

"I went through every single one of the 120 heads to check its arc and distribution," comments Shaun. "Some of the greens are very large so it's important that the irrigation goes where it's meant to! I'm planning to add a further 20 heads."

This system is fed by a 350,000 cu/m reservoir, supplied by rainwater, with a feeder tank and level valve – a limited amount of mains water is also available.

Shaun's team numbers three full time greenkeepers plus seasonal help; he also has responsibility for the formal lawns and presentation areas at the training yard.

Communication with members has been key to helping them embrace the changes, with Shaun writing a

monthly blog, and spending time on the course to discuss any issues.

It's a skill that will become even more key as Naunton Downs enters its next phase. After a phenomenally successful 2022-3 season for Ben Pauling Racing with 82 winners, more changes are afoot.

Lifestyle destinations are not unknown in the area with Soho Farmhouse and Daylesford close by, but Mark emphasises that this will be more of a community venue.

"We want to encourage local businesses to use and enjoy the estate and this will include the racing industry; we've already forged links with Aston Martin Cheltenham. It will also support local producers such as Hawkstone, Donnington Brewery, Mark's Cotswold Bakery and Lambourne Butchers."

With the full opening of the events barn set for 2025, developments are happening at a pace; a soft

“

It's situated at one of the highest points of the Cotswolds



10TH HOLE

Two new holes were designed by Shaun, and built using the drainage and irrigation from their predecessors and placed as the 10th and 17th. The 10th is situated in a secluded wooded area, where a number of trees that were affected by ash dieback have been removed. Constructed to USGA spec, a programme of fertilisation and aeration has brought it into full play for 2023.

opening of the new clubhouse terrace is planned for this summer. Sustainability will be a key consideration in the developments.

Summer is a quieter time in a predominantly National Hunt yard allowing Ben to take stock and prepare for the next phase. "It was a leap of faith and a considerable investment to purchase Naunton Downs, but we go into the 2023-24 season full of confidence and with a team of fabulous owners behind us," he says.

"The golf market being what it is, the club

can't survive in isolation, so we wanted to look at alternatives to keep the course and make the estate pay. Having Naunton Downs as a lifestyle destination was always Sophie's vision and it adds to the offering for our owners. We have entered into an equity partnership with Midlands property and construction business The Wigley Group, bringing investment of £2.1m and the funding to develop the estate further. We're very much looking forward to the future."

Article by Jane Carley.

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Game Set Match

As The Championships at **Wimbledon** drew to a close, we caught up with Head of Courts and Horticulture, **Neil Stubley**, to discuss the preparations and challenges.

Top Head of Courts and Horticulture Neil Stubley.

2023 didn't start with the best weather for opening the courts. How did this affect the overall preparations for the tournament?

April and May this year have certainly been challenging. It felt like we completely missed a traditional spring and went from a cold/wet May straight into 30-degrees. The Met Office's Mike Kendon said: "June turned out to be the hottest on record for the UK - for both mean and average maximum temperature."

This weather meant that our court preparations got off to a good start, as early April was warm, but through the month the cold weather slowed everything down. Our target of opening the grass courts for Members in mid-May wasn't achievable and we finally got play under way late May. Thankfully, with the steady weather through June, it allowed us to catch up and get the courts to the condition that we would expect in readiness for the two-week Grand Slam.

What were the main challenges this year?

As in most years, we must plan for, or assume, a variety of weather situations for The Championships. Cold and wet, or warm and dry will both have their challenges. The key to a successful Championships is to make sure the renovations from the previous year have gone to plan and the autumn/winter maintenance programme has been followed. We should enter the grass court season with a healthy sward which can withstand the various weather patterns.

How/did this differ from previous years?

When you have worked in our industry for many years, you realise that no two seasons ever seem to follow the norm; this year hasn't been any different. Having the ability to change and slightly tweak programmes, but still achieve the same outcomes, has always been key. We as an industry, whether on the world stage or a local club, have dedicated people who think on their feet and adapt - which is something we can be proud of.

“
We have
dedicated people
who think on their
feet and adapt



Has perception of the courts and the challenges you face improved over time with tv and media?

Whichever sport you work in, there has been an increase over the past twenty years. We do extensive research with STRI on all aspects of grass court agronomy - from seed cultivars, soils, nutrient programmes, irrigation and machinery to make sure we can be the very best we can. With this expectation comes the pressure to improve each year, something I think the team embrace, and are always challenging themselves to find that 1% improvement each year.

The standard of sport now is as good as ever and I'm a big believer that this can only happen because of the high standards you see through all sports on their playing surfaces.

With the ever-changing landscape of products and fungicide removal, plus more legislation to jump through, how do you adapt to that?

As part of our Trial works, we will look at being more sustainable and less reliant on chemicals. This can be through better drought/wear/disease tolerant grass varieties through to our steaming programme which we started in 2017. This process has allowed us to clean the soil profile and better manage the courts.

All Images
© AELTC



Have you utilised any new equipment over the past twelve months and/or what is the one piece of kit you couldn't live without?

The Koro has been a major benefit to managing the quality of the grass sward. The better we can establish the desirable grass, the better we can produce consistent courts that react exactly how we would expect them to. This, along with our regular steam sterilising, has allowed us to be in full control.

How often do you monitor data and plant stress during the tournament, or is there little that can be done at that point to prevent the excessive wear?

By the time The Championships start, there isn't much we can change; it's essentially cutting/marking and evening irrigation on all courts. The hard work has been done to make sure the grass plant is as healthy as possible and in its best condition in readiness. During The Championships, we have a team of six agronomists from STRI that will do various data collection from court surface hardness, moisture through the profile, Chlorophyll index, NDVI, court speed and ball rebound. All very important areas that determine how well the courts play.

When/if the roof is used how does this affect turf conditions?

It helps us to maintain a constant. When the roof is open there are many variables such as sunshine and wind which can dry the court surface out quickly and put the grass under

stress. When the roof is closed, it maintains a constant temperature and humidity which benefits the grass. The only challenge is that Centre Court and No.1 Court are in constant use as there are no more rain delays due to the use of the roof.

How do operations/surfaces at the Roehampton site (home of the Qualifying Competition) differ from The Championship courts at Wimbledon?

Our thirty Qualifying and Practice Courts at Roehampton are constructed and maintained the same as our 38 main site grass courts. This is important as we are always looking for consistency and, when players move across from the Qualifying Competition to The Championships, there shouldn't be any difference in court performance. We also have another venue that supports The Championships before the Qualifying Competition where we have a further sixteen Championship-standard grass courts for players to use once they come across from the clay court season.

Does your team also look after the horticulture areas of the Wimbledon site?

We have a Horticulture team within the Grounds Department led by our Head Gardener; he has a team of 10 year-round gardeners to maintain our 42-acre facility. We maintain the estate within the team which also includes The Championships overlays around the Grounds.



“

With expectation comes the pressure to improve

Our cover article questions professional recognition. What do you think could be done to raise awareness, respect and understanding of the industry?

I think we have come a long way since the 1970's when it felt as though it was an industry looked upon as a job for those without qualifications. I strongly believe one of the reasons there is such a high quality in modern sports is because of the high standards set and delivered by grounds teams. We are heading in the right direction,

but we need to focus more on making it an attractive industry for looking to join and get amongst it. Because of the unsociable hours it may require, it will always be a challenge.

How do you find recruitment currently? If it's not an issue to find skilled persons, do you think this is down to the prestigiousness of the club?

Each year, we recruit 12 seasonal staff to support us through the grass court season. Factors such as COVID and Brexit have made recruitment more challenging, but only time will tell if these are a direct cause or if we are seeing a new trend.



ACE FACTS

How many....

Groundstaff usually and how many additional for the tournament.

16 full-time with an additional 12 seasonals from April – October.

KG/portions of strawberries consumed

In 2022, 49,942 kilos of Kentish Strawberries were consumed.

Balls used

In 2022, the Ball Distribution office accepted a delivery of over 58,000 balls.

Average daily steps of a Groundsperson

Around 25,000 steps a day in the lead up to The Championships.

How much line marking paint is used in litres.

We use around 1500L during the grass court season.

Visitors across the tournament

Last year's Championships saw the highest ever total attendance with 515,164 guests (contributed by the first 14-day schedule).

What is the height of cut for courts

8mm for the playing season.

For 2023 stats see website article

Trials shaping tolerant **seed mixtures** **worth their salt**



As Turf Managers, we are well aware of the wide range of **environmental conditions** that impact us on a daily basis - and how we can best equip our surfaces and our maintenance programmes to best manage those challenges.

Heat, drought and disease are all examples of frequently encountered and well-researched areas, but perhaps lesser so is the implications of salt. Technical Manager for DLF, David Rhodes, explains why salinity is a growing consideration for an increasing range of facilities and what research is currently underway to provide more tolerant seed varieties.

Salt happens - it's just that in some environments it is more prevalent than others. Some venues may have areas of salt affected soils naturally or, for example in coastal locations, turf may be subject to sea mist and/or spray. Naturally, when one thinks of salt-affected turf, our thoughts go straight to links golf courses. However, it extends to

“

As increasing pressure falls on everybody to find more sustainable sources of water



ABOVE: COURTESY OF THE R&A

roadsides and verges exposed to salt de-icing, community surfaces constructed on areas of reclaimed sea bed and any venue that use impaired or recycled water for irrigation.

Research conducted by UNESCO and the World Economic Forum widely reports that the gap between global water supply and demand is expected to reach 40% by 2030 if current practices continue. This is therefore a major driver for both fine and sports turf clubs to be looking at more effective usage of rainwater to reduce the reliance on freshwater irrigation, and be well placed to cope with the prolonged periods of hot and dry weather we are seeing as a result of the shifting climate.

Brackish (or brack) water is found naturally in the environment, often in areas where freshwater meets marine waters, the best-known example being an estuary. Brackish

water provides a more sustainable source than freshwater for irrigation use, however, it has a higher salt content than freshwater, though not as saline as seawater. We also know that salt content is higher in recycled water too, so when we cannot change these environmental factors, we must adapt our products and practices to suit the known conditions.

Grass plants may suffer from salt stress when exposed to saline conditions. Salt stress can reduce a plant's absorptive capacity - leading to nutrient deficiencies, ion imbalances and damage to the chloroplast structure, ultimately reducing a plant's ability to germinate and grow. This is known as ionic toxicity and osmotic stress. If a plant is suffering from salt stress, the above ground symptoms will show in the form of wilting (similar to drought) and noticeable plant growth stunting and management problems.



David Rhodes
DLF Technical Manager



Above Top: Chewings fescue (left), strong creeping red fescue (middle) and top-performing slender creeping red fescue (right).

A plant tolerant to salt is sometimes called a halophyte, a word derived from Ancient Greek (halas) 'salt' and (phyton) 'plant'. A plant's tolerance to salt is characterised in two main ways:

- **Its ability to handle ion toxicity** - controlling the distribution and concentration in the tissue
- **Its management of salt stress in the root zone** - limiting the entry of salt at the root

Blocks were monitored daily and regularly evaluated for the percentage of green leaves and dry matter yield.

The results demonstrated a huge variation in salt tolerance between species.

Fescues tended to perform well, with tall fescue, slender creeping red fescue and strong creeping red fescue making up three of the top four ranked varieties. Creeping bent and tetraploid perennial ryegrass (4Turf) complete the top five.

What is interesting is the apparent difference in tolerance levels of varieties of the same species. For example, a poor performing slender creeping red fescue will still be a preferable choice for salt tolerance than the best performing chewings fescue.

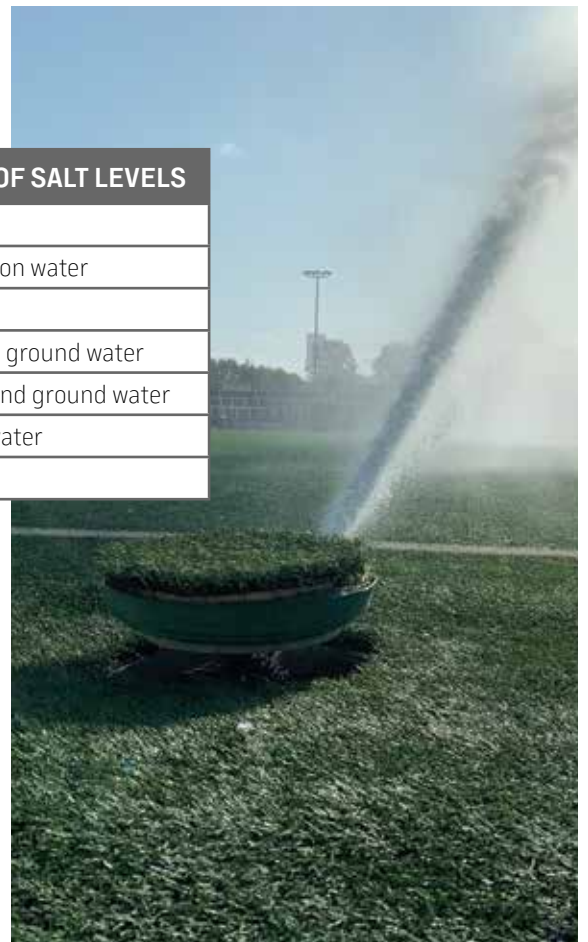
Using this information, breeders can then choose the highest-ranking varieties in terms of salinity tolerance to incorporate into mixtures for less risk of failed establishment, better growth and maintenance of the normal variety characteristics such as visual merit and wear and disease tolerance.

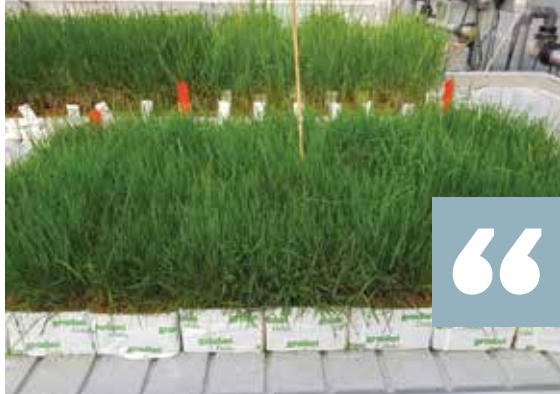
CLASSIFICATION OF SALT LEVELS

Water class	mS/cm	g salt / ltr	Type of water
Non-saline	<0.7	<0.5	Drinking and irrigation water
Slightly saline	0.7-2.0	0.5-1.5	Irrigation water
Moderately saline	2-10	1.5-7.0	Primary drainage and ground water
Highly saline	10-25	7.0-15.0	Secondary drainage and ground water
Very high saline	25-45	15.0-35.0	Very saline ground water
Brine	>45	>35	Seawater

Right: Hunter irrigation at Bromley FC.

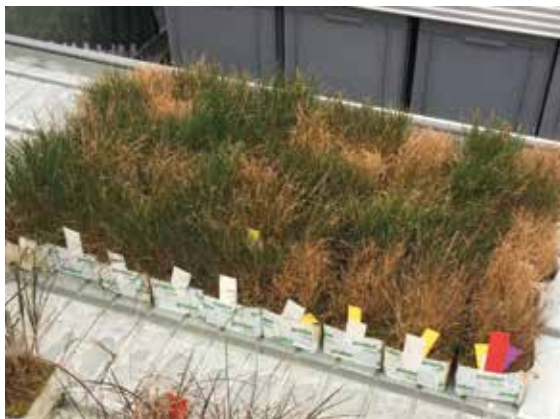
While some wild grass plants express some natural salt tolerance, DLF have recently conducted a large trials and screening programme of more than 300 turf varieties to establish those with the highest tolerance. In the trials conducted over the last seven years, each variety was sown at 100mg seed per 'block', with three to five replications and grown under optimal germination conditions. Salt was applied at regular intervals and at increasing levels from moderately saline up to brine.





“

Salt stress can reduce a plant's absorptive capacity - leading to nutrient deficiencies



Left Before salt stress (top) and after (bottom).

As increasing pressure falls on everybody to find more sustainable sources of water, it is critical that we as breeders and suppliers are providing the right range of products to perform under these changing conditions. While

research has already shaped a number of proven salt tolerant mixtures, there is always room for further improvement, likely best achieved through breeding. Current research and further trials are underway in the DLF global research network to screen and transplant single plants that demonstrate particular tolerance to salinity - with these kept for potential future breeding material. Watch this space...!

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PROUDLY BRITISH

The increasing significance of rain rate



The climate framework within which we manage turfgrass is undoubtedly changing. Climate experts can debate the theories behind this change until the cows come home, but greenkeepers and groundsman now manage the reality on a day-to-day basis.



Mark Hunt
Weather Analytics, Prodata Weather Systems

One of the changing climate trends that is clear concerns rainfall. Warmer air holds more moisture and so we have an increasing potential for more intense rainfall events. Dove-tail that in with changes in our jet stream dynamics, which can lead to slower-moving rainfall events, and we have (pardon the pun) a perfect storm. Climate scientists predict more extreme rainfall events will become (and I'd argue, already are) more common.

Measuring and understanding this change in the dynamic of rainfall events and the consequence for turfgrass management is key. It isn't of course just turfgrass management that is affected by extreme rainfall events. All well and good in having a greens rootzone that can cope with 100mm per hour rain rates when the fairways, bunkers, members car park and local roads flood at 30mm per hour.

Nowadays, you hear more and more on the news, quotes of "a month's rainfall in a day" and the focus is on the amount of rain in mm (or old style inches), but what about **how that rainfall is falling?**

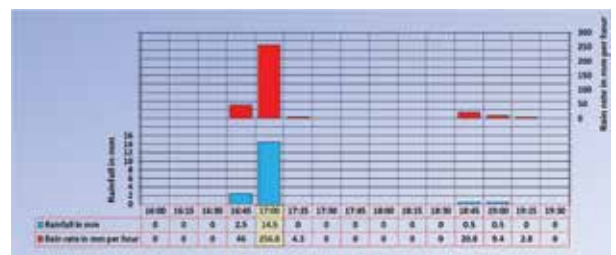
This is described by the rainfall rate in mm (or inches) per hour, there is a classification scale for rainfall rate ;

Light rain	Less than 2.5 mm/h (<0.1"/hr)
Moderate rain	Rain rate of fall is 2.6 to 7.5 mm/h (0.1 to 0.3"/hr)
Heavy rain	Rain rate is greater than 7.6 to 50 mm/h (0.3 to 2"/hr)
Violent rain	Rain rates greater than >50 mm/hr (>2 in/hr)

As we see warmer air temperatures in the summer and autumn, the potential for more violent rainfall events is clearly growing. In mid-June this year, we saw thunderstorms cross the U.K & Ireland, with significant rainfall events. So what degree of rain rate in mm per hour did we see?

Below is a graph using data from a Davis Vantage Pro weather station, showing a rainfall event in my home town of Market Harborough, Leicestershire. In that event, we had a total of 18mm of rain and it fell over the course of 2.5 hours between 16:45 and 19:15 and caused significant local flooding. All well and good if we just focus on the amount of rainfall that fell. The reality from an infiltration rate perspective is that the storm peaked between 17:00 and 17:15, during which time 14.5mm fell at a rain rate peak of 256.8mm per hour (just over 10" per hour).

It was that 15-minute period with its associated high rain rate that caused the flooding issue.



Modern day facilities, whether that is tees and greens rootzones, bunkers and cricket outfield, need to be able to cope with such extreme rainfall events and particularly those at the pinnacle of our profession under the spotlight of the tv camera. At the very least, we need to be able to collate and communicate this type of data so members / customers understand the capability of our facility and maybe how we need to invest in the future to improve it.

Mark is well respected in the turfcare community and welcomes your questions. Send them to: editor@pitchcare.com

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SCAN
ME!



GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT

It has been somewhat of a waiting game for **Nottingham Forest FC** Grounds Manager, **Ewan Hunter**, regarding the installation of a new pitch.

Ewan has been at the club since 2005 and has seen the same pitch at The City Ground go from League One to the Premier League. Fast forward to 2023 and the new pitch construction is well underway. We caught up with Ewan to discuss developments and what effect Premier League promotion had in allowing the club to invest.

How long has there been a necessity for a new pitch?

The old pitch was twenty-nine years old, and I'd say the last ten years or so we've been struggling during the winter months with drainage. The surface looked decent at certain

times of the year but, during heavy spells of rain, it presented a real challenge.

How were you managing the old pitch and what were the main challenges?

During wet weather, we constantly had to Verti-Drain and there were days spent trying to remove water from the pitch. On match days, this was challenging; we would fork holes and squeeze water off the surface.

Out with the old, in with the new

The old fibre sand pitch was constructed around 1994, ahead of Euro 96. It had lateral drains in gravel bands with a non-gravel carpet. The actual rootzone itself was inadequate quality so that had to be removed.





COHESIVE SITES

We share equipment from site to site and we're a good team.

We have some really good guys and we get on really well, so it's a good environment to be in. We're only a mile and a half down the road from the training ground, so it's quite easy for staff to go from site to site. It's also nice to get a change of scenery.

We took out about 7000 tonnes of old material and replaced it with the brand-new construction including new drainage, new irrigation, new under-soil heating, a gravel raft and then a sand lower root zone and an upper root zone. We seeded at the end of June, so that is establishing nicely.

How will the new pitch benefit time management, product usage, irrigation and general costs?

The new pitch is a SIS hybrid. Hopefully, once the grass knits into the system and the new rootzone compacts to where we need it to be, the surface will be miles apart from what we have been working with the past few years.

The management will be quite different.

It's going to take a lot more water through increased irrigation, plus more treatments and an increased number of fertilisers. The major positive is that we'll have more control - rather than worrying about the weather forecast, we will be able to work with the weather.

Did promotion of the club to the Premier League last year have any influence in the pitch now being purchased?

Obviously, it's an expensive project so being in the Premier League has certainly helped with the financial side of things. Also, the value of the players and the style of football played in the Premier League demands a certain standard. Once established, the new surface will be up there with the best.



LIFE BEFORE FOREST AND FOOTBALL.

I got into the industry at an early age after carrying out work experience at my local golf course in Thetford, Norfolk. I knew what I wanted to do when I left school; I went to Otley Horticultural College in Ipswich full-time for the next two years, completing my National Diploma in Horticulture. This had a small amount of sports turf included, but not really enough to fully satisfy me at the time.

I carried out many other work experience placements at local golf courses in and around Ipswich and was offered a full-time job working at Thorpeness Golf Course when I finished my college course. This resulted in a quick return to Otley College, as Thorpeness wanted me to go on day release to gain my NVQ 2 in Sports Turf and then my level 3.

I did have some time out of the industry for a little while. However, I soon realised I needed to get back to what I knew best and started working at Delapre Golf Course in Northampton. I was very grateful to them for the three years I was there, as I undertook spraying courses and worked my way up to becoming first assistant greenkeeper.

My mother-in-law spotted an advert in the local paper for a groundsman at Rushden and Diamonds FC, but I wasn't really interested as I wanted to stay in golf. However, after a second interview, I was offered the deputy head groundsman position and, within three months of me taking the job, my boss, Head Groundsman Jim Buttar, told me he was leaving to join Tottenham Hotspur.

I was asked to take on the role of acting head groundsman until the club could find Jim's replacement. I was slightly apprehensive about this. Luckily for me, Jim was fantastic, writing a lot of information and instructions and providing two weeks of intense training as I tried to learn the job very quickly. I had two successful seasons and then I stumbled across the Forest job in 2005; the rest, I suppose, is history.



Has there been much of a difference from moving from the Championship to the Premier League in terms of workload, management and preparation of the turf?

There's a lot of pressure on the grounds staff; from getting training sessions on throughout the week down at the training ground to the pressure of a match day. We had two training pitches (built by MJ Abbott) last season which are heavily used, and the staff there work a lot of hours to maintain and facilitate the first team training.

Tell us about your team

We've got a nine-man team who all worked really hard. I've got a fantastic deputy head in Jack Farmer, who's in charge of the training facility alongside a team of five who undertake all the day-day-tasks. We talk on a daily basis and I'll visit the training site from time to time to see how they're getting on. I work mainly in the stadium with my team of three, but we all come together on match days and we help each other out as and when we required.

“

The new surface will be up there with the best



The major positive is that we'll have more control

You have had new owners of the club over the past few years. Do they have a different stance on supporting the grounds management?

The ownership here has been in place for about seven or eight years and the investment and support has been great. They've purchased new machines and invested in two new training pitches last year, plus the new stadium pitch this summer.

Have you had any other recent investments in grounds management?

We've had quite a few machines for the new training ground including mowers, tractors, Verti-Drain and sprayers. Being back in the Premier League has seen a lot of investment in the club generally and we've had a lot of work done in the stadium, including the installation of TV cables, improvements to the concourse and dressing rooms. There's been a lot of work carried out by the club over the last few years and that work continues.

Article by James Kimmings.



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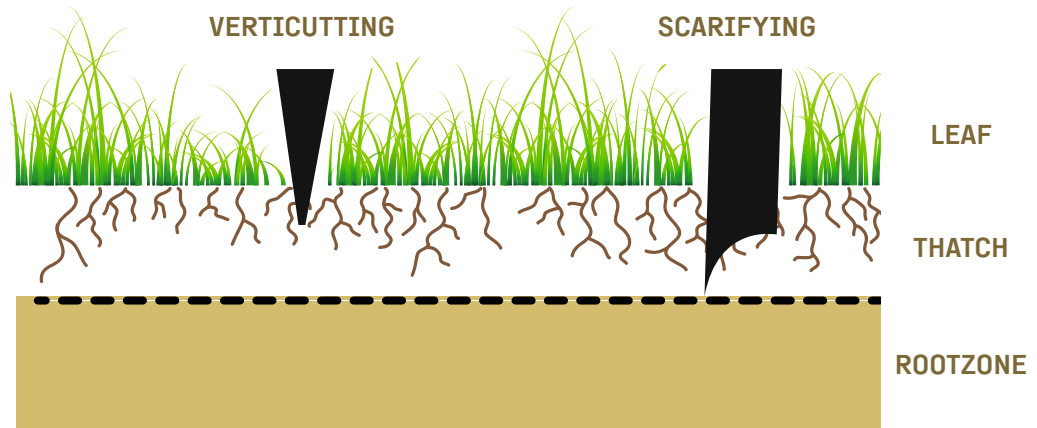
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verticutting vs scarifying

A detailed insight into the two methods.



Verticutting - cleaning out the sward

Method. The hexagonal blades spin backwards - anywhere between 1-9.5mm in depth - it cuts into the plant and separates it, which then generates new plants. When the grass is folded over (from being walked on or rolled), verticutting makes the grass stand up because it is spinning through and making it vertical. It also removes and thins out unwanted meadow grass.

Pros.

- More vertical grass growth which helps performance and presentation
- Thatch prevention
- Increases ball speed
- Broadleaf weed control
- Easier pitch preparation

Cons. As Einstein once said, there is a negative to every positive; if you verticut too often, it can cause a lot of damage to the surface by thinning out the grass.

Frequency. Usually, you would undertake light verticutting at the start of the season to get rid of some of the dead grass. You wouldn't verticut in the middle of July, or when conditions are really dry because if the grass is dormant you won't get the recovery. Undertaking it during wet seasons means the recovery time will be less.

Summary. It comes down to where your course is and then analysing your environment's typical conditions and temperatures. Not one course is the same!

Scarifying - thatch removal

Method. Scarifying is more of an intense method which can be destructive if you don't know the ins and out of the greens. If the roots aren't strong enough, the blades will roll it up like a carpet. Anywhere over 9.5mm in depth is determined as scarifying.

Pros.

- Removes thatch and prevent its build-up
- Acts as a cultural control for weeds
- Weakens Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*)
- Improves surface penetration of water
- Improves the air flow around the grass plant
- Aids the incorporation of materials, such as fertiliser, top-dressings, irrigation water and grass seed
- Aids seedling establishment

Cons. Even if your green is really healthy, after scarifying it will look slightly ropery. You have to have the patience to wait a month or so before the results start to show.

Frequency. The GMA states that monthly scarification, in general, should be the starting point from which to adapt a maintenance regime, but many see it as part of end of season renovations.

Summary. Get to know your green first, test the root system. Do that analysis on the roots and see if they are strong enough to cope. If it is a very short root, then scarifying maybe wouldn't be recommended until the green health has been improved.

By James Matthewman, Deputy Head Greenkeeper, Maesteg Golf Club.

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Bowled over

at Arundel Castle Cricket Ground

Arundel Castle Cricket Ground is a 3.5-acre amphitheatre built in 1895 by the 15th Duke of Norfolk and is renowned as one of the **most beautiful cricket grounds in the world.**

Set amidst the Sussex Downs and with stunning views over the Arun valley, it is overlooked by the stunning Arundel Castle, seat of the Dukes of Norfolk for over 850 years. In 1975, following the 16th duke's death, his widow decided to keep the club and for this purpose the Friends of Arundel Castle Cricket Club (F.A.C.C.C.) was formed.

James's (Jimmy's) journey

Senior Groundsman, Jimmy Askew, started his career at an early age, enjoying helping the grounds team at his local seaside ground



CRICKET FOR ALL.

The expansive diet of cricket includes:

- International
- England Disability
- Southern Vipers (Women's)
- National Finals
- Youth Finals (boys & girls)
- Tradition (Duke of Norfolk's XI)
- Oxford & Cambridge Varsity Matches (Men & Women)
- Various Prestigious Overseas Teams
- Private Hire / Corporate Days

in Littlehampton, West Sussex. Jimmy knew instantly that tending sports turf was the ideal fit for him. Very soon, a job was advertised to join the team on an apprenticeship basis at Sussex County Cricket Club, "I applied instantly," informed Jimmy. "I knew what a great opportunity it would be to work with Andy Mackay, the head groundsman, and his team."

Jimmy enjoyed five years working at the club with a spell working at their satellite ground in Horsham for part of his employment. "When the Horsham ground stopped hosting first class cricket, I was

made redundant, but fortunately I was offered a job at Portsmouth Football Club as an assistant groundsman," revealed Jimmy. "Cricket is my true love, but football is a close second," confessed Jimmy.

"Working at Portsmouth F.C. was fantastic and gave me a great alternative experience to sports turf management. I was there for five happy years in all, and then the job for senior groundsman was advertised here at Arundel Castle," explained Jimmy. The rest, as they say, is history. James has enjoyed an extremely successful three years at the beautiful Arundel Castle ground alongside his assistant Ian



“

Our ethos is to provide an atmosphere where activities can be enjoyed by all

Above
Close up
renovations new
seed coming
through.

Top right Senior
Groundsman
Jimmy Askew.

Far right
View from the
boundary.

Sykes (who incidentally has loyally served the club for the last twenty years).

Sky, surface, soil

Jimmy is responsible for the sixteen pitches at the club, which is nothing unusual I hear head groundsmen up and down the country say, but at Arundel Castle it's no mean feat when I explain the complexities of Jimmy's fixture list. Before we get into that, and as with all 'turfies' we had to start with a discussion about the weather (we all do right?). "We had a reasonably mild winter in this part of the country, which was helpful, but we had a very wet spring," explained Jimmy, "This did put our preparations back a little at the start of the season, but we've recovered really well."

Despite the trials and tribulations of the weather, Jimmy was proud to inform me they hadn't lost a game (so far) this year. "It's gone very hot and dry now, which is excellent, and the outfield is running true and fast. However, I'd like it to be a little greener so I'm still praying for rain at night," smiled Jimmy. Whilst speaking of the outfield, Jimmy has earth-quaked the entire area and dressed with over 100 tonnes of sand since his tenure at the club began. "The ground is extremely chalky at a shallow depth,

so verti-draining is out of the question for us," explained Jimmy. "I wanted to improve drainage and rooting so the vibrating slits work much better for us with little to no stone/flint being pulled to the surface." Jimmy and the club have plans to top-dress the outfield more regularly in the future to further improve its performance.

Pitch perfect

Jimmy is responsible for three types of wickets. Thirteen are standard 'old style' constructed, one county standard wicket, re-built in 2014 by the Sussex County groundsmen team, and two recently constructed new hybrid stitched wickets (3% beige stitch).

Jimmy explained, "As you can imagine, they all perform slightly differently and have their own unique growing characteristics. As such, my maintenance and renovation regimes must be tailor made to each type."

As previously hinted, the club's fixture list is beautifully varied in standard, age, gender and ability. This unique ground has a unique all-inclusive approach to the game and, as such, Jimmy must be ever mindful of the playability of his surfaces. "The old-style pitches provide great surfaces for general play up to a reasonable standard," explained Jimmy. "When



CLUB HISTORY

From Bradman to Warne, Marshall to Richards, Cowdrey to Botham, all the most well-known names in cricket have played here but the heart of the club is their passion and ethos to cover as many forms of the game as feasible and give back to the community as much as possible.

The club is uniquely neutral with no 'home' team to speak of, so it can host a full variety of matches, from international and first class, to County and elite, both male and female. The club is rightly proud; it also welcomes teams with disability and enjoys hosting youth finals as well as the extremely popular annual cricket festival, complete with picnics, drinks tents and family fun, where four local village teams battle it out, all to the sound of a local jazz band.

we play county or international games, we use either the 2014 pitch or the new stitched surfaces as they provide more robust and faster performance that the players demand at that elite level. I watch the fixture list and plan my pitch rotation and renovations accordingly to suit the differences in matches," Jimmy reiterated. "As an example, last week we hosted the Men's India international team practice session (before their match against Australia

at the Oval) and then later in the season we are due to host a local inter-village fun day for the local community".

Although maintenance regimes vary slightly from ground to ground, traditional methods win the day here. "We dress using Ongar loam as it matches our base construction," explained Jimmy, "Prior to dressing, we run a couple of passes of seed over the pitch using our Sisis dimple variseeder 1300 (we prefer to use

+




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Top left
Arundel Castle Cricket Charitable Foundation.

Top right
Jimmy's trusted Ransomes Auto Certes mowers.

Below Wear and tear after intense practice sessions.

Johnson's Premier Wicket uncoated seed), following the dressing and a light brush, we apply an I.C.L. Sportsmaster 8:12:8+3%MgO pre-seed fertiliser at 35gms/m rate."

The club have a modest but adequate machinery fleet comprising a John Deere compact tractor and outfield triple ride on mower and Jimmy's trusted two Ransomes Auto Certes cylinder mowers for his pitches.

Giving back

I picked up the uniqueness of the club's vision with James Rufey, the Chief Operating Officer and secretary, "There is no 'home' team at Arundel Castle," explained James, "but nevertheless we have a very busy fifty games booked this year which the very supportive 850 strong membership can enjoy." James continued, "We're proud to showcase the most unique diet of cricket fixtures covering all forms of the game. There really is something for everyone."

"The club also boasts an indoor cricket school, formally opened in 1991 by H.R.H. The Prince of Wales enabling year-round tuition and practice,"



explained James, "our ethos is to provide an all-inclusive atmosphere where activities can be enjoyed by all."

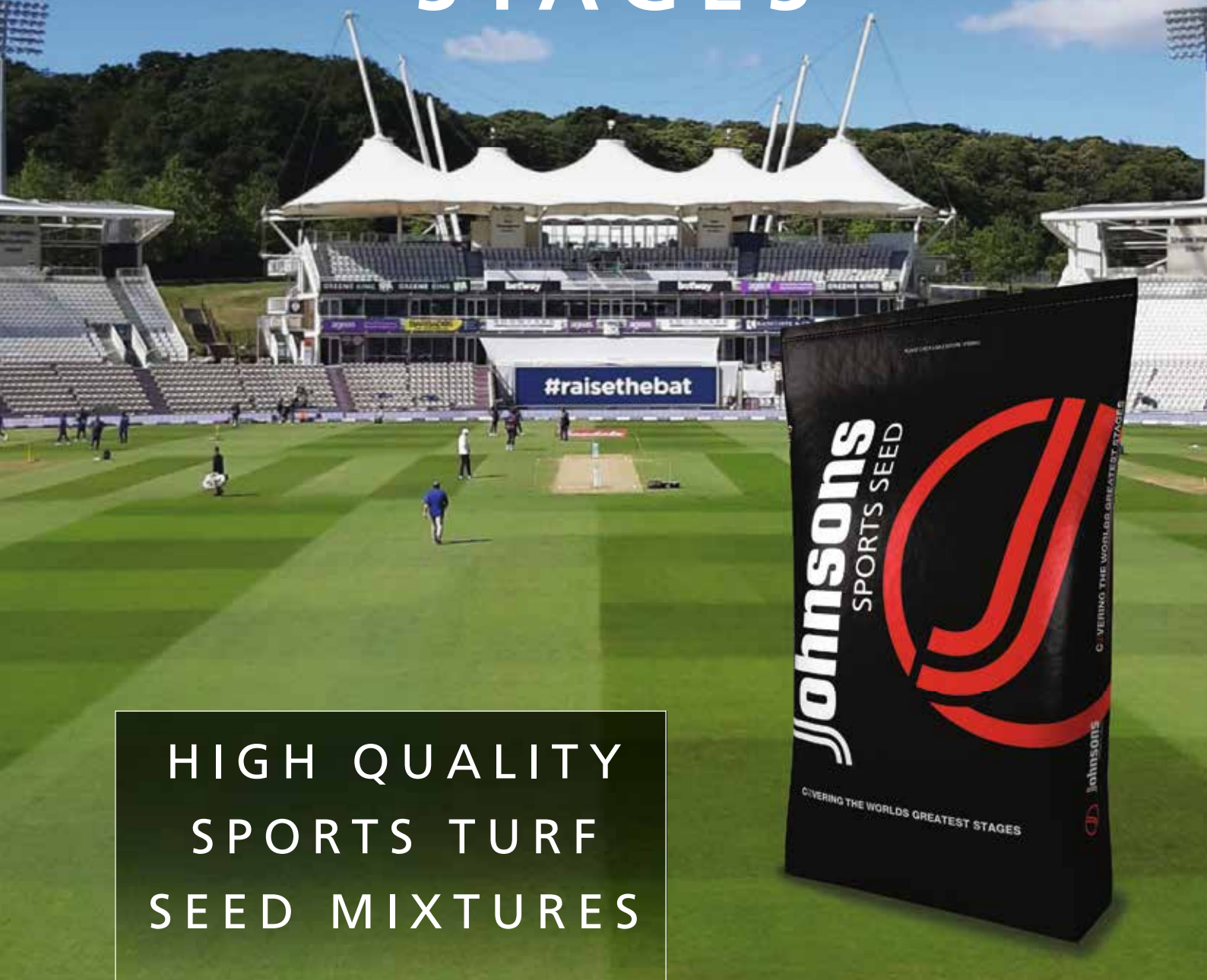
To that end, in 1986 the club established a charitable arm, and The Arundel Castle Cricket Foundation was formed. "The Foundation uses the power of cricket and other sports, outdoor recreation, and history to inspire and enhance the education, health and development of disadvantaged young people," explained James. "Our fully inclusive programmes combine sport, education and well-being to have a lasting, positive impact on the lives of young people from local, inner-city and special schools. The club's affiliation with its charity 'wing' is a perfect environment for inspiration and escape, leaving a lasting and powerful impression on the young people who visit us," stated James. "Last year, our programmes supported the health, education and emotional wellbeing of 1200 disadvantaged young people."

Bowled over

Not only was I was blown away by the beauty of the Arundel Castle ground, but I was also equally blown away by the club's ethos of inclusivity, flexibility and their drive to cater for all levels of the sport. It was wonderful to witness their ability to use the 'great game', and its perfect environment, to help those young people who desperately need it the most. Dare I say, it's a great example of what cricket can do for our communities if we put our mind to it! Thank you to the amazing team at Arundel Castle and wish you all a successful season with plenty of rain (at night only)!

Article by Phil Helmn.

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Light at the end of the tunnel

After falling short in the playoffs, you would expect the mood around **Dartford Football Club** to be slightly sombre. Their Head Groundsman, Jay Berkhauer had other ideas.



Jay Berkhauer

Jordans Sports
Grounds Solutions

MATCH DAY

"I did the kick-off preparations slightly differently from a normal charity match. I got the Dennis out and gave it a little double cut and then marked out the pitch before putting the sprinklers on. I wanted it to feel special for me as well as everyone else."

Jay, along with several other members of the club, had already organised the staff match for the end of the season to create a community feeling around the club. It certainly succeeded in lifting spirits and solidifies the importance of positive mental attitude.

He told us about where the idea had come from: "In the past, every club I have worked at has always had a staff game at the end of the season. I have been here four years and nothing like that has ever been organised, so I put the feelers out to staff and coaches. The idea started off as the staff just having a kick about."

Jay was pleased when the club wanted to come on board with the idea: "Geoff Ashburn, from the Dartford Supporters Association, got involved and we slowly started putting it together and that's when we decided to raise some money for the Association. They have helped me out in the past through paying for little things around the ground. If I need something, they will give me a couple of £100 for a bag of seed etc. It was time to give back."

Jay explained where the donations came from: "We charged each person £20 to play and then put a couple of squads together, but anyone who wanted to contribute more could also do that. I think in the end we raised just short of £800. The money was a bonus because the feeling around the club after missing the playoffs was low and it felt like this event lifted

everyone's spirits, including my own."

He reflected on what has been a tough couple of years for many: "It has been a long old season, but also a long hard couple of years for many in the industry. COVID in particular was very up and down, with a lot of pressure and no one knowing if they would have jobs at the end of it. Here at Dartford, it has been a bit of a kick in the teeth the last couple of years losing in playoffs and, subsequently, a hard couple of seasons for the club. Everyone getting together created a much-needed feel-good factor."

"Everyone at the club is never here at the same time, so it was good for everyone to have fun on the pitch before getting to know some people who may never have met properly. Manager, Alan Dowson (who came in at the start of last season) has a philosophy to build a community club; everyone's in it together mentality. I feel the event certainly achieved that and I would encourage more clubs to do the same."

Jay spoke about how Alan showed his support earlier in the season when a game had been cancelled: "I was really down when a game was cancelled due to really bad weather. Alan took me to one side to have a chat and his support was very reassuring."

As many of you know, the job has its pressures at times and Jay reflected on what it was like for him to step out on the turf he prepares. "It is a bit of a privilege to play on it. I have always

prepared the pitch to the standard that I would like to turn up and play on, and it feels like you've earned the chance to be able to go out and play. It is a stressful job and does have a lot of pressures behind it and all this can build up and get on top of you."

Jay finished by giving his verdict on well-being in the industry. "It is a massively important thing for people to think about.

Something similar to this match really lifted the club and made me feel rather good as well. The job is pressured; anxiety and concern about if the pitch is good enough will also be there. Professional players receive wellbeing support from their clubs because of the pressure they are under. Why can't grounds staff have foundations in place to get feelings off our chest?"

“

Why can't grounds staff have foundations in place to get feelings off our chest?

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24 HOURS A MOW

Setting records and supporting the homeless

Back in 2019, Andy Maxfield set the world record for a 24 hour mow around Ewood Park, raising £4500 for Alzheimer's Society. He covered just over 92km and he is now back for another challenge after being dethroned. This November, Andy aims to take on the mow again, with even more determination. We find out more...

When asked why mowing, Andy explained that he wanted to be unique: "Back in 2017, I was cutting the grass around the local area and I wanted to do a charity event which was different. I wrote to John Deere about a ride-on mower challenge which involved riding from John O Groats to Lands' End. We raised £10,000 and John Deere were a fantastic support."

"In 2019, it was slightly different. To beat the mowing record, I needed to cover the distance in a 24-hour period. I am accustomed to walking around cutting grass and I thought the 265 laps of Ewood Park wouldn't be a problem. I couldn't have been more wrong! Cramps and dehydration were the main challenges of the process and, when I finished, I was hallucinating and my kidney function had gone down to 50%. This time, I am much more prepared for the physical demands."

But why put yourself through such a hard



challenge again? "Probably stupidity to be honest! The guy in Australia who beat my record emailed me to tell me he had beaten my record and a little bit of me wants to claim the record back. However, the main priority is to raise money and awareness for Nightsafe as well as my own achievement is important."

Finally, he expressed what he wants to achieve from the challenge: "To be fair, I'd be happy to get over 100km, I know the record is 124km, but I want to raise as much money and awareness from the charity. On the day, I want to organise lots of different events. I am trying to get a lot of different fun things throughout the day while I'm mowing."

Andy is currently looking for sponsorships as he aims to raise money for Nightsafe, a charity to help support young homeless people aged 16-24 to alleviate the plight of homelessness. Here's what he had to say about the charity: "Most people reading this won't know what it is like to be homeless let alone homeless at 16 years old – I just want to help them get some support and stability. I am selling raffle tickets for the lawnmower that I will be using with tickets costing £2 each, this is to represent the cost of a breakfast for a young person."

[JustGiving.com/page/mow24hours](https://www.justgiving.com/page/mow24hours)

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1. Connect with other people

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2. Be physically active

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3. Learn new skills

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- Boosts self-confidence and raises self-esteem
- Helps you to build a sense of purpose
- Helps you to connect with others

4. Give to others

Research shows this:

- Creates positive feelings and a sense of reward
- Gives you a feeling of purpose and self-worth
- Helps you connect with other people

5. Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness)

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TALKING TURF

In this regular column, we talk all things turf along with the projects and challenges you face on a regular basis.

Tournament preparations

at West Essex Golf Club



Paul Kimber

Head Greenkeeper
West Essex Golf Club

After hosting the **Senior PGA Professional Championship**, we sat with Head Greenkeeper **Paul Kimber** to discuss preparations and challenges.

When a tournament comes around, do you manage the course differently in preparation?

As seen with most competitions, the arduous work is in the two or three weeks leading up to it. I try to always have it near 'tournament ready' so that we are only ever a week or so away from it being complete. Prepping the course is easy to be honest; I liken it to cooking a roast dinner... the skill is in the timing and getting everything to come together at the same time. This includes getting the timing right on fertiliser and PGR applications for greens, tees, approaches and fairways - ensuring that you do not get excess growth through the week of the tournament. The significant difference in maintenance is during the week of the competition itself, as all other work is put on hold. We will cut and roll greens every day, as well as tees, approaches and fairways, together with a full bunker rake. All irrigation, except for the tees, is switched off and we allow the greens to dry out in order to add speed and firmness.

Were there any developments to the course in advance of the tournament? Bunker projects for example?

We constructed two new bunkers on our 18th, which we timed to be open just as the competition started. This was not specifically for the PGA (as we would have done them anyway) and the only difference was in how

quickly they were opened for play.

Do you think there is added pressure on you to deliver when a big tournament comes to the course? Is this a motivation?

Yes, there is always extra pressure, but I think most of that is self-inflicted stress. There is always huge motivation and it always seems like you are never going to get it all done - so it is very satisfying when it all comes together. However, as I said, I try to keep it 'tournament ready' all season as nothing annoys members more than seeing loads of work being carried out on the lead up to a competition.

Did you employ more staff for the run up or during the tournament? If not, how did your team cope with added demand?

We just do it all ourselves. Unfortunately, we were a man down due to someone leaving, so it left us a little pushed, but we still managed to set the course as it should be. If ever we are running out of time, we just prioritise key areas and relegate any 'unessential' work until after the competition.

Had you done any other preparations before the tournament kicked off i.e. top dressing and verticutting?

In the three weeks prior, the greens were double verticut then Vertidraind to 11". We then aerated with solids on the Toro ProCore to a depth of 4" and applied 40 tonnes of sand. Finally, we applied a light granular. Two weeks



before, I sprayed wetting agent and feed and then a week before I put a PGR down with some N and Fe - this stopped any excessive growth and ensured they did not slow down during play.

Is a tournament part of the job and therefore does not change your approach?

In my view, the course should be to an

equivalent standard all year because it is members, visitors and societies who are our bread and butter, which means we have to look after them equally as well. Competitions give you a focus and are a little different to normal, although starting at 4am can be a bit brutal.

What was the feedback for the projects you undertook?

Incredibly positive. The PGA were very complimentary, as were the professionals, which is very satisfying and makes the whole thing worthwhile and enjoyable.

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GROUNDSPERSON PRESSURES

Finding balance is challenging in professional sports turf. If you want to produce the highest quality, **you're expected to take the pressure** that comes with it.

Often, that means working unrealistic hours and dedicating your life to your job, usually at the expense of yourself.

Many might find themselves in a place where the pressure is too much, and their mental health starts to suffer, but with a fresh approach, there are other options.

Aaron Winfield has been Head of Grounds at Harrow School for five months when we sat down in early June 2023. Experience taught him early on that a work-life balance is what he wanted, with professional sports and the turf industry a hard place to find it.

Like most, his love of sport drives his passion for the job. Aaron's grandfather looked after their

local cricket ground, and he grew up playing at Long Marston Cricket Club in Hertfordshire. That interest led to a degree at Myerscough College and a six-month internship at The Oval, followed by three years at The Grove.

Exposure to these venues cemented Aaron's desire and ability to produce the best, but more importantly it showed him what he liked and disliked about the roles.

"I've been very fortunate working at The Oval; initially, it was for six months, but I've gone back as a volunteer, and that kind of confirmed to me that I enjoy doing it in bits and pieces, but I couldn't do it full-time again," he explained.

"Like the Grove, it is intense, and it's amazing, and I love it to bits, and I love how it makes me





Left Onsite golf course.

Above View from a students room.

Far left Head of Grounds, Aaron Winfield.

feel. It's why I volunteer at tournaments and events. I still have that intensity here, I still have days when I'm drained, but, as a team, we're still producing the same quality, and the work-life balance is there."

"There is expectation here, but also understanding. With the first-team football and rugby pitch and the first-team cricket pitch, I know they are constructed and irrigated, so the pressure is on for them to always look pristine. The other side is that, when they are in use, they expect them to be of good quality."

"The staff always want the pitch playing well, and there are always questions if something is flooded or that sort of thing, but they are also understanding. At the beginning of the year, I

can't tell you how many teachers came to see me and said, "I can't believe how tough the start of the season has been, but we understand. And the same goes for cricket. They were so sympathetic at the start of the year, but when you get that sympathy, you have to give it back later in the year now, and I can produce good pitches. I've got to produce good pitches because I have no excuse."

"I love county and international-level cricket prep, and you can do cricket here to the same professional level, but you get that work-life balance, and it's something I would sell to anyone in the industry, especially with the discussions that are now going on about mental health struggles and everything like that."



“You can do everything at a school, but you get that balance. We host professional sports bodies, we’ve had Man United Ladies, the NFL, AFL and cricket, but I go home at 3.30pm every day.”

“I could quite easily stay till 9pm, making it look amazing, but who am I doing that for? Because no one’s going to come to me and go, ‘Oh, Aaron, that’s amazing, you stay till 9pm; here’s your reward for that.’ No one does it. We

leave at 3.30pm, and we do extra hours when we need to, but we leave at 3.30pm because that’s when we’re scheduled to work, and if we can’t do it in that eight-hour day, then it’s not doable.”

“Others in the industry might say, ‘Oh, I stayed till 5pm, or I stayed till 11pm;’ who are you doing that for? You’re doing it for yourself, but no one’s patting you on the back. And then we get upset when people blame us. There is a balance, but we need to look after ourselves.”

Finding the balance for himself has been one thing, but as a manager, Aaron has been conscious of finding it for his team too. He gives them responsibility and lets them learn from the experience. Whilst accountability falls to him, he wants his staff to grow at Harrow and take pride in their work.

“Our industry is changing a lot,” Aaron begins. “When I started out, you had the old boy who’s been at the club, and he was stout. You don’t need to go to uni, and you don’t need to do this, you don’t need your Level 2. It’s all experience. And yes, I agree with that in a way. But what happens in the business world, or any other world, is that people go out and get qualified. They don’t get real-life experience, but they go into work, and then they build that experience.”

“In our industry, people aren’t prepared to let go and give other people responsibility because they’re worried it will fall back on their head.”

“I want people to take responsibility. I want someone to grab the first-team pitch and say, ‘I want to do this.’ Because our site is so vast, we’ve got experienced guys who worked in football, and we’ve got experienced guys who have worked in cricket. If you want to take responsibility for it, come to me and say, and I’ll let you do it.”





“

Everything we do is to give the boys the best experience

“At the end of the day, I’m still responsible for the agronomy plan and everything like that, but we sit down as a team, and I’ll run it past everyone and ask what they think, and we’ll develop it that way: but it’s a team effort.”

“I’m not out there doing everything. They all do it, and I’m there helping and guiding them. So it’s their input that has produced it all. I can’t sit there and say the first-team football pitch was all me because when was the last time I mowed the first-team football pitch? They’ve done it all.

That’s their pride and joy to relish.”

“We need to give the younger generation a go. We’re losing people in the industry because the qualified people have got annoyed and left. You need to give young people a go because otherwise, people hold onto the job for 40 years, and then the younger ones aren’t getting any experience. So you can’t moan about it one way and not let it go the other.”

Whilst Aaron’s team is central to his focus, the quality of the surfaces and the boys he’s

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preparing them for are his main priority. The expectation is that a Harrow student and international sports person should walk onto a pitch of the same quality.

Whether on one of nine cricket squares, 14 football/rugby pitches or the nine-hole golf course, Aaron is aware how important sport is to the boys and the benefits it can have, including for their mental health.

“Sport is fundamental to what we do here, and that’s not just the sport itself, but the boys’ mental health,” Aaron explains. “It’s the awareness and benefits of it and getting the boys out of the classroom.”

“On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, as well as Wednesday afternoons, they are outside

the classroom, and there are fixtures every Saturday. They’re not just in the classroom, they’re not stuck in a bubble, they’re getting out in the world.”

“I think when you consider we’re in north London, getting outside, especially with the mental health aspect we’ve spoken about, is really important.”

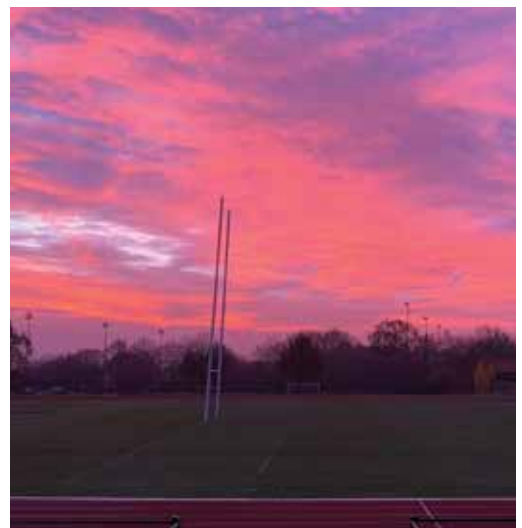
“That’s the bit where I have that balance, where I sometimes have to swallow my pride. It might destroy the pitch a bit, but I can get that back at the end of the day. The key is getting the boys outside and playing, and everything we do is for the boys.”

“As much as it’s for my own gratification that it looks good, everything we do is to give the boys the best experience they can have at the school, and that is the drive to do it. That’s a big part of what we do here and quite a fun part of it.”

Article by Blair Ferguson.

“

People aren't prepared to give other people responsibility because they're worried it falls back on them





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A COURSE WITHIN NATURE

Shortlisted for the 2023 England Golf's Club of the Year, **Brailsford Golf Course** is a highly community-centred club, introducing primary school children to the game and creating a new youth team.



Ben Archer
Course Manager

Eding the Peak District National Park (the nation's first) between Ashbourne and Derby, Brailsford offers scenic views of the surrounding Derbyshire countryside, with gently undulating parkland and contrasting woodland terrain with several water hazards that attract diverse wildlife.

Opening in 1996 as a nine-hole course, further development of the 60-acre estate saw another three holes added, thanks to sterling work from the then greenkeeper.

Further improvements created differing tees

for the back six holes to extend the length for players wishing to play the full 18 holes of what is a par 69, 5,852yd well manicured course, featuring the 8th and 9th holes played across the lakes.

"Biodiversity is key to our future," declares course manager Ben Archer, "as is sustainability because we are conscious of the effect golf has on nature and resources."

"The club is committed to protecting the biodiversity of the course as a legacy for future generations," Ben continues, "and to that end, environmental impact is considered in every decision we make."



CLUB MISSION

Ben, 28, is bristling with the energy to take the club's mission forward.

He landed at Brailsford as head greenkeeper in May 2019 from Kedleston Park, where his six years included apprenticeship and qualification in Level 2 and 3 greenkeeping. "As first assistant, I had reached a glass ceiling, with a deputy and head above me, so it was time to move on," he recalls.

"I live and breathe the golf course," he confesses.

"On holiday at home I'll be checking the weather and moisture levels. I'm annoyingly close, just 15 to 20 minutes drive away."

"Last year for example we removed all plastic tees from sale and teamed up with Ocean Tee to supply bamboo ones. We add new birdboxes around the site every year, mostly donated by members. They present an opportunity for visitors to enjoy the diverse range of native birds populating the site."

Protecting and creating habitats to help encourage biodiversity is at the heart of Brailsford's mission, Ben explains. "Many bug hotels around the course in our managed woodland offer a sanctuary for beneficial insects, especially pollinators. A healthy bug population is the keystone to the proliferation of diverse flora and fauna."

"Our moisture meter divides each green into nine plots, colour coded in the laptop to signal any dry spots. Such technology is common now as water management and greenkeeping go hand in hand."

"Sprinkler systems can deliver water where it's not needed and vice versa if they are positioned incorrectly. Moisture meters can help provide more uniformity of application and consistency, which is what course maintenance is all about."

Helping Ben and the team manage water is a Geka hand hose system allowing them to spot treat greens. "Some were too wet at the back, others too dry at the front. We can now use water where it's needed," he explains.

The club can access spring water that feeds a tributary of the river Trent, thanks to a submersible pump house. The abstraction

licence Brailsford holds does not always work in the club's favour, however.

"Last year, we were not allowed to take water between the end of June and late September because of the heat wave," says Ben. "Greens dried out and we lost grass. The Environment Agency give you a blanket ban - there's no in between to prioritise watering."

"Since the local reservoir was built forty years ago, the village has grown 60%, raising demand dramatically. We're now spending a four figure sum on bent grasses, which are more drought tolerant."

A proprietary club, Brailsford is blazing a trail of innovation inside and out. The greens committee was scrapped in 2019 (captain's and secretary's car park spaces went too) in a bid to introduce a sleeker management style. "Everyone has an opinion and you can end up going round in circles," says Ben.

"The fact is, owners and players do not understand grass as well as greenkeepers do - they pay professionals to do the job and we are trained in what we do."

Ben knows though that he relies on presenting facts and data to support any drive to improve efficiency. "Sustainability has to be part of the business, working side by side. I report regularly on what's happening out on course, and what it means for members and visitors."

Little if anything goes to waste if it can be reused or recycled. "When we replaced lounge furniture last year, we called in a company to take it away for upcycling and live another life.



Above: Tree work on the 7th hole before (left) and after.

There was no bonfire," says Ben.

In a programme of reducing and recycling plastics, Ben mixes his own fertiliser in a bucket. A 20kg bag lasts him a month.

The six waste bins out on the course were installed three years ago and are doing their job at reducing litter. The contents are periodically emptied and collected with clubhouse refuse.

"We're considering ditching the lockers as

they take up plenty of space that could be used for other purposes. Many players prefer to bring their clubs in the boot."

"This is a relaxed, forward-thinking club," says Ben, "with no segregation. Every competition is mixed and we practise inclusivity, inviting local schools here once a week to try golf, with another three planning to visit us. We want the club to function as a community hub."

Built on farmland, the course was nutrient rich from the start, which sparked a move to reduced fertilising to fostering a more natural growing environment.

"We introduced eco rough to reduce fertility and improve the definition behind the holes, toughening up the course and making more of a fair challenge for all players," says Ben.

"But we were spending 35 hours a week sat in a tractor cab, burning diesel, flail cutting and collecting, so last year we decided to outsource the job to a contractor, who removes around twenty bales - about twenty tonnes of grass - that are recycled back into the food chain."

The style of working relationships at Brailsford means adaptability ranks high. "The owner and my team of two under me are very flexible, which is a real benefit when numbers are few."

"When I started, one of the greenkeepers was working March to October only, but we have increased resources as the business grows. It's a difficult question - as an owner, do you invest in staff first or wait until revenue rises?"

Assistants Ben Bloore and John Bridges "keep on top of everything like strimming, bunker maintenance and raking", Ben explains.

Of the four water bodies on site, two are large fishing lakes, two are smaller ponds. Sensitive, though necessary management is the regime in place. "On the golfing side of the lakes, we keep the banks clear to allow uninterrupted views for players. Trout,



Biodiversity is key to our future





Left Eco rough collection.

Below Assistants;
Top Ben Bloore
Bottom Jon Bridges



dragonflies, tree creepers and reed warblers all populate the water and vegetation.”

The focus is on “creating a golf course within nature,” Ben states, and introducing practices that benefit biodiversity, rather than sticking to the old ways. Educating members about the benefits of the team’s strategy is ‘a big thing’.

“Some older members argue against removing trees. ‘They’ve always been there’, they say, but that’s not a good argument for keeping

them. We’re trying to become more informed about climate change and sustainability and to do things that take account of that.”

“The traditional golfer loves a blanket of grass, but looking at biodiversity, dandelions and daisies offer some of the first flowers for pollinators in March time.”

“The eco rough is helping create a course with more traditional links grasses. Buttercups are appearing now, whereas they were out-

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competed before.”

“It’s all about little wins,” Ben states. “If all goes well, we’ll introduce wildflowers next year to continue our journey to sustainability.”

For the time being, Brailsford will remain a 12-hole course, with the option to play six holes twice. “Let’s get the existing holes perfect first,” Ben states. “Another six holes would involve a £1m investment and anyway, 90% of members only complete twelve holes, although they like the idea of eighteen.”

“It’s all about adjusting your offering to the clientele, and the trend is for shorter rounds that don’t take out the whole day.”

Ben’s bought into zeolites as a method of soil improvement. Twice yearly soil sampling records mineral levels in the profile. “I have all the data logged, displaying a time line that traces the changing condition of the soil over the years,” he says.

“I started using zeolites in spring 2020 to help lock in nutrients and ameliorate the profile. On the 4th green, sulphur levels and cation exchange was low. Now it’s the highest it has ever been.”

A parkland course can create maintenance issues familiar to many greens teams and Brailsford is no exception. Extensive work to reduce the impact of trees along the course has helped alleviate disease outbreaks and reinforced the decision to cut application of fungicide drastically.

Tree lining the 4th and 7th holes created the damp, shady conditions fusarium loves. “We’d apply fungicide on the Friday and come in on Monday to see mycelium springing up. We needed to improve the soil and increase light levels,” recalls Ben. “Removing forty alders along the 7th allowed light and wind to penetrate.”

“The hole was far too sheltered. It has come on tremendously since we completed the work eighteen months ago, helping us develop a more consistent course, with similar shade, moisture and temperature levels that’s easier to manage.”

A further fifteen trees, including oak, silver birch and maple came out behind the second tee, Ben adds. “the 1st green suffers the most - to the south of it there’s a wall of ash, silver birch and thorn hiding a sewage works. It needs thinning out.”

Overseeding twice a year with bents is increasing disease resistance, Ben reports. “I switch the seed mix every 18 months as I want to introduce as many cultivars into the sward as I can.”

Brailsford is at the vanguard of a wholesale rethink of the impact on and importance of golf courses to the community and to biodiversity. Pressure on wildlife habitats makes this an urgent reappraisal.

Article by Greg Rhodes.



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How do **golf courses** **help nature?**

Taking time to appreciate, enjoy and record the species that use your golf course may not only be good for you, but can be good for shifting how people see **golf's impact on nature.**



There is lots of evidence that shows how much we benefit from spending time around nature, both physically and mentally. That is true whether you see that wildlife at your local nature reserve or on your golf course.

Do you enjoy listening to a Robin sing its heart out from the top of the tree on the 5th, or watching a Brown Hare skip through the long rough? But how do we find out what we are giving back to nature on our golf courses?

Take part in citizen science

Personally, I feel the more we record what wildlife is on our golf courses, and share those stories, the more we can understand what the contribution is across the industry. More and more UK golf courses are making alterations to support nature on their sites, and many have been managing with nature in mind for a long time. Large-scale scientific research, such as some of the projects that The R&A are running through their Golf Course 2030 project, are hugely important, but you can play your part too.

Citizen science is a great way to get involved. You can record your own species observations and add them to mass databases through apps such as iRecord or take part in specific citizen science projects. These are often run by conservation charities and are a chance for people to help answer specific research questions or provide a snapshot in time of how wildlife is doing.

All this data adds up to paint a picture of how species are doing across the UK, year-on-year. We know, for example, that while the House Sparrow is the most common bird recorded in that survey, its numbers are down 57% from when the Birdwatch started in 1979.

In the last issue, I talked about how Starlings feeding on leatherjackets can be part of an integrated pest management approach. By recording the number of Starlings on your golf course, throughout the year as well as during the Birdwatch, you can help us find out why they are declining and what we can all do to help.

Get your members on board

Engaging your members with recording wildlife can also be a great way to get them excited about the work you are doing to support nature. Can you have a wildlife recording sheet in the changing room or entrance to the clubhouse? Can you start a wildlife part of the newsletter for people to send in their sightings each month?



What about bringing in local experts to lead wildlife walks around the golf course and help train keen members on recording techniques for different species groups? Do you have a greenkeeper who is particularly passionate about wildlife (I know many that are!!)? Can you give them the time and support to be able to champion nature projects at your club? The more we can do to champion the great work golf courses can and are doing to support nature, the better.

Start with butterflies - and spread the word

A great citizen science project to get started with is the Big Butterfly Count (14th July – 6th August). The project is run by Butterfly Conservation Trust and asks everyone to share their observations to help find out how some of our favourite butterfly species are faring. The stats that come out of this project are very concerning – 80% of butterfly species in the UK have declined in abundance or distribution since the 1970s.

Can you contribute to this project by recording butterflies across your golf course between those dates? Pick a sunny afternoon and really take a moment to take in the beautiful habitats your golf course offers and try and spot as many butterfly species as you can. And you don't have to stop when the Big Butterfly Count wraps up - maybe the greenkeeping team can keep a record of the butterflies they spot in the long rough? Or you could ask your members to record butterflies during their round?

Sharing your results and stories afterwards, whether that's with a short tweet or a magazine article, helps others in the industry and the wider public to appreciate what a contribution golf courses can make!

**RSPB
BIRD
WATCH**

The UK's biggest citizen science project, for example, is the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch, which asks people all over the UK to spend an hour in January recording which birds land in their garden, local park or other outdoor space (including, of course, golf courses!). Last year, over 500,000 people took part across the UK and sent in over 9 million observations of birds.

Article by
Dr Marie Athorn
The RSPB and
The R&A partnership

Osprey Experience

North Wales Wildlife Trust is working to allow wildlife to thrive as they work in partnership with Dwr Cymru Welsh Water to help bring back ospreys to Wales.

They are helping visitors to better understand the local wildlife. There is a live feed to the osprey nest in the Llyn Brenig visitor centre and a cafe which is open daily. You can also see the ospreys from a safe distance until the end of August. It might be worth a visit if anyone is looking to try and improve bird habitats on their course or if you want to learn some more about wildlife habitats.

For more information visit
northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk



Wildflower for you

Tickseed: *Coreopsis lanceolata*

Tickseed flowers from summer to frost, making it one to keep an eye out for before the chilly winter draws in. Tickseed is low-maintenance, drought-tolerant and long-blooming making it ideal to fit on the border of a fairway. It thrives in places with lots of sun and good soil drainage. Cutting back the top of a declining perennial to the ground or near ground level will promote vigorous new growth, rejuvenating the plant. Coreopsis is an excellent plant to attract wildlife. Bees, butterflies, and other pollinators visit the flowers and birds eat the seeds. It commonly flowers from June to October.



Food sources

Are food sources scarce on your golf course for badgers and other animals? You may want to try feed stations.

One social media user said: "Feeding local badgers with a 20kg dry dog food sack from Costco is costing about £20 and lasts 10 days. It hasn't completely stopped digging but has definitely reduced to manageable levels."



Another user wrote: "Not a lover of feeding wild animals, but we are having some success at putting these out next to tees that are being dug up by badgers for worms".

Is this something you might try?

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PUBLIC PLACES



Jewel in island's crown

The recent Jewel of the Solent television series spotlighted the delights of the Isle of Wight. One of those deserves special merit - **Godshill Model Village.**

Exemplifying Britain's love of the miniature, the Village features expertly crafted trees and shrubs presenting the perfect backdrop to a faithful rendition of Godshill High Street, along which it sits.

The brainchild of a Mr Damms, who established the model village in 1952, the site has been sensitively managed to take account of the maturing landscape to maintain scale and perspective with the buildings populating its two acres.

"The Model Village depicts life in the 1920s," says Stuart Dyer, co-owner with wife Penny. "Over the last 50 years, we have built up a large collection of conifers and shrubs, which now number 3,000 specimens, many pruned using the niwaki approach - a Japanese term for highly sculptured trees.

"My father in law, Robin Thwaites, purchased the site in 1969 - resurrecting Shanklin Old Village and restoring other features including a 1:10 scale model of Godshill church and thatched cottages. We then bought the business off him in 2004."

"This is really a model within a model," Stuart adds, "a copy of the High Street that actually includes our own house and a miniature version of it as well."

This mini marvel certainly packs plenty into its two acres but memory can prove deceptive for some returning tourists. "Penny grew up here," says Stuart, "and visitors tell her it's much

bigger than they remember even though we have remained exactly the same size."

The attraction presents far more than a little corner of England preserved in aspic though. As the High Street changes over time, so does the Model Village. "A tea room replaced its slate roof with thatch, so we have done the same to retain authenticity," Stuart reports.

"We're constantly studying the trees to ensure they are still in scale with the buildings. That's important for several reasons, one being that visitors like to lie down on the ground to take pictures that show as life-like an image as possible."

An RHS partner garden, Godshill Model Village has relied on the services of head gardener Fred Green to help fashion such a stunning visual attraction that ranks right up there with famous counterparts, Beconscoft and Babbacombe (Legoland's contribution to this gardening genre deserves mention too).

"We're a bit like Capability Brown in miniature," states Fred, who is celebrating his 36th year here. "A kind of old fashioned, retro tourist attraction." After working in nurseries, Fred gained his City & Guilds in Horticulture before studying groundsmanhip.

The houses are very accurate models of real buildings, and handyman Martin Thorne maintains chimneys and brickwork while Fred manages the greenery. We don't try to be too clever," Stuart insists, "but the team tackles all the little jobs





“

We study the trees to ensure they are still in scale with the buildings

CLOUD PRUNING

Cloud pruning has shaped the garden's contours over time. Box, yew, pine and Japanese privet are especially receptive to a technique much favoured in the Far East and US.

As its name suggests, such pruning creates the illusion of foliage floating like clouds on the ends of branches.

really well to preserve the appearance for visitors to enjoy.”

That team includes two junior gardeners, John and Roman, who work here two mornings a week and at weekends when the growing season dictates.

When he's not 'legging it up tree trunks to shape crowns or wiring up foliage', Fred's visiting renowned Exbury Gardens near Southampton 'for inspiration'.

“We buy trees in three or five litre pots and plant them out around the garden and leave them until they have gained growth and strength before pruning begins.”

Sooner or later, the issue of climate change enters our conversation. “Our new 15,000l water butt, installed in autumn, at the end of the garden collects rainwater in a pond system to help us become more sustainable,” says Fred.

“I apply plenty of mulch to help reduce evaporation - my own compost creation. Although in a sheltered position - 'in the lee of the Solent sun' - the site's highly sandy soil ensures efficient drainage, not always what's wanted in hot weather.”

“Conifers, azaleas and rhododendrons have been lost through drought, but dwarf varieties have survived better. Box blight has hit us hard so we are trying different planting options, while we also lost some conifers when

temperatures plummeted last winter after a prolonged dry spell.”

A major casualty was the rare *Cupressus lusitanica*, or Mexican cedar, with characteristic blue-green foliage. “The tree had survived the heat but the sudden temperature drop killed it.”

Lawncare presents a different challenge than the usual pitch maintenance or amenity area work. “I cut a little grass every day,” Fred explains, “with most lawns trimmed twice a week.”

Qualifying his words, Fred adds: “I'm cutting postage stamp-size patches much of the time and have to remove six-inch high miniature figures from the sports areas before I can start. We have a football pitch with 22 players and spectators around it, a cricket square, lawn bowls and croquet - all mini scale.

A Flymo electric strimmer handles the grass perimeters, with their 1.5in metal-edging, with an 18in petrol Honda pedestrian managing the larger lawns and a Flymo mower tackling displays areas. “All in all, I spend 16 hours a week cutting grass,” Fred calculates.

An attractive miniature electric railway snakes its way around part of the site, adding further visitor interest and engagement and helping the Model Village lift a Best Kept Tourist Attraction accolade.

“The garden is looking its best in May, June and July, especially with the first flush of conifer newness,” Fred says, before emphasising: “Attention to detail is vital so that visitors can enjoy the full impact of the model village in the correct perspective. That requires constant vigilance so that we can complete work before it needs doing because, by then, we cannot create and maintain the appropriate look.”

SEED MIXES

“People like perfection, including the grass surfaces. For example, I top dress the lawn bowls rink, which measures 5ft x 3.5ft, with sharp sand and a quality seed mix, applying proprietary glyphosate in June to remove sorrel and trefoil, with a possible second application, if needed.”



Crown reduction using his 9in shears helps achieve that aim, aided by topiary secateurs. Caught early enough in the season, growth is easy enough to contain. “My thumb and forefinger can remove the soft, fleshy candles that first appear,” Fred explains.

Not all is small in this mini realm, however. “The garden still retains a handful of large specimens, survivors from the site’s earlier

function as a vicarage - including a rare ginkgo biloba dating back to the late 1800s.”

Godshill Model Village couldn’t ever be a place where you can hop onto a ride-on mower and lose yourself. More a destination where you must stay ever focused on delivering a fantasy world for 80,000 expectant visitors a year. No easy task.

By Greg Rhodes.





GreenGrounds

for the **future we need**

Great strides have been made in making **sustainability in grounds** an accepted part of the landscape for the industry and it's easy to see the progress that's been made in the last decade with the introduction of the **FA's sustainability strategy** and the **Green League**.

But there is still a way to go, which is where a new GreenGrounds initiative joins in.

The initiative, which is a partnership between machinery distributor Reesink Turfcare and Bio-Circle, the sustainable surface technology system manufacturer, was formed to solve the problem of a general misunderstanding that surrounds starting an achievable and effective sustainability project.

Here, we talk to Mark Tomlinson, head of environmental and sustainable stadia projects for Bio-Circle, and founder of the GRASS (Groundcare Resources and Sustainability Solutions) forum for sharing sustainable practices, to learn more about GreenGrounds and how it plans to promote environmental awareness within the turf and grounds care industries. How it brings the industries together, raises the importance of effective sustainable activities, makes an overall positive impact towards decarbonisation and environmentally-friendly maintenance for grounds care.

The good news is it's not as complicated - or as difficult - as you might think.

What is GreenGrounds?

GreenGrounds is an initiative that aims to promote environmental awareness of sustainability solutions within the turf and grounds care industries, to form a collective approach and is committed to helping the



industry with free advice and knowledge, and creative and practical solutions to professionals ready to make a difference.

As the grounds care division for Bio-Circle grows, it's become a daily occurrence for me to be asked how to start a sustainability project, which is where the seed for GreenGrounds comes from. We know there is an interest and enthusiasm to start making change.

Why is such an initiative needed?

Sustainability and biodiversity are here to stay and rightly so. Climate change is at a crucial point - it's the sweet spot when we have the

Above and left: Wild and natural planting at grounds around the country.



CASE STUDY - FOREST GREEN FOOTBALL CLUB

- o Forest Green Football Club is the first UN Carbon Neutral Football Club in the world. Its continued process of improvement within the football and sporting industry has demonstrated what can be achieved and becomes the benchmark for clubs and sporting locations around the world to follow.
- o It's the leading football club in the UK to drive sustainable practices within its infrastructure and with pitch and grounds care environmental maintenance.
- o Its sustainability features include maintaining the first professional fully organic pitch, creating a biodiversity area within the stadium facilities, 20 percent of its annual electric needs are provided by solar panels on the stands, LED scoreboard powered by the sun and welcoming the industry's first all-electric tractor from Farmtrac.
- o Bio-Circle has partnered Forest Green Football Club for five years and with the club's support have demonstrated how sustainable practices of equipment maintenance cleaning, washdown water reductions and recycling equipment can be incorporated into a sustainability plan/project and how smaller projects combine to show how important each element is to a full environmental project.

Below: Mark Tomlinson - Head of Environmental and Sustainable Stadia Projects for Bio-Circle.



power to make change and make a difference for the future. If we leave it much longer, we won't have a choice to make. Any change no matter how small, from all industries is needed. This is our contribution for the grounds care industry.

What are the barriers to adoption?

There's no consensus on what effective sustainable measures are, and clubs and businesses do not follow the same sustainability guidelines; quite often it's activity that just ticks a box, done with a lack of general knowledge which means opportunities are missed. That means there's no accountability and, instead, confusion in the market.

In a worst-case scenario, it can lead to 'greenwashing', when the growing pressure to 'get green' means that without the correct knowledge, businesses who are desperate to show their values align with environmental issues, inadvertently provide misinformation to falsely present themselves as environmentally friendly.

How did the relationship with Reesink come about?

Bio-Circle and Reesink are two forward thinking organisations keen to encourage turf professionals to focus on their sustainable responsibilities. We work in and with nature and have an invested interest in its longevity and future, and we feel it logically falls to us to lead the way to promote sound environmental practices.

The lack of general information is astonishing and if not led by organisations within, then who?

The great beauty of this sector is the ability to network with likeminded leaders and manufacturers who share the same beliefs. Enter Reesink and the idea for GreenGrounds.

What's the solution?

Straight forward advice, knowledge, time and support are key. Bio-Circle has been promoting

“

These activities help safeguard the future of the industry



best practices for six years and part of this over the last 12 months has been via GRASS (www.grass-forum.com), so I have experience in driving innovative programmes promoting sustainability. And I've found that the best way is by encouraging professionals to implement environmental and sustainable changes within their daily job.

No project or change is difficult. GreenGrounds ultimately focuses on making this extremely easy, removing the barriers or the fear.

What areas can be more sustainable?

There are all sorts - biodiversity guidance, water recycling options, solar energy, electric machinery, air systems, organic pitches, water-saving washdown systems, no cable irrigation and Bluetooth technology, advances in turf agent applications, effective reservoir management... the list is considerable.

What are the quick fixes to be more sustainable?

Plan a project. Write a priority list. Plant a wild seed mix on some open land. Any of those are a great start to the journey and an easy five-minute job. It can be that simple. Plan equipment upgrades. It may take two or three years of budget to achieve this, but the key is you have a plan.

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Above: Nick Johnstone, groundsman at Forest Green Rovers, with the Farmtrac FT25G all-electric tractor which forms part of the club's sustainability programme.

Stanley Park Sports Ground in Wiltshire is a success story. Paul Harvey, head of leisure services, began his sustainability journey three years ago. Over a cup of coffee, he quizzed me on my knowledge, listened and said, "how can I do this?" Paul wrote a simple plan, and now the site has battery equipment, organic pitches, solar panels, recyclable water washdown, wild meadows, beehives, and engaged with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust on a tree planting programme. All done on a budget and 'cost neutral' with good planning and budget management.

What happens if we just ignore the environmental impact of grounds care?

The distant future of an Earth beset by floods, droughts, wildfires and typhoons isn't distant anymore, but happening now and it will get

worse. Reports say that by 2030 temperatures will have risen to 1.5°C above the average of the pre-industrial era - the threshold long cited as the tipping point for calamity. To continue as we are means we will fail the future generations; it's as simple as that.

What are the main turfcare practices throughout the year that could be done better and how?

Firstly, a priority plan needs to be implemented, easy low-hanging-fruit changes. Nothing can be achieved without a plan. Make the project easy so it works to your advantage. The last thing anyone needs is a complicated, time-consuming plan; it's not there to hinder you or make your life difficult, but to help you succeed.

What do you think holds people back from adopting a full sustainability policy?

A lack of knowledge... help, assistance, and an arm around a shoulder to encourage. It's not about a commercial sale. We all need to give something back to this wonderful industry.

In your view, what will it take for GreenGrounds to succeed, or even the industry as a whole?

Acceptance that this is an issue that needs dealing with. Buy-in from all and a changing of perceptions. Can we reach football fans with the message that the turf is an environmental asset not just a playing surface? Seven million people attended football games in the UK alone in the 2022-23 season. This broke all records and is a huge audience with an invested interest in their club. The attention of the GreenGrounds project to an audience of this size is mind blowing!

Reesink and Bio-Circle have come together to accept our environmental and sustainable responsibilities. No greenwashing but acceptance to help the future of the industry. Key communication and good practical advice. But leading organisations must join and support our focus. No individual will succeed, this is a concerted industry effort. We are proud to be the first to stand up and say we will help everyone; no facility is too big or too small to implement change. Let's all accept this is a journey we're all in together.



Jon Cole
Business
Divisional
Manager -
turfcare for
Reesink UK

"It's important to Reesink that we focus on providing sustainable, environmentally friendly machinery alternatives that reduce our customers' carbon footprint and do not compromise on the quality of the work. Our current offering includes products powered by biodiesel and advanced batteries made more efficient by incorporating electronic fuel injection, hybrid and electric technologies."

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



All grounds care professionals ready to make a difference and start their sustainability journey are welcome to contact Mark Tomlinson at Bio-Circle on 07712 426122 or Jon Cole at Reesink on 01480 226800.



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A day in the life of SCHOOL sports MANAGEMENT



Harvey Milne

Senior Groundsman,
Crosfields School



Bradley Tennant

International
Greenkeepers and
Groundsman

With the summer holidays underway, we spoke with Bradley Tennant and Harvey Milne about what it is like to manage an **interchangeable sports venue**.

As someone who works across several different sporting sites, Bradley started by explaining how working in a school environment is different from other venues: “Obviously, the main difference is the multitude of sports and managing them all at the same time, across four seasons. It means the renovation time for each sport is a lot smaller.”

“Most places would have downtime at the end of a season before renovating the pitch/surface, whilst we’re straight into cricket.”

When asked about the biggest challenge from one sport to another, it was clear which sports take the most adaptation; Bradley answered: “In terms of the easiest change, it is football to rugby, and the worst - rugby to cricket. Coming into those spring months, the grass is going wild and we’re hacking it down. We have to collect and remove those

clippings because they will slow the ball down for cricket, by bouncing and hitting lumps of grass – which obviously isn’t good for play. We have Berkshire County level team who play here, so there is a standard which has to be met – which is even more added pressure.”

Harvey highlighted the management structure away from sport: “We have created meadows to encourage biodiversity, but also that means fewer mowing areas, and less machine wear equals less maintenance and less time in the office ordering fuel etc. We still maintain the woodland areas as well as smaller tasks, such as tidying around the car parks if required. We try and help each other out where we can, but there are many aspects of the job that take you away from the sports field.”

When asked about working around the student break times, Harvey said: “The children have set breaks and lunches. If it’s raining, they won’t be outside, but that also





means that we probably can't undertake certain jobs too."

Bradley added: "Just this morning, we were hedging the car park which doubles up as a playground for the year two children. There's no way near enough time in one of those gaps between breaks to do that during term time, so that becomes a half term job. Our aim is to provide the best facilities for the children, but also not be a hindrance and be in their way."

As an industry which can sometimes be misunderstood, Bradley and Harvey share the same view surrounding the education of grounds management. "Education and science surrounding their environment would really give students something to think about when they're out there on the pitch. For example, it rained yesterday and there were clippings on the pitch - why was that?" Bradley said.

Harvey summarised: "It builds up respect as well. If children are educated about the industry and the skill involved from an early age, the industry will then get more recognition and hopefully recruitment uptake."

DIRECTOR OF SPORT - GARETH EDWARDS

The grounds team at Crosfields School works closely with the PE and Games department to understand and provide playing surfaces that meet the requirements of different sports. The sports that use natural turf are football, rugby, cricket and athletics. Crosfields' coaching philosophy in football is based on exploiting space on the pitch and encouraging a fast-paced passing and moving game. This requires a smooth, true surface with shorter grass than is needed for rugby when the grass length is longer to enable the durability of pitches in muddier, colder conditions. Summer brings cricket and athletics and the need for surfaces that are kept short with consistent grass coverage on the athletics track and cricket outfield. It is essential for the grounds department to be working with teaching staff throughout the year to provide the correct surfaces to enable teaching and learning to succeed, and high-quality sport to be possible.

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Is it OK to put people on

PEDESTALS?

PART TWO



Trainer and conference speaker Frank Newberry, looks at the plus side of putting people on a pedestal and introduces us to the **'Abundance Mentality and the Scarcity Mindset'**.

PROBLEM SOLVING

If you have any questions about communication, management or problem solving please get in touch with Frank at: franknewberry.com

In part 1 (May/June issue) of this 2-part article, I explored how easy it is to put people 'on a pedestal'. I mentioned that, despite some disappointments, I still have a tendency to do that.

Abundance mentality and scarcity Mindset

I still think it is OK to have a positive expectation of others, as long as I remember to communicate my expectations to them. This brings me to something called the 'Abundance Mentality' and the 'Scarcity Mindset' (you can read more about these on pages 219-220 of 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' by Stephen R Covey, ISBN 0-684-85839-8).

Reading Dr Covey's book, I discovered that

I was not just putting people on a pedestal – I was, in my own way, deploying a powerful management technique. I was adopting an 'abundance mentality' in my work and in my dealings with people.

I wonder if you too have an abundance mentality? If you do, then you will have a deep conviction that ability, wisdom and intelligence are widely distributed among the population and that you, or your employer, will always locate (for example) these intelligent people. You will hire them to work with you, and ultimately the work team will make more progress than if you did not employ them.

Whatever you need in the way of resources, equipment and talented people, you can get hold of them with a little effort

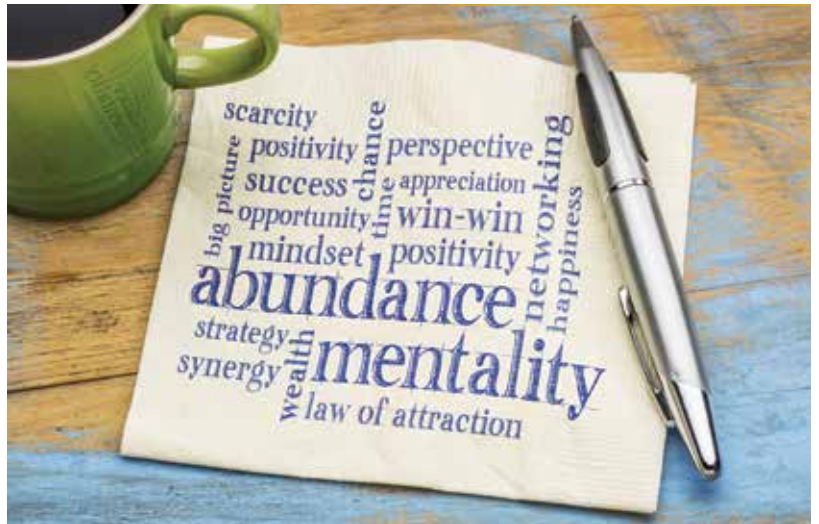
on your part. The key factor here being your conviction that these resources are indeed out there, and they are in abundance.

You might be wary a lot of the time

On the other hand, if you have a ‘Scarcity Mindset’, you will have a deeper conviction that ability, wisdom and intelligence are actually in short supply. You might be wary a lot of the time and protective of what you have. When you come across someone intelligent, you might well be suspicious of them. Why? Because s/he might be after what you have. For example your job, your next promotion, your next pay rise. The key factor here being your conviction that ability, wisdom and intelligence are ‘scarce’ and should not be exposed to risk or to change.

If you feel stuck in a rut

If you sometimes feel stuck in the rut of scarcity thinking, and your world of work is often a negative rather than a positive place, then I would suggest that you consider changing your thinking, and switch instead to an abundance mentality.



Try and see the positive in situations and in people. Look for those situations where you can get a win-win in your dealings with people. Do it for a trial period and then review how things are going after a few months.

I wish you all the very best and - you never know - there might be room for you on that pedestal!

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