

PITCHCARE

The turfcare magazine from pitchcare.com

April/May 2019

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DON'T MISS

Polished at the Emerald
Keynote Interview with the Emerald Stadium's Ryan Golding

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate, an independent day and boarding school, is set in a 220 acre estate at Thorpe Underwood, North Yorkshire in rolling countryside. Of particular interest, especially to those in sports turfcare however, is QE's dedicated Sports Village, recently completed in 2016

Calling America

Our special feature looks at Pebble Beach Golf Links ahead of the U.S. Open, visits LA Galaxy, the 'soccer' club that has helped raise the sport's profile in the States more than any other, and the All American institution that is Hunter Industries



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WELCOME TO

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Life after chemicals

The start to spring has been far less strenuous than it was last year and, although we encountered a further blip of cold weather entering April, this has largely been a pleasant start to the year.

Living in rural Shropshire, I believe the farming community are much happier bunnies as the fields have mostly been prepared and planted already, something that they couldn't even contemplate at this time last April, as fields remained waterlogged.

Whilst still cool - we even had some snow this week, as I write - there has been growth and recovery and improvements to the playing surfaces as we come out of the winter. Many cricket groundsmen got on earlier with pre-season rolling, and the bowls greens that I have seen locally are in a state of readiness for this season's play.

As a business, we have seen a real knock-on effect from last year, with vertidrainage and hollow coring starting at golf clubs as early as January this year. The long hot summer killed off a lot of grasses and people are conscious to get areas oversown in time for a spring grow in. There is no doubt that the best grass seed cultivars will be in short supply as demand, undoubtedly, will outstrip whatever is available. Again, last summer's drought made for poorer harvests of seed.

This year, we lose yet another chemical from our armoury as the EU commission have decided not to renew propiconazole; what lovely people they are! This is pretty much the last true contact fungicide that was available to us, so our options going forward are fairly simple.

For those that have an open budget, the use of regular preventative fungicides is possible. For the majority, a change of tack in grounds management, in terms of bolstering up the soil/rootzone with beneficial microbiology and improvements to the grass strength and health to fend off pathogens and,

therefore, disease. Whilst none of this science is new, nor the education available to groundsmen and greenkeepers, we are in an evolving state and need, more than ever, to embrace good cultural practice.

Having worked in stadium environments for thirty years, I was always shy of going 'green', as it was just not worth taking the chance when working within a microclimate, so swore by fungicides. However, in the last few years, and with better suited products available, I have been more open to a non-chemical approach. The regular use of sugar, humates and seaweed, alongside a nutritional regime, has seen me cut out fungicides from the annual programme, without detriment to the grass, and with virtually no visible disease pressure throughout the year. This, despite some big disease windows that we have had to endure over the last two years.

We have also seen very similar results at many other sports venues and golf clubs so, apart from the obvious environmental benefits, there is light at the end of the tunnel and life after chemicals.

Good luck this spring!

**Cheers
Dave Saltman**



SAY THAT AGAIN!

"Don't become a groundskeeper! It's not so much a job, more of an affliction! The days are long, the work is hard, but honestly, my ethos has always been 'find something you love to do, and you'll be just fine'"

Shaun Ilten, LA Galaxy

"You go from communication and staff management to using science, maths and English - and you do it every day, without even thinking"

Ryan Golding, Emerald Headingley

"Presentation is not paramount; we pride ourselves in following good practice. We ensure that we achieve a first class playing surface; we will not compromise!" Presentation usually follows!"

Ben Grigor, Queen Ethelburga's

"Professional turf management has been a bit of a late arrival at the party, we've been pushed toward looking at biological controls rather than embracing them enthusiastically"

John Handley, Maxwell Amenity

"The people playing out here are having a once-in-a-lifetime experience, that's sort of our Pebble Beach motto. The day you forget that is the day you start losing ground"

Chris Dalhamer, Pebble Beach

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Issue 84 April/May 2019

Ben Grigor, Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate

COVER STORY: Starting from scratch

Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate, an independent day and boarding school, is set in a 220 acre estate at Thorpe Underwood, North Yorkshire in rolling countryside. Of particular interest, especially to those in sports turfcare however, is QE's dedicated Sports Village, recently completed in 2016. Grounds Manager **Ben Grigor** explains all to an impressed David Mears. **P86**

GOLF

The man from Del Monte

This year, Pebble Beach celebrates its one hundredth anniversary. The course, that began life as part of the complex of the Hotel del Monte, hugs the Pacific coast of Monterey Bay and is regarded as one of the finest in the world. This June, it hosts the U.S. Open for the sixth time. **P10**

A right royal green space

Something 'green' stirs amongst the ancient woodland of Epping Forest, as a popular multi-use golf club reaps the rewards of organically managed soil biology. Greg Rhodes interviews Chingford Golf Course's Head Greenkeeper Gary Speller to find out more about the management practices at this green oasis of Greater London. **P16**

Diversity is the only way!

It's been over eight years since Pitchcare first visited Hart Common Golf Club and much has happened in the interim period. Lee Williams visits one of his old haunts to discover more. **P24**

Good things come in pairs

Stockley Park Golf Club, just five minutes from London's Heathrow Airport, is set in 240 acres of rolling countryside. Lee Williams met with the club's General Manager Gary Ivory and Head Greenkeeper Martin Venner to discuss what the future holds for this par 72, 6,625-yard tree-lined course, opened in 1993 by European Tour legend Nick Faldo, who hit the very first drive. **P32**

WINTER SPORTS

A stitch in time!

In the second of a series of updates, FIFA's newly appointed Senior Pitch Management Manager, Alan Ferguson, discusses the issues surrounding the staging of the Club World Cup and Asia Cup, with a National Day thrown in for good measure! **P40**

Straight outta Carson

Though less than twenty-five years old, Los Angeles Galaxy is the best-known soccer franchise in the USA. The signing of David Beckham in 2007 catapulted the club onto the global stage and a conveyor belt of big-name players have followed since. This 'starcentred' business model has brought success both on and off the field. **P48**

Bluebirds' fledgling head groundsman

Cardiff City Football Club are the only team from outside England to win the FA Cup, doing so in 1927. They have also been finalists on two other occasions and have spent a total of eighteen years in the top flight of English football, most recently in the current season, since their formation as Riverside AFC in 1899. **P56**

Polished at the Emerald

In this Keynote Interview, Ryan Golding, Head Groundsman at Leeds Rhinos RLFC and Yorkshire Carnegie RUFC, explains what attracted him to the industry and how things have changed since he started seventeen years ago, after reading a magazine article. **P64**

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MULTI SPORTS

A true vocation

For over forty years, Peter Craig has served in what he views as his vocation. Like many who have worked in this industry for such a long period of time, he has a genuine passion for what he does, arguably just as much now as he did when he was first blown away by the Old Trafford cricket pitch in the mid-seventies. **P70**

SUMMER SPORTS

The heart of the village ...

In the pretty Staffordshire village of Abbots Bromley, teamwork has seen an ambitious plan to create a new community sports hub grow from vision to reality. Pitchcare caught up with joint Trustee and Chairman, John Stevenson, to discover more about how the project is progressing. **P80**

SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

Unashamedly sporting

Holmewood House, a non-selective boarding and day school for boys and girls aged 3-13, is set in thirty-two delightfully green acres on the southern fringe of Kent's famous spa town Tunbridge Wells. It aims for 100% pupil participation in sport, regardless of ability. Neville Johnson went there to meet David Tankard, the man in charge of grounds maintenance. **P96**

EQUESTRIAN

Derby dreams dominate at Epsom

Home to the Investec Derby, and synonymous with Flat racing for even the most casual follower of the sport, Epsom Downs is used to being in the news. But last year it hit the headlines for the wrong reasons when its September meeting was abandoned at the 11th hour due to an infestation of chafer grubs causing unsafe footing. **P104**

P104

PUBLIC PLACES

Holme is where Mike's heart is

Set in fifty acres of gardens in the Wye Valley, Holme Lacy is one of Herefordshire's treasures and a hotspot for visitors all year round. Garden supervisor, Mike West has spent a generation steering the gardens to their award-winning status. **P110**

PUBLIC PLACES

Built on innovation

Supply and demand is a core concept in business. With rainfall occurring on an average of just forty-four days a year, and situated close to the Pacific Highway - the main route between the Californian cities of San Diego and Los Angeles - Edwin J Hunter and his son Paul chose a perfect location for a startup company consisting of just thirteen employees; San Marcos. **P120**

TECHNICAL

Time to be proactive

In recent years, we've seen a continually changing landscape in our industry, relating most notably to the chemical armoury we have available to us. David Lawrence, Grounds Manager, and John Lawrence, Assistant Grounds Manager at Edgbaston Priory Club, spoke to Kerry Haywood about the changes they are making. **P126**

It's the name of the game

With the huge growth of online sales in recent years, the aeration market has become filled with a mass of products for ponds, lakes and reservoirs. It's almost too easy to get caught up in the volume of options available, so how do you find the right product for you? **P136**

Pesticides of the future

In the last issue, Maxwell Amenity Technical Manager John Handley, stated that the case in favour of chemical pesticides is that they have worked in the past. But, the inherent disadvantages that accompany their use - widespread toxicity, secondary pests, resistance and escalating costs, has brought us to the point where there is a need to use alternatives. **P140**

Ryan Goldman, Head Groundsman, Leeds Rhinos RLFC and Yorkshire Carnegie RUFC



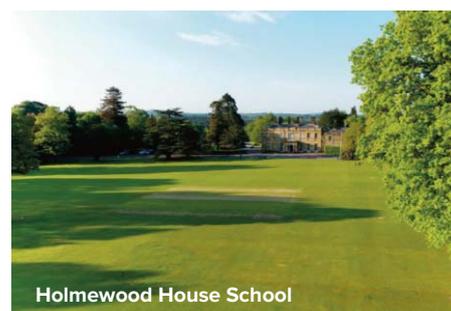
The Lensbury



Pebble Beach



Epsom Downs Racecourse



Holmewood House School

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Monsanto in court!

Bayer/Monsanto loses big again in second RoundUp trial

A San Francisco federal court has awarded a Sonoma County landowner \$80.3 million in the second lawsuit against Monsanto's popular herbicide, RoundUp.

Edwin Hardeman, 70, is one of 11,200 product users who have filed lawsuits against Monsanto, arguing that the herbicide caused their non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and that the company buried evidence rather than warning consumers of the possible health impacts.

Hardeman's trial was conducted in a two-part sequence to preserve the validity of the jury's assessment on the link between RoundUp and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. It is one of three trials likely to have a major influence on the remaining lawsuits filed, although the defendants claim that each trial will be individually assessed.

The San Francisco jury ruled in Hardeman's favour and found that Monsanto had knowingly marketed lethal products; thus, awarding \$75 million in punitive damages as a result. This was tacked on to \$200,000 to cover expenses and economic losses, and \$5 million to compensate for past and future suffering.

For 26 years, Hardeman used RoundUp as a herbicide on his plot of land in Sonoma County.



Then he was diagnosed with lymph cancer, which the World Health Organisation has linked to glyphosate, the active ingredient in the herbicide.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer listed glyphosate as a probable carcinogen in 2015, yet the Environmental Protection Agency has not banned the substance.

Over the past year, researchers have found glyphosate present in cereal, and beer and wine.

Bayer AG, who acquired Monsanto for \$63 billion last June, say they are disappointed with the ruling and will appeal the verdict.

Bayer has lost more than 60% of its value since acquiring Monsanto.

Wild bees and other insects are disappearing in the UK.

Researchers have studied 700,000 records on insects from 1980 onwards and found that a third (or 33%) of 353 species, including wild bees and hoverflies, have declined across their ranges. Experts say that the levels of die-offs within several species of flying insects over the past decades raise the prospect that they may soon go extinct in England, Scotland and Wales.

Wild bees, which serve a vital role ecosystems as pollinators, have especially been hard-hit by the use of neonicotinoids, which have recently been banned by the European Union. However, more than a tenth (11%) of species studied have seen their numbers increase since 1980, which means that certain insect pollinators are still abundant enough in the UK.

A third of insects surveyed are in decline, including upland bees, which inhabit alpine environments and moorlands, and solitary bees, which live in burrows in the ground. But not all insects are on their way out: populations of 22 species of Britain's most important crop pollinators are in good health.

"The widespread common species, in very broad terms, are doing okay. The rarer species are doing less well," says Nick Isaac, of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) in Wallingford, Oxfordshire. "If you only care about wildlife and biodiversity, it's bad news. If you only care about whether your crops are being pollinated, it's okay."

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Work has started near Seagrave to build a new £100 million training ground for Leicester City FC's Premier League footballers

The site, which is 11 miles from Melton, has been earmarked for 12 full size football pitches, an indoor pitch, a sports hall, a first team and academy training building including 30 bedrooms for players and staff, and a covered show pitch with capacity for 499 spectators. Also planned there will be Europe's first Sports Turf Academy, for elite level full time training and education of sports managers, greenkeepers, horticulturalists and mechanics.

Leicester's vice-chairman, Aiyawatt Srivaddhanaprabha, described the scheme as 'a once-in-a-generation opportunity' to make a sizeable, meaningful investment in the club's long-term future.

Following the appointment of McLaren Construction as the project's principal contractor, initial preparations and earthworks to transform the 185-acre site are now firmly under way.

Government to miss targets

Ministers urged to declare National Climate Emergency in the UK

Campaigners say the UK will miss almost all of its 2020 nature targets and young people want change.

A national climate and environment emergency should be declared immediately, the government has been told.

Labour's shadow environment secretary Sue Hayman challenged ministers to make the announcement, which would see the UK take drastic action on climate change after it emerged that the UK will miss almost all the 2020 nature targets it signed up to a decade ago.

It comes as schoolchildren have been marching in the streets calling for more to be done about climate change and as scores of local authorities pass emergency motions setting early targets for zero carbon.

The so-called Aichi biodiversity targets were set in 2010 by the global Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The joint nature conservation committee (JNCC) found earlier this week that the UK was making insufficient progress on 14 of the 19 targets.

The UK is failing to protect threatened species or end the degradation of land and is not doing enough to reduce agricultural pollution, the report found. It also said the UK is not ending unsustainable fishing or stopping the arrival of invasive alien species.

"We have heard that the UK is on track to meet only five out of the 28 biodiversity targets," Hayman told ministers from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, led by environment secretary Michael Gove.

"This is an environmental and climate emergency. So, can I ask, do the ministers and secretary of state agree with the around 50 councils and thousands of young people who have declared an environmental and climate emergency?"

"Will they today to commit to join with Labour in declaring a national environmental and climate emergency?"



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John Deere celebrates milestone machine

Five millionth machine rolls off the production line at Deere's Power Products plant at Greeneville

John Deere recently marked a manufacturing milestone with the completion of the five millionth unit of riding lawn equipment built at the company's Power Products factory in Greeneville, Tennessee.

Originally founded as a small, satellite factory, Power Products is now the highest volume facility for John Deere and is responsible for manufacturing many of the iconic green lawnmowers sold by the brand. The facility was established in 1988 and celebrated its 30th anniversary last July.

"The production of the five millionth machine is a significant milestone for the Power Products team, John Deere and our loyal customers," said factory manager Jeff Hollett. "We take immense pride in the legacy we have built

here in Greeneville, and to know we have built five million machines is something we are really proud of."

The Power Products facility currently manufactures the John Deere 100 Series small ride-on models, some of which are equipped with the award-winning Easy Change 30-second oil change system, as well as the S240 lawn tractor and the Z300 and Z500 Series ZTrak zero-turn mowers. As with all John Deere products, the models built by the employees at Power Products have a greater reach and purpose than just the equipment.

"The production of five million units really puts into perspective what we do here on a daily basis," said Hollett. "It's more than just manufacturing machines to help people look after their lawn. It's



John Deere's five millionth machine, a 22hp E140 lawn tractor, at the US factory in Greeneville, TN

about our unwavering commitment to quality and integrity. This is the only way we were able to reach this milestone, which is a

testament to the long-term success of John Deere Power Products."



Lateral Property Group have provided a positive update on plans for a new 10,000-seat Community Stadium for Castleford Tigers rugby league football club; part of the wider £135m AXIOM retail development.

Next to Junction 32 of the M62, the 106 acre next generation AXIOM retail and leisure destination, will comprise around 75 retail, restaurant and leisure units, alongside a new community stadium for Castleford Tigers.

Once operational, the development will create in excess of 2,000 jobs, plus around 1,100 construction jobs per annum during the 2.5 year build period.

Plans for the community stadium and retail development were originally granted in 2015 and further detailed planning amendments to the retail element have been made since then, which have now also been granted planning permission

The new Castleford Tigers Community Stadium will have a capacity for 10,000 spectators (approx. 3,200 seated and 6,800 standing). It will have the ability to be expanded to a capacity of 12,000 through future phasing by infilling the four corners if sustained club performance justifies further expansion.

BIGGA, Reesink and Toro launch awards

Launch of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards 2019

The British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association, Toro and Reesink Turfcare have launched their annual competition that seeks to uncover the brightest emerging talent in the golf greenkeeping industry.

The Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards are a nationwide competition to uncover the best student greenkeepers from among the ranks of BIGGA members.

Two awards are up for grabs, with the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award entering its 31st year and open to all greenkeeping students studying for eligible qualifications. The other award is the Toro Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year, available to greenkeeping students aged 20 and under.

The winner of the main award will head to the University of Massachusetts for a six-week scholarship to study winter turf management, whilst the winner of the 'Young' award will earn a two-week work experience placement at the exclusive Vidaubin Club in the South of France, in addition to a Continue to Learn package at BIGGA's annual turf management exhibition each January.

Prizes are also up for grabs for the runners-up in each category, whilst those who nominate or endorse the applications of the winning students - who can be course managers, head

greenkeepers or college tutors - also receive a major prize.

Application forms can be downloaded from the BIGGA website and the deadline for applications is 24th May 2019. Regional interviews will take place from 1st to 12th July 2019 and the national final will take place at BIGGA House from 9th to 10th September 2019.

David Cole, managing director of awards sponsor Reesink Turfcare, said: "The Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award has stood the test of time and is as relevant today, over 30 years since its inception, in a world now filled with sponsored awards."

"The introduction of the 'Young' category, entering its fourth year, helped reinvigorate the original intentions of this pioneering programme. Whichever award they enter, this is the start of an exciting journey for our 2019 nominees."

For more information about Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year or to enter the awards, visit <https://www.bigga.org.uk/education/toro-student-greenkeeper-of-the-year.html>

To check out a video that takes a look at the 2018 instalment of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year finals, head to <https://youtu.be/Mg4nqFFZfSg>



Amenity Forum to launch new standard

Meeting professional standards is a hot topic at the Forum's recent Updating Events

The management of amenity areas is a vital and important task, creating safe and healthy public spaces fit for purpose. It is crucial that such tasks are undertaken to the highest professional standards but, as it stands, although there are a number of recognised assurance schemes, there is no overall standard which can easily be recognised as demonstrating that those undertaking amenity management operations are professionally competent and using methods at the highest standards of best practice.

Given that, the Amenity Forum is developing a standard for the sector. This will inform the public, and those who place tenders or employ operators, that the processes implemented are safe and healthy and fit for purpose. The standard will be akin to the Red Tractor logo, which is widely recognised in the food sector. It will be instantly recognisable and

will verify that the various assurance schemes in the sector are maintained at the overall standard.

In the current climate, cost will always be a key factor when considering amenity management plans, but it is vital that quality and standards are an essential element in the final decision. The new standard and accompanying logo will give confidence to all involved.

Those attending recent events, as part of the popular series of free Amenity Forum Updating events, welcomed the proposals.

It was recognised that, whilst many do currently look to employ contractors and the like with assured credentials such as Amenity Assured, there remains others who operate outside such standards. The new Amenity Standard seeks to address this and ensure it is as widely recognised in the amenity sector as the Red Tractor is in food.



Professor John Moverley, Chairman of the Forum, said; "I would like to see this standard as an essential requirement when employing anyone involved in amenity management. If employing a gas fitter, I seek to ensure he or she is CORGI registered, a similar requirement should be essential in amenity management."

"There are a number of well recognised assurance schemes in our sector; this new standard seeks to embrace these and, in a simple way, provide everyone of an assured standard and best practice. I would like to see the logo associated with the standard to be proudly displayed across the UK in our parks, golf courses,

sports grounds and indeed all our public spaces."

The new standard is due to be launched later this year and, in the meantime, everyone is urged to seek evidence of a recognised assurance scheme when employing those charged with amenity management in all its forms.



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PELLENC

Stony Holme course is saved

Former head greenkeeper to act as consultant as course revival praised by golfers

Golf fans in Carlisle have welcomed the news the city's much-loved council-owned Stony Holme course has been saved.

There were fears the course would be left to go to rack and ruin after operator Mack Golf ceased trading and entered into voluntary administration. But Carlisle City Council vowed to get the right professional help to keep the course viable.

A new operator has stepped forward - Jim Douglas - who previously managed the facility for 20 years. He has vowed to bring the course and the neighbouring Swifts Driving Range back to life.

Former head greenkeeper Robin Little, who will act as an advisor to help get the course back on its feet, said: "This is great news for the club and good news for Carlisle, because it means the city has a site for grass roots golfers again. I wish Jim all the best."

"He is the right man for the job. It's all about providing affordable golf that's accessible for everybody."

Stony Holme captain Mark Thompson played a key part in highlighting the danger to the course after its sudden closure five months ago.



Former head greenkeeper Robin Little

For a time, parts of the course fell into disrepair, with flood debris left where it settled, and fusarium affecting some greens.

That was brought under control after Carlisle City Council hired a specialist firm. "Everything now seems to be quite positive," said Mark.

The maintenance commissioned by the city council has meant the course will be back in action far more quickly than would otherwise have been the case, he said.

"People have obviously been waiting to see what would happen but hopefully they will come back. The message is that this golf course will get up and running again so people should use it. We can take back the course from the dog walkers and the mountain bikers."

Mr Douglas warned last week that there is a tremendous amount of work needed to re-establish the course and clubhouse, but he was confident it will happen quickly. He thanked Carlisle City Council, grounds staff, reception staff, the golf club and its members.



Cricket returns to its roots?

On an expanse of Texan grass, two immigrants were openly engaged in a distinctly un-American activity ... they were marking out a cricket pitch.

Armed with a tape measure, a ruler, a heavy roller and a small pot of white paint, Samuel Plummer, the Jamaican head groundsman, and his assistant, Shafeeq Ahmad Khan, a Pakistani, put the finishing touches to another wicket at the Prairie View Cricket Complex, 45 miles northwest of Houston.

In the process, they brought the dream of a local businessman and the ambition of the sport's international leadership closer to realisation.

Cricket was once America's national pastime. Benjamin Franklin brought an early rule book back from England and there is some evidence that George Washington's troops played a form of the game during the revolution. A match played in Manhattan in 1844 between teams from the United States and Canada has been cited as the first modern international sporting event, predating the America's Cup by seven years and the Ashes by 33.

The sport is stirring back to life in America. Cricket's administrators are eyeing the opportunity presented by an estimated 20 million armchair fans and 200,000 players, drawn mostly from the Asian and Caribbean communities.

The United States men's team played its first Twenty20 game with full international status in the United Arab Emirates in February.

The sport has "enormous potential" in America, Dave Richardson, the International Cricket Council (ICC) chief executive, said in 2015. James Sutherland, the chief executive of Cricket Australia, has pressed the ICC to commit to hosting a global limited overs tournament in America soon and suggested Central Park in New York as a possible venue. "Bring big games and big names to the country," he said in 2017. "It's one of the biggest commercial markets in the world."

ICL embark on research project

ICL has started an exciting research project exploring the use of wetting agents to further improve water use and to potentially help optimise nutrient use for managed amenity turf.

It is a three-year research project delivered through the Centre for Global Eco-Innovation, Lancaster University. The Centre is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and is supporting local sports field construction specialists J Mallinson in collaboration with surfactant specialists at ICL.

Dr Andy Owen (ICL International Technical Manager) has been instrumental in planning the project. "I have known the research team here

at Lancaster Environment Centre for a number of years and the chance to collaborate and generate useful research optimising inputs to turf through wetting agent use is invaluable."

Graduate researcher Vasileios (Billy) Giannakopoulos is working under the supervision of Dr Jaime Puertolas and Professor Ian Dodd. Billy, who was selected ahead of a number of other applicants to embark on the three-year project, said "I'm delighted to be a part of this project as this kind of research has never been undertaken until now. It is such an interesting and relevant topic, with the potential to make a real difference for turf and crop management."

BASIS Points for magazine subscribers

BASIS awards two CPD points for 'paid-for' subscribers to the hard copy version of Pitchcare magazine, due to the "diverse range of content that relates to the control, management and use of pesticides".

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The U.S. Open

The man from Del Monte



Chris Dalhamer

This year, Pebble Beach celebrates its one hundredth anniversary. The course, that began life as part of the complex of the Hotel del Monte, hugs the Pacific coast of Monterey Bay and is regarded as one of the finest in the world. This June, it hosts the U.S. Open for the sixth time. Golfdom's Editor-in-Chief, **Seth Jones**, went to meet **Chris Dalhamer**, the man charged with readying the course for the world's finest golfers and the millions of television viewers around the world



It's been nine years since Pebble Beach Golf Links hosted the U.S. Open, but somehow it doesn't seem so long ago. Time flies in Pebble Beach, California, something longtime assistant superintendent Jack Holt can attest.

"It's been thirty-eight years I've worked here, going on thirty-nine," he says, "and I couldn't tell you how that happened - it goes by so quickly. It's unbelievable. This will be my fifth U.S. Open."

Rick Pieper will celebrate his thirty-ninth year working for Pebble Beach Resorts this month. He started out as a "car man" at Spyglass Hill, before making the switch to the maintenance team when he learned he could go from \$4 an hour to \$6 an hour. After a few years on the crew, he fell in love with the gardener at Spyglass Hill, but she told him she wouldn't date a co-worker (or a married man), so Pieper asked the superintendent if he could get a transfer.

He got the transfer. Within two weeks he was divorced, working at Pebble Beach and had a new girlfriend.

"It was at the beginning of getting ready for the '92 U.S. Open ... but I also worked the '82 U.S. Open," Rick recalls. "We came over from Spyglass to help them out, because, back then, the (U.S.) Open had the crew, and maybe about four other extra guys. There were only about fifteen or sixteen guys that would go out and get the course ready for



The 8th green



Left to right: Jack Holt, assistant superintendent, Bubba Wright, assistant superintendent and Chris Dalhamer, CGCS and Director of Golf Course Maintenance



The Pebble Beach crew



The people playing out here are having a once-in-a-lifetime experience, that's sort of our Pebble Beach motto. The day you forget that is the day you start losing ground

the '82 U.S. Open!"

It will be a crew of 140 maintaining the course the week of the 2019 U.S. Open - forty members of the Pebble Beach crew plus one hundred volunteers. Quite an upgrade from what Rick remembers in 1982. But some things never change; he's still working U.S. Opens at one of the finest golf courses in the world and, yes, he's still married to that gardener.

Exceeding expectations

The 2019 U.S. Open begins 13th June and is the ultimate way for the course to celebrate its 100th anniversary. This will be the sixth U.S. Open played at Pebble Beach, with previous years being the 1972, 1982, 1992, 2000 and 2010 tournaments. The U.S. Open will return again in 2027, and the Women's U.S. Open will be played there in 2023.

It's all par for the course at Pebble Beach. Chris Dalhamer, Certified Golf Course Superintendent, works as director of golf course maintenance over all four courses at Pebble Beach Resorts: Pebble Beach, Spyglass Hill, the Links at Spanish Bay and Del Monte Golf Course all fall under his jurisdiction. Major championship golf, professional golf and once-in-a-lifetime golf is nothing new to Chris and his crew.

"We want to exceed expectations each and every day," Chris says. "We tell that to our crew all the time - the people playing out here are having a once-in-a-lifetime experience, that's sort of our Pebble Beach motto. The day you forget that is the day you start losing ground."

Chris started working at Pebble Beach as an intern in 1993. A native of the area, he first fell in love with golf maintenance as a high school kid working on the crew at Poppy Hills Golf Course in Pebble Beach. He graduated Chico State University, Chico, California, with a degree in business and a minor in plant science. From there, he participated in the Northern California Golf Association's internship programme, which got him the internship at Pebble Beach. He was eighteen months into the internship when the superintendent at the time, Mark Michaud, promoted him to assistant superintendent, a job he held for five years.



Mechanic and Greenkeeper Jon Rybicki



Mechanic and Greenkeeper Rick Pieper out on the course

Chris left to take the superintendent position at Carmel Valley Ranch Golf Club in Carmel Valley. When Troon Golf took over management of Carmel Valley, he was promoted to Troon's senior agronomist for the West Coast. A year later, Spyglass Hill, a course he's always loved, called. Three years into his tenure as superintendent at Spyglass, the position at Pebble Beach opened up, and Chris has never looked back.

And how could he? With so much high-end play, there's no time to look back. "From August 2018, we're going to have

two USGA events all the way to June of 2019," Dalhamer says. "And then two PGA (Tour) events, plus another tournament ... we're always in tournament mode. That's a solid 10 months of tournament mode building, breaking down, getting prepped."

Tools and talent

Thankfully, Pebble Beach has the tools - and the talent - to handle such a workload.

Jon Rybicki has worked as the mechanic at Pebble Beach for the last five years. He has experience both as a mechanic and as an assistant superintendent, but what was

new to him was the fury with which the Pebble Beach crew attacks a task.

"It's just a different culture, it's a machine," he says. "When we go out to do something, we put all our effort into it and get it done quick, and a lot of golf courses aren't like that - you take your time. That's the biggest difference between a normal crew and this crew."

Pebble Beach operates Jacobsen's Eclipse II walking greensmowers, Jacobsen 550 fairway mowers and Jacobsen AR5 rotary mowers. Whilst the course will play very similar to the 2010 U.S. Open, one

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A brief timeline ...

In the early part of the 20th century, Samuel F.B. Morse was challenged with making the Pebble Beach area an attractive real estate investment in order to find a buyer. He decided to create a one-of-a-kind golf course with unsurpassed beauty and an element of difficulty that would always be challenging.

Morse utilised the extraordinary talent and vision of two great amateurs - Jack Neville and Douglas Grant - to design the course, and Pebble Beach Golf Links officially opened on February 22, 1919.

In December 1926, Del Monte hosted the 1926 Monterey Peninsula Open on Pebble Beach Golf Links, putting up a \$5,000 purse and attracting most of the country's top golfers - professionals and amateurs. Harry "Light Horse" Cooper of Texas won with a 72-hole score of 293, five over par.

In September 1929, Pebble Beach hosted its first national tournament: the U.S. Amateur field, and continued to host regular high profile events, even through the war years; most notably the U.S. Women's Amateur, the Bing Crosby National Pro-Am and the U.S. Amateur.

In January 1958, television covered the Bing Crosby National Pro-Am for the first time. Bing himself hosted the broadcast of the final round live from the 18th green.

In June 1972, Pebble Beach Golf Links hosted its first U.S. Open golf championship. Jack Nicklaus won by 3 strokes with a 2-over par 290.

Their second Major was the PGA Championship in August 1977, with Lanny Wadkins winning on the third hole of sudden death.

Pebble Beach has remained a popular choice as host of the U.S. Open, with tournaments played in June 1982 - which featured the battle between Tom Watson and Jack Nicklaus and the most talked about shot in golf. Watson was the eventual winner - June 1992 (Tom Kite), June 2000 (Tiger Woods) and, June 2010 when, following course enhancements by Arnold Palmer, Graeme McDowell ran out the eventual winner, posting an even-par 284. In doing so, he became the first European to win a major on American soil since Tony Jacklin in 1970.

In 2001, *Golf Digest* ranked Pebble Beach Golf Links as the No. 1 Golf Course in America - the first time a public course had been so honoured.

The 2019 hosting, to mark the course's centenary, will be their sixth U.S. Open and the tournament is scheduled to return again in 2027 following the hosting of the U.S. Women's Open in 2023



Taking pride in a national treasure

change will be the gained knowledge the course will bring to the tournament since then, especially on their Poa annua greens. The United States Golf Association partnered with Pebble Beach to study the use of wetting agents on the course, hopeful to have the greens slick, yet attractive, in June.

"We've worked in conjunction with the USGA, they funded trials on our greens to see how we can get them as dry and as firm as possible, but consistently rolling and not aesthetically displeasing," Chris says. "I'm not going to say it's going to be perfectly green, but it's going to be dried down to a level that is tournament championship conditions, but you won't see pock marks."



Chris says that, for him and his staff, though it can sometimes be a grind, it never gets old caring for a "national treasure."

"The opportunity to take care of a historic property, and to have great ownership that puts the resources into place ... you take pride in that," he says. "You take pride in a national treasure, making sure you're shining it. They day you don't, you have to move on. We look at it as an honour. The footprint of this is pretty special."

About the author: Seth Jones is Editor-in-Chief of *Golfdom*, regarded as the preeminent resource for Golf Course Superintendents and greenkeepers in the USA.
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View from the 7th tee



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Chingford Golf Course

A right royal
green space

Something green stirs amongst the ancient woodland of Epping Forest, as a popular multi-use golf club reaps the rewards of organically managed soil biology. Greg Rhodes interviews Chingford Golf Course's Head Greenkeeper **Gary Speller** to find out more about the management practices at this green oasis of Greater London

Less than half an hour's train ride east from London Liverpool Street station lies a beautiful 18-hole golf course, laid out on land offering peaceful, scenic walks with a twist of history thrown in.

Royalty rode across these acres in Tudor and Elizabethan times, when Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth I galloped through the oaks and beeches of Epping Forest. Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge still rises among the trees, a historical reminder of the days when deer were the riders' quarry. A Royal link with the land remains - his Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester is the official Ranger of Epping Forest.

Managed by the City of London Corporation (CoLC) - as part of its

stewardship of Epping Forest - the Chingford Golf Course comprises two returning loops and plays a maximum 6,342yd par 72 to challenge players of every standard.

Not one golf club but three, in fact, have adopted the holes as their home. Royal Epping Forest Golf Club (REFGC) established a nine-hole course in 1888 and members still play here today. Over the years, they have been joined by Chingford Golf Club and Chingford Ladies Golf Club.

Officially the oldest golf club in Essex and the only one in the county with royal attribution, it is also one of the few royal clubs playing over land with commoners rights, along with the Royal & Ancient at St Andrews and Royal Montrose.



Head Greenkeeper Gary Speller



In 1901, the CoLC took responsibility for managing the course, and public play at Chingford was regulated for the first time with the introduction of annual season tickets.

William Dunn Jr, the course's first professional, came from a famous family of golf course designers. He expanded the course to 18 holes, extending it from Hawk Wood to Warren Wood, and across Rangers Road towards Barn Hoppitt. In the late 1920s, the then Captain of West Kent Golf Club, R.E.B. Overton, was behind a number of other modifications to the course. These modifications were completed in 1928 with the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Charles Batho, hitting a ball off one of the new tees. Sir Charles had played his first game of golf on the course twenty-five years prior. In the late fifties, CoLC moved the entire course to the west side of Bury Road with Les Gowers, the course golf professional at the time, designing the new layout with a change to the 1st and 2nd holes in the 1990s.

The Chingford Golf Club was formed in 1923 by a group of local tradesmen who could only join the existing private club as 'artisans'. Today, a busy social and competition calendar keeps the greenkeeping team busy ensuring golf is on hand year-round to golfers. The Brock Cup, for example, maintains the memory of Walthamstow Golf Club following its takeover by Chingford, which also includes an independently-run ladies' section.

Historic it may be, but tradition lives alongside innovation here. An early adopter of soil biology, it has taken root across the course, which reaps the benefits of the investment in a natural approach to disease control and turf health under an evolving environmental programme which Head Greenkeeper Gary Speller runs.

The only concession is winter tee mats for the par 3 holes.

"We enjoy high usage here and are open throughout the year - summer is particularly hectic," Gary confirms. "Although private



members and the public all play here, there's no conflict, just friendly rivalry. Pay and play is very popular and loyalty schemes or yearly subscriptions are also available for the public. Add to that the clubs and it creates a diverse demographic, in contrast to many private clubs."

Only a couple of minutes' walk from Chingford station, the course draws a healthy catchment from the capital. "CoLC

runs its own golf society, which also plays here," Gary says, "creating even greater diversity of use."

Employed by CoLC, Gary keeps strong communications with his line manager, CoLC open spaces management and the club chairmen. The City has other golfing interests locally, Gary explains, with Theydon, Loughton and Woodford Golf clubs all having agreements with us to play

golf on Forest land.

Its sporting offer also stretches to Wanstead, with provision of some forty-five natural football pitches. The national game has played its part in Gary's life. Born and bred in nearby Walthamstow, he left school in 1988 to take up an apprenticeship at Abridge Golf and Country Club in Essex, gaining Levels 1 and 2 in Sport Turf Management at Writtle College.



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I like to keep the presentation of the course as high as possible, but the conditions do not always allow us to deliver the perfect result



A switch to the Spurs training ground and main stadium as deputy head groundsman followed in 1999, but his stay proved short-lived and he left in 2000. "I wanted to return to golf," he explains. "There's more variety of work, different heights of cut across the course and differing areas to manage, creating more challenges throughout the year."

"I'm perfectly happy here," the 48-year-old confesses. "My key target is to maintain a course free of pesticides, fungicides and insecticides."

"It's a challenge though", he adds, "with the move to natural organic turf management, it will take several years to begin the process of weaning off chemical application. We want to find another way of controlling disease and pests, but it takes time to evolve. We did have to spray a fungicide on the course twice in 2017, but that was all we applied. Over the first few years, the biosystem stabilised and became more self-reliant, although we still apply organic materials to keep everything ticking over."

"It's all about improving what you have rather than spraying chemical to tackle disease," states Gary, summing up Chingford's environmental stance. "The aim is for the course to fight disease naturally

with help from the biological products we apply."

Last summer's scorching heat delivered its own problems as fungal disease took hold in the prolonged dry conditions. Gary and his team placed wetting agent down to help the soil retain as much moisture as possible.

Gary, accompanied by his three-strong team, runs a tight ship at Chingford and soldier on with machinery and maintenance that many a greenkeeper would balk at. "Epping Forest is a charity and we do have a tight budget to work to. The manual pop-up irrigation system was installed more than thirty years ago, however our machinery is kept up to date with the relevant machinery checks carried out," he says.

Machinery maintenance is addressed in-house, with the whole team chipping in. "We're all learning grinding skills," Gary says, "so that there's always someone on hand to do it."

But back to Gary's career path. After leaving Spurs, he joined Crewshill GC in Enfield as an assistant, where he rose to deputy then head greenkeeper.

Meanwhile, he was qualifying in Level 3 Sports Turf Management at Oaklands College, St Albans. After taking up the Chingford Golf Course head greenkeeper's post in 2010, Gary continued qualifying,

completing his PA 1 and PA 2 spray certifications, as well as those for tractor driving, loading, trenching and mini-digger operation.

He leads a small team of two greenkeepers including Paul Routledge who joined seven months ago, arriving from council-run Picketts Lock Golf Club in the Lee Valley. "His arboricultural skills are extremely useful," Gary notes, "he is qualified to handle a chainsaw and can help cut back overhanging trees as well as using his Level 2 greenkeeping qualifications day to day."

"When you are such a small team, you have to mix and match duties," Gary stresses.

Another member of the Sports Operations Team is apprentice Tim Stone, here since October 2017, a former Royal Marine with experience of maintaining sports pitches. Doesn't Tim fall outside the usual age-range for an apprentice? "The CoLC is an equal opportunities employer," Gary states. "Age is not a barrier to retraining for a new career and we select the best candidate for the job from applicants. Tim is very fit, as you'd expect from his naval background and has the stamina to put in the hours."

Emphasising the skills mix required of a tight-knit team, he's on day release to Capel





L-r: TBC

Manor College, Enfield for his Level 2 Sports Turf Operative qualification.

Gary also employs casuals too. Ron Penny, retired, worked on the golf course for over twenty years until 2012 "Casual staff are used to cover holidays, rest days and to help at weekends too. Ron is an asset given his long history of working for the CoLC at Chingford Golf Course."

Along with golf demands, Gary's work commitments spread to the CoLC's Wanstead football provision and wider sports operation team. Forty-five natural turf pitches sprawl across three sites, mostly full-size playing surfaces and some smaller ones for junior or mini football. "I step in when necessary," he explains. "the Team Leader there, Paul Poupoutsi, and I work together to support both sports operations, covering for each other, sharing staff and helping work through operational issues to reach the best solution for the circumstance."

Maintaining a woodland site can attract wildlife issues, but Gary's grateful for one small mercy. "The course has just four bunkers on it," he reveals, smiling, leaving the team free of many of the animal intrusions that courses with more sand traps can fall prey to.

Gary has immense pride in his job, if only for one good reason. "The golf course is my

CV. If I had to move on, any prospective employer would look at my last course as proof or not of my competency." Happy here, he seems unlikely to want to move site.

"I like to keep the presentation of the course as high as possible, but the conditions do not always allow us to deliver the perfect result."

The history and status of Epping Forest ties the team on some aspects of their work. Deciduous poplar and oak dominate the area - some of the latter date back to medieval times - creating a huge task in autumn to collect fallen leaves. "We get support from the arborists who work for Epping Forest too, they are highly skilled tree surgeons who undertake the more complicated tree management on the course."

With his ever-present eye on disease outbreak, Gary has introduced a programme of removing some of the shrubbery that lines the greens and foliage overhanging them. "It makes for better airflow and allows more natural light on to the course, especially in winter months," he reports.

At the back of the 8th green, the vegetation proved particularly challenging. "We removed some hawthorn and rose hedging last year and, as a result, are

In 2011, we sprayed full brew compost teas on the greens and soon started to see an improvement. Over the years, that process has continued. We apply twice monthly with different products to help the biology in the soil

fusarium-free, so that's certainly helped." However, the team must steer the saws clear of oak saplings sprouting up around the course," he adds. "We must always remember that we are just one part of the wider Epping Forest landscape, which is such an asset for Londoners."

Gary returns to turf management. "One of my first priorities after I arrived was to trial organic methods - applying a few different products and fertilisers in the hope of introducing a more natural growing environment."

"In 2011, we sprayed full brew compost teas on the greens and soon started to see an improvement. Over the years, that process has continued. We apply twice monthly with different products to help the biology in the soil."

The sward features predominantly Poa annual meadowgrass, but Gary is overseeding with bents this year, then fescues next to create a more balanced grass mix.

Because of the popularity of the course, the team strives to stay ahead of the first tee times - spiking, sanding and cutting before the day starts in earnest.

Like many courses largely unchanged from an era well before the development of beefier drivers, Chingford needs extending

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on some holes to keep golfers challenged. "I want to make the 18th into a Par 5 to create a strong finish to the course," Gary says. "A new tee is up and running, but we have to consult the Forest's Head of Conservation, Dr Jeremy Dagley, and his team with any plans to remove trees as the Forest is a protected site of historic interest."

Managing cut heights last summer proved a complex task, especially at the height of the heatwave when temperatures soared. "Normally we fluctuate between 5mm on greens, 10mm on tees, a more sustainable height of 18mm on fairways and 45mm for the rough."

As the course is a public open space, does Gary have to pepper it with 'Keep off the Grass' notices. "No," he states decisively. "The public know what they should and shouldn't do by and large." That said, he has witnessed some eyebrow-raising scenes in his time here. "One year, I spotted a family picnicking on one of the greens from which I had to point out to them that they were sitting in a position dangerous to themselves. We also have to move people on who have chosen the fairways for a spot of sunbathing."

He has occasion to read the letter of the law if visitors persist in flouting the rules. "Paragraph 28 of the Epping Forest Acts by-laws state that no-one is allowed to interfere with the playing of lawful games on any portion of the Forest set apart for such

games," states Gary, clarifying the position.

At other times, blessedly rarely says Gary, the public stray well beyond the bounds of reasonable behaviour. "Someone once drove a quadbike across a green, badly churning up the surface and one of my team found it at 8.30am, just as play was getting underway. The Forest is open access, including the course, so it is difficult to prevent deliberate vandalism, if someone has a mind to it."

Although locals and players are quick to support the protection of the course, highlighting vandalism more widely is the last thing Gary wants. "Copycat incidents can occur if we publicise such things in an effort to deter people," he says. "Our colleagues, the Forest Keepers, are charged with by-law enforcement on the Forest, so we do call them to assist on the course when needed."

While free from badger damage on the course, other wildlife makes its presence felt. "Foxes do their bit on some of the greens, and crows ripped up some surfaces searching for leatherjackets. I think they left disappointed, thanks to the hot, dry summer."

The course itself is not included in the Forest's Site of Special Scientific Interest designation, but Gary and the team are sparing with certain maintenance tasks. "We avoid strimming the ditches because of the Great Crested Newt population and take

due care when building tees in case we encroach on their habitat." Again, Gary contacts the Forest's Conservation Team for advice before taking appropriate action to resolve issues arising.

Epping Forest boasts its own herd of Longhorn cattle, which graze the woodland pastures "Cows have been known to stray on to the course," Gary says, "but it's not an issue for us and is less frequent now we have our invisible fencing approach."

"We work in balance with nature as much as we can," Gary stresses. "The naturally grassy areas we leave uncut to encourage flora and fauna." Gary keeps a close watch on regulations governing the application of chemicals and runs a proactive stance on the issue. "The rest of Europe tightly controls use of chemicals, so I believe it's best to be ahead before we are forced into compliance. That's one of the reasons we focus on organic turf management for disease resistance and control."



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Hart Common Golf Club

Diversity is the only way!

It's been over eight years since Pitchcare first visited Hart Common Golf Club and much has happened in the interim period. **Lee Williams** visits one of his old haunts to discover more



Hart Common Golf Course is situated in Westthroughton, Bolton and is privately-owned by Peter Roberts. Since it was first opened in 1995 as an 18-hole venue, it has been developed into a 27-hole complex with an 18-hole, par 72 6307 yards parkland course, a nine-hole 694 yards Academy course, three full-sized practice holes and a fully covered twenty-six bay floodlit driving range.

Hart Common is the first club I joined as a fifteen-year-old, along with my dad and my uncle, as it was a short drive from where I lived with my parents. I have watched this course develop over the years and have always been impressed with the amount of thought and work that Peter and his family have put into improving it year on year. This shows, as they are now in the top ten best courses to play under £20 on the Golfshake.com website.

On a cold and very foggy day, I met up

with Course Manager Richard Roberts, who is also Peter's son. I have known Richard for several years now. We first met when I worked in sales and, over time, we have grown to become good friends through a shared love of the industry.

Richard and Peter are always looking at new ways to improve the course, whether that be investment in machinery or testing new products on the market. To help sustain this investment, they have always looked at other ways of bringing money into the club so that they don't depend solely on green fees.

One such method is outside contracting work around the Greater Manchester area, which Richard is responsible for. He does most of the work himself around the daily management of the golf course. "Over time, we have just diversified into other things. Instead of hiring machinery, we have always bought it. We like to carry out our own verti-draining which some people get a contractor

in to do a few times a year on their greens, tees and fairways. We now have the equipment to do this ourselves and, at the same time, we are doing other people's. This helps pay for the machinery but, additionally, gives us the flexibility to not have to depend on contractors being available."

In the early days, Richard started out by offering to help with the playing surfaces at local sports clubs who he'd played for in the past, or where friends were involved with them, and it has grown from there. "Once clubs know there's someone who understands their needs and budgets and can tailor work to give them the best value for their money, they soon come to trust and rely on what we offer them."

Over time, the demand for Richard's services has grown and, subsequently, they have acquired quite a bit of specialist kit. This enables them to cover virtually all sports surfaces, both natural and artificial, from local bowling greens up to stadium



Over time, we have just diversified into other things. Instead of hiring machinery, we have always bought it

pitches. “We do a lot of seed drills on greens with the Vredo, whilst the Air2G2 is out a lot on hire. We have carried out drainage jobs at a few other local golf courses. We do a lot of football pitch maintenance and end of season renovations for various clubs around the area.”

Whilst Richard is away, his twin sisters Catherine and Claire (33) are at the helm. They have been working full time at the club since they left full time education but, even

before they finished school, they would pick up balls at the driving range and rake bunkers at the weekends and in school holidays. Alan Lee, whose dad helped build the golf course, has been at the club for twenty years. Terry Battersby joined twelve months ago. Johnny Bowker is the in-house mechanic. He is self-employed and uses the club’s grinders and facilities to run his own business whilst repairing and servicing the club’s machines. Johnny features in Pitchcare’s ‘how to’ series of videos.

Richard has PA1, PA2 and PA6 spraying certificates but, other than this, does not have any industry-recognised qualifications. “I’ve learned everything on the job over the last twenty odd years, plus sharing ideas with other industry professionals. With my family coming from a farming background, we all knew a bit about growing grass and what was involved in it. So, with quite a bit of tweaking here and there, I have got to where I am today. I have never really had the time to go to college as I have been helping my dad build and improve the course since the beginning. This said, I do



Richard Roberts





We have planted thousands of trees creating quite a few woodland areas which, along with the long rough, we allow to grow in through the middle of the course

feel that having a career in this industry, without going through the usual training and educational paths, has helped round my knowledge. We've tried and tested lots of new products, equipment and ideas over the years and tweaked quite a few of them to include them in both our course maintenance and our contracting business."

Moving back to the course itself, I ask Richard what maintenance they undertake on the greens. "We have been overseeding

the greens once every six weeks since last March with 20kg of creeping bent grass seed and we have been getting some great results. For years, a lot of experts have said you only see bent grasses take in August/September when the soil temperatures are up but, as I said, we did them in early spring last year and it came through brilliantly. We are set to do some tests with a seed manufacturer at the end of January, so it will be interesting to see the results."

With the introduction of a higher percentage of bent grass now visible in the greens, Richard is using a lot less fertiliser. He believes this has led to a reduction in Poa annua, either by being starved out or strangled out by the creeping bents.

Alongside the overseeding programme, Richard likes to scarify the greens as often as he can get away with. "We have a couple of scarifiers we use on the greens, plus a small, tractor mounted Koro with a box,

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Getting Personal

Richard Roberts - he's happy as he is!

Who are you? Richard Roberts. I don't think I actually have a title?

Family status: Three children; Chloe 20, Reece 18 and Zac 8.

Who's your hero and why? I don't have one.

What would you change about yourself? To have slightly more patience.

What's your guilty pleasure? I haven't got enough time for one.

What's been the highlight of your career so far? I can't pinpoint one that stands out. But, everytime the course gets a good online review or gets good feedback on social media for work we've carried out is nice.

What are your pet peeves? I could fill this page so I'll refrain.

If you could go anywhere right now, where would it be? Watching cricket in the West Indies.

What's the best part of your job? Being outside and meeting new people.

... and the worst? Being outside and meeting people I would rather not.

Favourite record, and why? I listen to all types of very different music

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do? Relax, because I won't have to worry about my children's futures.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Johnny Vegas,



Oliver Reed and I think Donald Trump would be entertaining.

If you could be anyone for a day, who would it be and why? I'm happy as I am.

Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload? I try not to but it depends how late the phone is ringing till.

What's your favourite smell? A BBQ because it means the sun is shining.

What do you do in your spare time? I don't get much spare time but it would be fishing if I can.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? How much air goes in this tyre?... seconds before it exploded.

What's your favourite piece of kit? New T6 tractor.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Three words isn't enough.

What talent would you like to have? To be a mind reader.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Some people need an IQ test before thinking for themselves.



which is a little bit severe to use too often, so we use that twice a year at a depth of 15mm. Then we have the Greentech scarifying units on the Toro Greensmaster. The blades are a lot narrower and further apart, so this enables us to go a lot deeper; around 25 to 30mm if needed. This will be done once a month throughout the season, if the grass is growing hard and dense enough. We can then scarify them on a Monday and, by the end of the week, it doesn't look like we have been on them. It's about removing the thatch that is there; a lot of people say that creeping bents produce a lot more thatch than other varieties. If anything, I would like to think that we are now on top of our

thatch levels."

Richard is trying to reduce the number of chemicals he applies to the greens, which is a process he has been working on for the last two years as more and more chemicals have been taken off the market in recent years. "It was hard work at the start, but we do a lot more coring now, using the micro core cassettes for the Greensmaster. We break the cores up on the green, so they are getting toppedressed with the rootzone that has got all the nutrients, humus and everything else. In the last twelve months, we have applied just two granular fertilisers; the rest have been liquid feeds, with the addition of biomass sugars, liquid gypsum and precision microbes."





“The wetting agents made a big difference last summer. Generally, when there is a hot spell, the greens will burn off over a weekend, but it was at least eight weeks into last summer’s dry spell before it was panic stations; we were watering, but not going out hand watering trying to put wetting agent tablets on. For us, that was unheard off.”

I asked Richard what he put this down to. “It’s a bit of everything really; obviously, we are breaking the thatch down and, if everything is right underneath, the grass will look after itself. It’s only when grass is under stress, and things are not right, does disease and dry patch creep in.”

Over the last eight years, Peter, with the backing of Richard, has invested heavily in a variety of aeration equipment from Campey Turf Care and Cheshire Turf Machinery which has played a big part in the maintenance of the course.

I asked Richard what his aeration programme is and how often it is carried out. “We don’t have a set maintenance programme, it’s just if and when depending



For years, a lot of experts have said you only see bent grasses take in August/September when the soil temperatures are up but, as I said, we did them in early spring last year and it came through brilliantly



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 Amazone fertiliser spreader
 Ryan turf cutter
 John Deere 1200A bunker rake
 Toro Sand Pro 2040 bunker rake
 Toro Greensmaster 3250Ds x 4
 Toro Greenmaster 3420Ds x 2
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 Air2G2
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 AFT Whizz Wheel
 Bernhard Grinder
 Bobcat 360 degree digger
 Kioti EX35
 New Holland 730TL loader



on fixtures. We have a Charterhouse high-speed Verti-Drain, Toro ProCore, Air2G2, Imants Rotoknife, Greentech hollow tining units on one of the triples and sorrel rollers, so we try to keep the greens open. We'll aerate on a Monday/Tuesday most weeks, varying the machines we use and the depths we go to."

"The greens are not quite USGA specification, but we have twelve inches of rootzone over a gravel carpet, so we like to get down as deep as we can. The tees and fairways are verti-drained and shockwaved at least once a year, the walkways and high traffic areas are done two or three times a year."

Richard would like to invest in a bigger Koro with an elevator and a Koro Recycler in the future, but says that he would have to find enough work for them outside of the golf course to make the purchases cost-effective. "This would mean getting bigger on the contracting side, adding to my already busy workload. I think the Koro Recycler is something we will look at. With sand getting more expensive, it

would help cut the cost of topdressing when renovating football pitches. We have looked at it before for the tees instead of going out divoting every week - let the tee get ripped up, put the soil recycler over it, bring the soil back to the top, reseed it, level it out and you have a completely new tee again."

Richard and his dad are proud of the work they have carried out in recent years to help improve the ecology at the golf club. "We have planted thousands of trees creating quite a few woodland areas which, along with the long rough, we allow to grow in through the middle of the course. This has helped create a desirable habitat for many species of wildlife. We have also got quite a few wild orchids growing around a number of the ponds on the golf course."

Richard believes the industry is facing many problems at the moment, mainly due to the pressure placed on greenkeepers to continue to produce quality surfaces and keep improving courses whilst facing budget and staff cuts. This situation, he says, cannot be maintained.



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Stockley Park Golf Club

Good things come in pairs

Stockley Park Golf Club, just five minutes from London's Heathrow Airport, is set in 240 acres of rolling countryside. Lee Williams met with the club's General Manager **Gary Ivory** and Head Greenkeeper **Martin Venner** to discuss what the future holds for this par 72, 6,625-yard tree-lined course, opened in 1993 by European Tour legend Nick Faldo, who hit the very first drive



n a very windy and wet day, I head towards the club's modern looking clubhouse, tucked away in the corner of a large business park, which overlooks the 18th green and lake, where I'm given a warm welcome from both Gary Ivory and Martin Venner.

Gary has been at the club since the start of July 2018 and took over as General Manager in August with the task of improving the club's appeal and increasing revenue. "When I took over, I saw the way the course was set up, we weren't getting the best out of it in many ways. At the

end of July 2018, we employed Martin to help improve the course's overall appearance in a bid to attract new members and green fees, and we have certainly seen a steady increase."

Gary has been involved in golf management and operations for the past twenty-five years and worked for several proprietary and members golf clubs. He has worked with many greenkeepers and believes it's essential to work closely and understand their needs to help a golf club progress.

The emphasis is on Gary and Martin to work on the solid foundations the course is

built on, to get it back to where it once was, hosting European Senior and Challenge tour events. Gary explains, "The course was built on land regeneration and a lot of money was invested into it when it was first built; thirty miles of drainage installed, a full irrigation system and USGA spec greens, so all the infrastructure is there. The layout of the holes is absolutely amazing and it's a proper tournament golf course - you could be fooled into thinking you're at a top golfing venue particularly on the back nine. However, we are being realistic on the course condition and decided it should always be at a level of seven out of ten in





Gary Ivory (left) with Martin Venner



This has been our first major project and we are now at the point where we have reshaped the fairway, turned it over, stone buried it, carried out 200 metres of drainage work, and we now just await a contractor to come in and oversee it

its presentation. It's all about consistency and making improvements as we go along, with the budgets we have available to us. When the time is right, and when the money is rolling in, we will look at the next steps to help improve the course further."

When Martin first joined the club, he had a big challenge on his hands, which many people may have just walked away from. "The greens were in a poor state and had disease. Fairways were pitted, dry and suffering from the heatwave with hardly any grass cover." Gary added: "Unfortunately, if no maintenance plan is being adhered to, things can go downhill quickly; there was no definition of cut and the tees hadn't even been divoted. There was no attention to detail, lack of joined-up thinking all of which had hit our bottom-line money wise."

Martin now has a proper structure in place for the layout of the course and has worked closely with Martyn Parish from Maxwell Amenity Ltd, who has provided sound agronomic advice and a comprehensive

nutritional programme. Gary is more than happy with what they have achieved so far. "It's been quite a difficult start with the weather conditions, alongside all the other things we have had to be put right, but we are getting there. The difference between the greens now, to what they were in the summer, is chalk and cheese - the grass looks healthy, they're free from disease and they're rolling nicely. Good greenkeeping practices and hard work from Martin, along with his passion and vision for things, has certainly changed the course."

Martin talks me through his current fertiliser regime for the greens. "Soil samples were taken from the greens by Martyn Parish and, once the results came back, a programme was put together which included: Turf Hardener 20L/Ha, Maxwell Bullet Phosphite 5L/Ha, Maxwell Bullet Chelated Iron 20L/Ha, fungicides: Medallion TL, Instrata Elite Turf Disease Control and ICL H2Pro DewSmart. Martyn has really hit the mark and helped us all the way through





We need to expose them to everything as quickly as we can; give them a plan of their progression and set goals to achieve whilst going through their apprenticeship

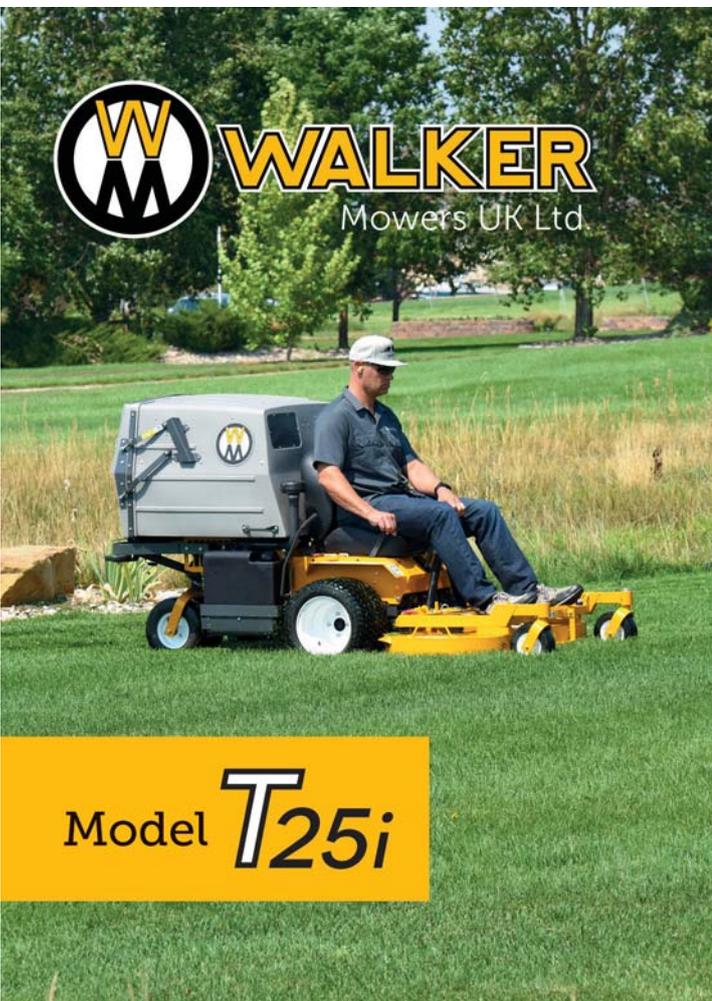
it. When things weren't going quite right, and I was questioning myself, he was a shoulder to lean on. In the coming months, we will carry on with the programme using ICL Greenmaster Pro-Lite Cold Start 11:5:5, SeaAction Liquid Seaweed 10L/Ha, BioMass Sugar 20L/Ha, HumiMax 6L/Ha, Green solutions 15:0:6 40LHa and ICL Primo Maxx II at 0.2-0.4L/Ha."

Martin first got into the industry through his brother, who was a greenkeeper at

Stockley Park. "I was working in carpentry with MDF and it wasn't the greatest for my health, so I decided it was time to move on. Luckily, I knew the Course Manager here and he gave me the chance to be an Apprentice Greenkeeper before working my way through the ranks over the next ten years to become First Assistant. I had a brief time away from the club when I left to join QPR as a groundsman but, unfortunately, that didn't work out and I left after six weeks.

From there, I ended up working in landscape gardening for twelve months, until my brother-in-law set up his own groundwork firm where I worked for two years before the work dried up. It was a varied four years, where I had totally come away from the industry and I really missed it. I received a phone call from the club to come back as Head Greenkeeper, to work alongside Gary and help them achieve their future goals."

Martin has taken it upon himself, along



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Getting Personal

Martin Venner - he's a polite guy with a big heart

Who are you? Martin Venner, Head Greenkeeper, Stockley Park Golf Club.

Family status. Engaged to my partner Sam, and I have two children.

Who's your hero and why? Superman.

What would you change about yourself? Worry less and switch off from work on my days off.

What's your guilty pleasure? Guinness and blackcurrant.

What's been the highlight of your career so far? Definitely getting the role I'm in now.

What are your pet peeves? Lateness and bullies.

If you could go anywhere right now, where would it be? Florida with the family.

What's the best part of your job? Job satisfaction after a hard days work

... and the worst? Rainy days.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To give my kids the best possible opportunities.

Favourite record, and why? Too many to mention.

Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with? My partner.

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do? Go on holiday and make some plans.

If you were to describe yourself as a musical instrument, what would you be and why? Drum kit; loud and chaotic.

What's your favourite smell? It has to be freshly cut grass.



Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?

My granddad, Freddie Mercury and Tom Jones.

If you could be anyone for a day, who would it be and why? David Beckham.

Do you have any bad habits? Snoring after a few beers.

... or any good ones? Courteous, and I put others before me.

Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload? 100% yes.

What are you reading at the moment? Not a big reader, but always have time for Pitchcare magazine.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? When you feel like you're coming to the end of your rope, tie the knot and hold on.

What do you do in your spare time? Play golf and days out with the family.

What's your favourite piece of kit? Toro ProCore 640 (but we haven't got one).

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Hardworking, trustworthy and passionate.

What talent would you like to have? Play the drums.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? The introduction of a mental health first aider introduced to every work place.

Image above taken after Martin had just scaled Scafell Pike for Make-A-Wish Foundation. His second time climbing the mountain for charity.



with the help of his dad and using the skills he learned in previous job roles, to take on the task of remodelling the first hole which will reduce contracting costs greatly. "Historically, the first hole was infilled, leaving stones on the surface and limited grass cover, making it unplayable. The hole currently has a temporary tee, which is in a bad state of repair from where you play directly onto the green." Gary adds: "Martin and I sat down and designed a hole from scratch. We took some inspiration from Berkhamsted Golf Club, using the contours of the land, grass bunkers, putting a water hazard in there and a dogleg as well. This has been our first major project here and we are now at the point where we have reshaped the fairway, turned it

over, stone buried it, carried out 200 metres of drainage work, and we now just await a contractor to come in and do a final stone bury and then oversee it. Once it's back open for play in June/July, it will be a massive achievement for us."

The club recently invested heavily in new machinery which arrived at the end of March. Gary explains: "We signed a five-year lease agreement with Farol Ltd for new John Deere equipment. The old machinery we had limited what Martin was able to achieve, so the new equipment will help the presentation of the course and enable us to get that much wanted definition between the rough, fairways and surrounds. It's all about having a vision for the course and, luckily, we all



Working through last summer's heatwave



Left to right: Ryan Day, James Venner, Greg Wright, Gary Ivory (General Manager), Martin Venner (Head Greenkeeper) and Rob Venner



Unfortunately, if somebody isn't doing what they should be, things can go downhill quickly; there was no definition of cut and the tees hadn't been divoted

(including the clubs Directors) share the same end goal."

There are currently five full-time greenkeepers, including Martin, and Gary tells me they are doing a great job. But, they have struggled to bring in staff. "We try to get qualified people here, but the industry has stagnated, and people don't want to leave their current positions due to

job insecurity." Martin interjects, "We had some interest but, with it being just before Christmas, we struggled. This is when we decided to invest in what could be the new generation of greenkeepers and took on two apprentices who are both doing well." Gary believes it's been a blessing in disguise. "We now have two young lads who are keen, want to learn and don't come

here with any preconceptions. They have a 'can-do' attitude and want to do things well, whether that be strimming around trees, raking bunkers, clearing ditches etc., and they are enjoying it."

I asked Gary how he would attract young people into the industry, and what is the key to keeping them interested in the job. "The biggest thing is that, when people go

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The layout of the holes is absolutely amazing and it's a proper tournament golf course

into a greenkeeping department, there is a misconception about what is involved. It's sometimes seen as a dead-end job and not a career, and that has not been explained to young people. In some instances, when a young apprentice joins a club, they are given all the less attractive jobs, the jobs that no one wants to do. I understand you must start somewhere, but there is no progression set out to them from the start. There are still too many people out there who have entrenched ideas of what the industry is and don't give youngsters any insight. We need to expose them to everything as quickly as we can; give them a plan of their



progression and set goals to achieve whilst going through their apprenticeship. We want to think they will give us their all in the two years they are with us. We will support them the best we can but, at the end of the apprenticeship, it's our intention for them to stay with us and become qualified assistant greenkeepers. Equally, we won't stand in their way if they want to move on knowing we have done everything we can to help there career going forward."

After speaking with both Gary and Martin, I believe the club is in good hands. It was clear to see they have a good working relationship and share the same beliefs and passion. I also admire the fact they are willing to take a chance on apprentices, work with them on their development and share the vast amount of knowledge they both have to shape the future of our industry.



Stockley Park Golf

What's in the shed

John Deere 2500B greens mowers x 2

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Toro Reelmaster 5010 fairway mower

John Deere 9009A TerrainCut rough mower

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TruTurf greens iron

John Deere 1200A bunker rake x 2

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FIFA Update

A stitch in time!

In the second of a series of updates, FIFA's newly appointed Senior Pitch Management Manager, **Alan Ferguson**, discusses the issues surrounding the staging of the Club World Cup and Asia Cup, with a National Day thrown in for good measure! Blair Ferguson reports



In December 2018, Real Madrid made FIFA Club World Cup history by winning the tournament for a third successive time in the Zayed Sports City Stadium, Abu Dhabi. But Los Blanco's weren't the only history makers. The tournament was also the first time pitches were delivered under the guidance of FIFA's newly appointed Senior Pitch Management Manager, Alan Ferguson.

His appointment is one of several within the Stadium and Infrastructure department which will cover all FIFA tournaments and support the 2020 Olympic football tournament in Japan. Being the smallest of

the FIFA World Cups, the Club World Cup offered an ideal opportunity for Alan and his new colleagues to try out some of the procedures and techniques they hope to use worldwide in future FIFA managed tournaments.

Despite the relatively small scale of the tournament compared to other FIFA competitions, there were still plenty of challenges for Alan and the team because the same venues used for the Club World Cup needed to be fully match ready to host the 2019 Asia Cup two weeks after the final of the Club World Cup.

However, this wasn't the only issue facing

the new team. The Zayed Sports City Stadium also had to host Abu Dhabi's 47th annual National Day celebrations seventeen days before the semi-final, causing venue changes for fixtures and placing a greater strain on the Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain, the only other venue chosen to host Club World Cup games.

These issues were then further compounded by having to use much of the native fine sand in the pitch construction. Unlike the angular sands commonly found and used in pitch construction across Europe, the round particle sand does not provide the stability associated with angular



Matt is used to non-football events being held in the Zayed Sports City Stadium as they host major events like many other stadia around the world, but the size and scale of the National Day gave all concerned a real headache and challenge

sands and can create issues with all round stability and general player interaction with the surface. It also makes it harder for the young roots to fully establish in short time frames, reducing the chance of the surface holding together under play.

Alan explained to Pitchcare how these challenges were dealt with, and how important the inclusion of a hybrid element in the construction was in producing pitches that could cope with the intensity of two tournaments being played back to back. It would also provide another first for FIFA as it was the first time a lay, stitch and play pitch would be used in a World Cup in this time frame.

“Our biggest initial challenge for the Club World Cup was having the National Day celebrations in the main tournament stadium,” Alan explained. “The day is very significant for the people of Abu Dhabi as it marks the UAE’s Union Day between the

seven emirates and there was no possibility of moving the event away from the stadium. The stage for the event covered the entire playing surface and was one of the biggest I have ever seen on a pitch. Our concerns were high from the first inspection carried out in November 2018 with the venues Grounds Manager, Matt Jones. Matt is used to non-football events being held in the Zayed Sports City Stadium as they host major events like many other stadia around the world, but the size and scale of the National Day gave all concerned with the Club World Cup a real headache and challenge.”

“One of the difficulties of building pitches in the UAE and Middle East in general is the finer rounder particle sand that is available. If you have enough time to grow the pitch in, then stability can be managed and isn’t as big an issue but, with the limited timescale and heavy schedule we had, it was going to





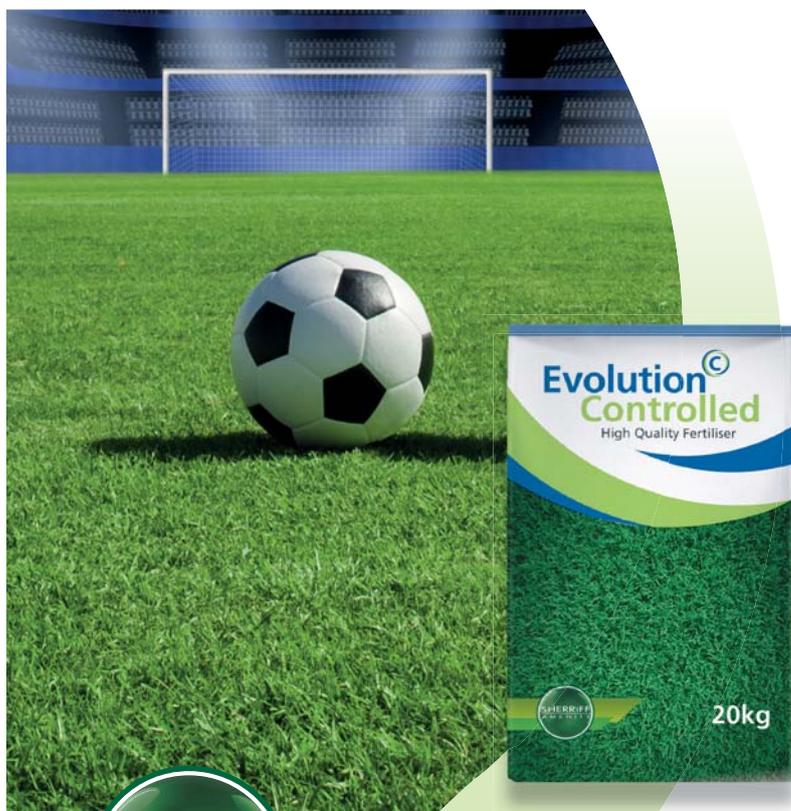
be a problem. Having worked with various hybrids in recent years, it was already obvious from the match and training schedule the team were facing that the turf on its own would not be sufficient to provide a suitable surface for the finals. For me, the answer was straightforward; by installing stitched fibre into both pitches, I was confident we could significantly boost the performance of the turf in Zayed Sports City and take it through the tournament and give Matt and his team a fighting chance of surviving the Asia Cup whilst, up in Al Ain, add strength to an existing natural pitch.”

“The issue in the second tournament stadium - Hazza Bin Zayed in Al Ain - was that the National Day celebrations had displaced three games, meaning five games had to be played in the stadium in six days on a 100% natural pitch. Match day 2 and 3 saw the games played back to back on the same day. Three weeks later, the same pitch had to host eight games for the Asia Cup. Another significant factor to be considered was the Asia Cup rules allows match day minus one training on the match pitch, meaning that it would actually see twenty-four uses over the period of the Asia Cup.

The 100% natural pitch would struggle to make it through the Club World Cup, leaving the grounds team little time to reinstate it for Asia’s premier international football event.”

“It was clear that, to achieve the stability of the pitch we wanted in the Zayed Stadium, we would have to use a lay, stitch and play technique, and it was the first time FIFA would do this to provide a top quality pitch in such a short space of time. The technique had been used in Samara, Russia for the 2018 World Cup, but it was done over a much longer period of time.”

“The theory here was to use the stitched



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SIS Pitches began cleaning out the old organic matter in the afternoon of the 8th, whilst a second-team were preparing to harvest the new pitch from a local nursery which had been set up at Abu Dhabi Cricket Club

hybrid to support the new roots rather than relying on the upper profile as much. As I said, the stitching technique has been used many times before and is a proven method. For us, the risks of not doing it for the competition were high, with all around playability, player safety and the reputational risk to FIFA and the Asia Cup.”

“The Local Organising Committee (LOC) had been negotiating with contractors based in the UAE around the delivery of maintenance for both the training sites and the stadia. The best decision taken in the build-up was to retain both SIS Pitches and Dessert Group who had delivered the tournament pitches in 2017. The contracts for both were extended, allowing the maintenance to be continued for the entire twelve month build-up.”

“Both companies were also responsible for the delivery of the pitches for the 2019 Asia Cup and this meant that equipment that wouldn’t normally be available so close to a

final was working in the country finishing some of the stadia being used. It also ensured consistency across the delivery, something we are keen to improve on for our tournaments.”

SIS Pitches had already been awarded a contract to build the pitch at the new 15,000 capacity El Maktoum Stadium in Al Nasir, Dubai. The venue was one of the new stadia to be used for the Asia Cup and, because the pitch ordered was a SISGRASS hybrid, the stitching machine was already in the UAE and could be used in Abu Dhabi after the National Day celebrations. Alan views the proximity of the machine more as good fortune than good planning, with a rigorous customs process avoided for any machines that would have been needed from outside Europe.

The event was held successfully on 2nd December, but the final clearing of the pitch wasn’t completed until the 8th. SIS Pitches began cleaning out the old organic matter in





the afternoon of the 8th, whilst a second-team were preparing to harvest the new pitch from a local nursery which had been set up at Abu Dhabi Cricket Club. A third SIS team were also working at Al Ain at this time to stitch SISGRASS into the existing pitch to help it cope with the extra fixtures.

As the works were ongoing, testing was underway to assess just how quickly the newly stitched pitches were in terms of readiness for play. Pro Pitch consultants, who were retained by the LOC, monitored both pitches closely. The data gathered from

the pitches would go a long way to help with planning for future tournaments. iTurf, who are retained by FIFA, tested before the games alongside Alan's own testing. Key parameters, such as surface hardness, moisture and traction among others, were monitored closely, with more test sites than normal used to ensure the delivery had been consistent over the entire playing area.

Four days after stitching was completed in Al Ain, the first games took place. Surface hardness was 75 Gravities on average, with moisture at 23%. Damage limitation was key

as games two and three were being played back to back on the 15th before a second doubleheader for games four and five on the 18th.

The observations during the installation also revealed that traction levels were inside the optimum range within hours of the fibre being delivered, with surface hardness coming in to the optimum range forty-eight hours later. The unique action of the stitching machine, combined with verti-draining the profile ahead of it to aid the entry of the needles, completely

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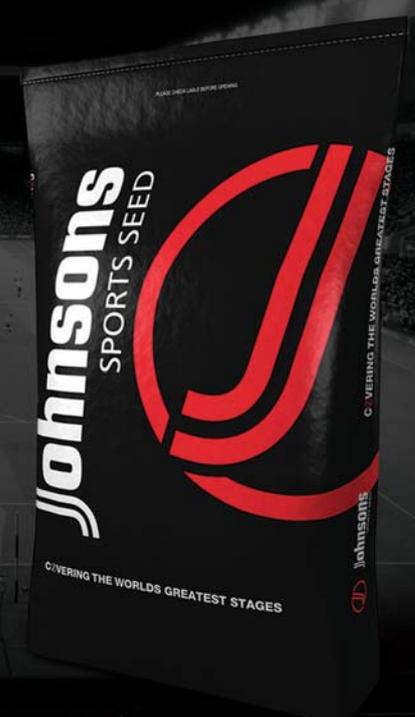
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I believe we will experience the same scenario we faced in the UAE more and more and have to ensure we have the best techniques identified to continue to provide the world's top players with the world's top pitches

decompacted the profile to levels that had not been fully anticipated, but pitch preparations which were following the installation quickly saw hardness levels rise back to optimum levels.

Whilst preparing the pitches for the best chance of success was important, Alan was also focused on managing them throughout the games. One of his aims at FIFA is to work with local groundsmen and use these experiences to improve their knowledge and educate them on new techniques and technologies. For this tournament, Alan also wanted experienced staff on hand to help manage training sessions and games; something he thinks helped to contribute to the overall success.

For Alan and FIFA, the experience of the Club World Cup has given them a strong indication of what is possible at future tournaments. He said: "The 2018 Club World Cup was one of the most successful editions held. It was the first one to be staged under

the new FIFA pitch management model and, because of that, we were able to make decisions and manage it very effectively when we were presented with challenges."

"Beyond the men's World Cup, where most of the stadia are new builds or extensive renovations, FIFA's flagship competitions will be hosted in existing league venues that have a multi-use schedule. I believe we will experience the same scenario we faced in the UAE more and more and have to ensure we have the best techniques identified to continue to provide the world's top players with the world's top pitches. The pitch operations have gone a long way to showing us what the future looks like and how we can achieve it."





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LA Galaxy

Straight outta Carson



Mark Allen

Though less than twenty-five years old, Los Angeles Galaxy is the best-known soccer franchise in the USA. The signing of David Beckham in 2007 catapulted the club onto the global stage and a conveyor belt of big-name players have followed since. This 'star-centred' business model has brought success both on and off the field. But, behind the LA glitz and glamour, there is a vital element to this prosperity - the groundskeeper and his crew. The team behind 'The Team'. ALS Technical Sales Area Manager **Mark Allen** travelled to the LA suburb of Carson to meet **Shaun Ilten**, the man responsible for the highest profile soccer surface in North America



As a first-time visitor to the USA, I'd prepared myself for the fact that everything was going to be 'BIG'. With hindsight, I had no comprehension of just how big 'BIG' could get.

I realised things were on another level as we landed at Los Angeles airport. Gawping out of the aeroplane window at the sprawling city below, I spotted another aircraft landing parallel to ourselves, within what felt like touching distance. Why have one runway, when you can have a pair? Or, in fact, four parallel runways, with eight possible approaches. It was time to

redefine my idea of what 'BIG' meant.

And 'looking down on LA' is an appropriate analogy from an Englishman as, since the very first wave of British players migrated to the USA in the 1970s, we have always metaphorically looked down on 'soccer' played across the pond.

Major League Soccer (MLS) has frequently been dismissed as a retirement home for ageing European superstars and, to make matters worse, we tend to believe that they don't even play on 'real turf'. It's fair to say that us Brits can be quite snobbish about the things we hold dear - and playing football (not soccer) on real

grass (not artificial plastic) most definitely falls into this category.

Yet, are our long-held stereotypes a reflection of the truth or are they just a series of common myths? I'm here representing Pitchcare.com to gain a true insight. Is the quality of the game worthy of the hype that surrounds it, and are the quality of the playing surfaces worthy of the players that the big money can attract?

It's often said about the NFL Super Bowl that the TV adverts are better than the game. Having spent the previous evening watching the showpiece final, I concur. As much as I want to like Gridiron, the game



Shaun Ilten

just leaves me cold. English football, on the other hand, still has the capacity to enthral, inspire and disappoint me in equal measure - even after thirty years of playing and watching the sport. Visiting an English football stadium still gives me a buzz of excitement and, even on a non-match day, I marvel at the sense of atmosphere that four empty stands and a green pitch can create. And now here I am in America, with the opportunity to explore another iconic venue - the home of the Los Angeles Galaxy.

Dignity Health Sports Park is a fifty hectare site on the campus of California State University in the suburb of Carson. It is important to realise that LA is not really a city in itself, it is a county that encompasses approximately eighty cities within its boundaries. Once again, BIG!

The suburb of Carson is fourteen miles from downtown LA and has a population of 90,000 people - that's the equivalent of a place the size of Barnsley or Stevenage.

I arrive at the stadium on a drizzly Monday morning in February (that's right, drizzle. In LA, where it hardly ever rains) and, walking towards the entrance, I consider those who have come before me. Over the last decade, a sizable contingent of British footballers have made their way up the imposing boulevard to the 'Dignity Health Care Sports Park'.

The site houses an 8,000-seat tennis stadium, a 5,000-seat facility for track & field and a 2,450-seat

indoor velodrome for track cycling. The jewel in the crown, however, is the 27,000-capacity stadium - a light and modern arena that has been purpose built for soccer, though currently also hosts the Los Angeles Chargers American Football franchise, who are awaiting completion of their own swanky new home in nearby Inglewood.

Amusingly, the ground has endured three name changes in the last seven years, having originally opened as the 'Home Depot Centre' in 2003, before a rebrand as the 'StubHub Centre' in 2013. On January 1st 2019, it was renamed once more by 'Dignity Health', a company that operates hospitals in the USA. I say amusingly as, given the furore that often surrounds stadium naming rights in the UK, there appears very little fuss about the constantly changing moniker. Perhaps, as a young sport, there is less of the historical burden which can hinder British clubs, or maybe the US soccer fan is simply less romantic about the whole concept of their club. In the greatest meritocracy in the world, monetising your assets is probably considered a sensible way to fund your ambition.

I'd heard from colleagues in the turf trade that Shaun Ilten was an approachable, hospitable guy and, sure enough, he doesn't disappoint when we meet. From the moment we shake hands, he keeps me (and my travelling companion) engaged and entertained.





'Game changer' David Beckham with his statue - the first to be erected on the Legends Plaza

Yet, as nice an individual as Shaun is, I quickly realise that there must be more in his locker than just being a great fella. To have progressed from a summer intern to the position of Director of Turf & Grounds by the age of twenty-seven, he clearly possesses an array of skills - not least, drive and determination to succeed. He also needs to be very good at growing grass because, let's be blunt, a business strategy that centres around attracting huge global

superstars can't function properly if the most important tool of the trade (the pitch) is not up to scratch.

Zlatan Ibrahimović was reported to have refused a \$100m offer from China in order to take a \$1.5m-per-year offer from the Galaxy, and an elite standard grass pitch was very much part of that decision-making process. David Beckham also turned out to be a 'natural grass' advocate during his time in the MLS - famously telling reporters in 2007

//

I would often approach David for his opinions, as he'd played on most of the best pitches in the world. Having access to a guy like that was brilliant for me and, despite soccer and its infrastructure being quite new over here, he never once criticised the surface

that "every team should have grass, without a doubt,"

I begin by asking Shaun, just what an impact the arrival of Beckham had, both on the club and on his eighteen-man agronomy department?

"Quite simply, it was a game changer; both for the Galaxy and for the MLS in general. Even before Beckham, our standards were pretty high, but once he came in everything got magnified"

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I question whether having such a figure in the ranks bought extra stresses, not least, the constant demand to produce a safe, fair, aesthetically pleasing surface every time the team took to the field?

“Not at all. I mean, we’d do all that stuff anyway. In fact, I would often approach David for his opinions, as he’d played on most of the best pitches in the world. Having access to a guy like that was brilliant for me and, despite soccer and its infrastructure being quite new over here, he never once criticised the surface the whole time he played for us”.

Talking as we walk and regaling us with stories of soccer royalty, Shaun leads the way through the bowels of the enormous stadium and out onto the pitch.

What greets us is an expanse of turf that has been in place for only three days, having just received its close season renovation. Surprisingly, this had been a re-turf (or ‘re-sod’ to use the local vernacular) rather than a new seed establishment and, more intriguingly, one of Shaun’s guys is traversing the length of the pitch with what



A surprising sight - a 2-tonne roller



Mark Allen (left) in conversation with Shaun

can only be described as a ‘heavy roller’. Coming from the UK, where anything weightier than a human is rarely allowed upon a stadium pitch, this is quite a shock. Shaun must have sensed my surprise and immediately explains the reasoning behind the process:

“The NFL season finished at the very end of December and the first soccer friendly kicks off at the beginning of February. As much as I would love to establish a pitch from seed, the timescales just don’t allow it”

“We re-sodded three days ago and the soccer boys kick off in seven days’ time. I appreciate that a two-tonne roller isn’t text book but, in my current situation ... well, I’ve just got to get this field flat. Aerification and decompaction can come later”

It’s a fair point. Sometimes, unconventional thinking provides the greatest solution plus, this being Shaun’s umpteenth renovation cycle, it’s fair to assume that he knows what he is doing.

Standing on the newly turfed pitch, it’s clear that the sward structure differs slightly from what we are used to seeing back in Blighty. Here in California, the sun loving ‘Bermuda grass’ is the go-to species, as it grows easily, roots deeply and is tolerant of most soil types. It also recovers quickly from damage and responds well to feed and water. It sounds ideal; and it is. In fact, the only issue comes when the weather turns cooler and cloudy. That’s when the addition of some Ryegrass is required to provide

additional strength and quality to the mix.

Having endured drought conditions during 2018 back in the UK, I ask Shaun about the water situation over here.

“Despite an almost constant drought problem in Los Angeles, we are not restricted in the amount of water we can apply. We irrigate the stadium pitch and all nine training fields with reclaimed water, which is piped in from a treatment plant ten miles away at El Segundo”.

Whilst appreciative of the freedom to run the irrigation system without limits, the quality of this recycled or ‘dirty water’ is not necessarily of the highest standard. This can bring its own problems.

“All of the junk that’s in recycled water - the high sodium, high nitrates, high bicarbonates - makes it really challenging to keep the grass alive. Plus, with very limited rainfall, I’m not getting the acid rainfall to flush that stuff out.”

However, the upside of using reclaimed water is a reduced requirement for artificial fertiliser applications:

“Yeah, we don’t go as heavy on the fertilisation as the British stadium guys” smiles Mr Ilten.

At the mention of the British guys, I’m keen to know if Shaun has any links to the UK network of groundsmen?

“Absolutely. I really value the relationships that I have been able to foster with the UK stadium guys, and not just those based in Great Britain. Paul Burgess of Real Madrid,



I really value the relationships that I have been able to foster with the UK stadium guys, and not just those based in Great Britain. Paul Burgess of Real Madrid, for example, has been a massive help to me over the last seven or eight years



The imposing boulevard to the Dignity Health Care Sports Park



I'll be honest, before working at the Galaxy, I had no interest in soccer whatsoever. The game here was still very much in its infancy and I'd grown up following the NFL from a kid

for example, has been a massive help to me over the last seven or eight years. Paul has been here several times, and I have been lucky enough to visit the Bernabeu stadium. I genuinely value that professional connection”

With the rain starting to fall more heavily at this point (what did Shaun say about the constant drought problem?), we move back inside. Looking around at the maintenance

equipment area, you would be hard pressed to tell much difference between the Galaxy and a top end UK stadium ... except it's BIGGER, obviously!

The kit on display is all fairly standard gear – including SGL lighting rigs, an Air2G2 machine, Dennis G860 pedestrian mowers and a number of Graco spray linemarkers. Clearly, it's not only the UK groundsmen that have had an influence on Shaun. Many of

the leading figures from the European Sales and Manufacturing sector have also assisted with raising the standard of pitch preparation in the USA.

With dual sports usage on the stadium pitch, I ask Shaun if he is more a soccer man or an NFL fan?

“I'll be honest, before working at the Galaxy, I had no interest in soccer whatsoever. The game here was still very

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Don't become a groundskeeper! It's not so much a job, more of an affliction! The days are long, the work is hard, but honestly, my ethos has always been 'find something you love to do, and you'll be just fine'

much in its infancy and I'd grown up following the NFL from a kid"

"In truth, even now, watching soccer for me is all about observing how the ball rolls, what cuts up, that kind of thing. But I would say that the standard of play in the MLS is getting better every year and I think we are doing a great job of shaking off the 'retirement home' label"

This is a key point. Ten years ago, the game needed 'stars' in order to gain a foothold on the sporting landscape - especially in a BIG country with lots of sports competing for an audience. Today, it feels like the hard work creating interest and demand has been done. Attendances continue to grow, and they are now seeing talented homegrown players moving through the ranks. The fact that these players are now given the very best 'real grass' surfaces on which to compete, would suggest that the British portrait of the MLS is years out of date.

Having discussed various demanding aspects of life at the Galaxy, I'm intrigued to know what is the biggest challenge of all for Shaun and his crew?

"I'd say it's the MLS season as a whole, especially when, as a multi-use facility, we

get concerts scheduled mid-season."

I pause to consider what I've just heard, then repeat the words back to him.

"Concerts? Mid season?"

"Yes!" he laughs. "It's not ideal, but it's something we've adapted to. Mind you, the Coldplay gig was a real stamina test!"

The Coldplay gig, to which he refers, was a full-on stadium show on July 18th 2009.

Two days later on July 20th 2009, the Galaxy hosted Millan in an International friendly. "That was a hell of a shift" he shudders.

As we come towards the end of the interview, I ask Shaun, if he could meet his sixteen year old self, what single piece of advice would he give?

"Don't become a groundskeeper!" he laughs. "It's not so much a job, more of an affliction! The days are long, the work is hard, but honestly, my ethos has always been 'find something you love to do, and you'll be just fine'."

As we say our goodbyes and pause for a few souvenir photos, I very much get the impression that Shaun is a square peg in a square hole - a Southern Californian boy who has found his calling in life and goes about his high-pressured work in a convivial, unflappable way.

The stadium pitch he presides over has to withstand the full gamut of multi-use - soccer, gridiron, concerts - and often all around the same time of the year. In order to cope with that, he genuinely needs to believe his own ethos - or to broaden things slightly, the sapience of another revered American, Mark Twain, which goes:

"Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life."

And, regardless of whether you are a soccer player, a groundskeeper or just a writer that gets excited about visiting stadiums, who could possibly argue with wisdom like that?



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Cardiff City Football Club

Bluebirds' fledgling head groundsman



Cardiff City Football Club are the only team from outside England to win the FA Cup, doing so in 1927. They have also been finalists on two other occasions and have spent a total of eighteen years in the top flight of English football, most recently in the current season, since their formation as Riverside AFC in 1899. They have also won the Welsh Cup on twenty-two occasions, making them the second most successful team in the competition's history behind Wrexham.

On a cold but pleasant Monday afternoon at the end of January, Lee Williams met with **Liam James**, the club's new Head Groundsman

Since 1908, when the club changed its name to Cardiff City, and except for a period between 2012 and 2015 when the owner, Vincent Tan, rebranded the club and changed the home colours to red, they have played in blue and white, leading to the nickname "The Bluebirds" (they reverted to their traditional blue in January 2015).

They play their home games at the 33,316 capacity Cardiff City Stadium after moving from Ninian Park in 2009, and have long-standing rivalries with nearby clubs Swansea City, known as the South Wales derby, and Bristol City, known as the Severnside derby.





It was quite a tough summer. If we were watering, it was scorching and, if we weren't, it was burning

After meeting Liam outside the groundsman's entrance at the stadium, I am taken onto the pitch, which was in immaculate condition for this time of year. Liam was three quarters the way through cutting with the Allett Buffalo, working his way around the SGL lighting rigs. We then sat down in his office, over a coffee, to discuss his journey so far as a groundsman at Cardiff City.

Since joining the club eleven years ago, Liam has worked his way through the ranks, and was rewarded with a promotion to Head Groundsman last year after Phil Williams retired from the role.

"I first got involved with the club working

matchdays at Ninian Park as a volunteer. At the age of eighteen, I was given the opportunity to join the club on a part-time basis looking after the under eighteen and twenty-three pitches just over the road from here. This eventually led to a full-time role as an assistant groundsman. I was then moved over to the main stadium and put on my NVQ Level 2 in Sportsturf at Pencoed College. Once I completed my Level 2, I decided to have a gap year before starting an NVQ Level 3 in Sportsturf; I also have my PA1, 2 and 6 spraying certificates. From the stadium, I moved to the training ground where I helped oversee all the work carried out installing a Desso GrassMaster pitch, which our first team now use three to four times a week depending on the weather. We also get all the Welsh national teams training at our facilities. The start of this season has seen me taking the Head Groundsman position at the stadium, which is a dream come true for me being a Cardiff City fan."

In 2016, Liam went out to France with the



Head Groundsman, Liam James





I believe the industry is getting better, from when I first started the pitches are improving overall with new products and machines coming into the market each year

Welsh national team working at the training ground in Dinard for Euro 2016, which he tells me was a great experience and it was a proud moment in his career thus far.

The stadium also hosts the Welsh national side, who have just signed another two-year lease extension to hold all their home qualifying games.

Before the start of the season, Liam sits down with the Stadium Manager, Wayne Nash to discuss budgets. "What we tend to do is buy bit by bit, so we buy all our machinery at the start of the season. For example, last year we bought a Wiedenmann Terra Spike, two new Allett rotaries and two new Allett cylinder mowers. We know roughly what our fertiliser budget is, so I space that out between three orders, one at the start of the season, one at Christmas and one in April."

Liam's grounds team comprises Simon Hancock, Assistant Groundsman, who has been at the club for sixteen years; William Birch, Assistant Groundsman, who has been at

the club for six years and has an NVQ Level 2 in Sportsturf; and Kurtis Simpson, Apprentice Groundsman, who started at the club this season and will begin his NVQ Level 2 in September at Pencoed College.

The stadium pitch is a thirteen-year-old Desso GrassMaster with a fully automated Hunter irrigation system, undersoil heating and a 3G surround. To help with shading from the end of August up until March - which takes out three-quarters of the pitch through the winter - Liam has the addition of four SGL 1000 watt MU360s and four SGL MU50s, and they also had an SGL LU440 on trial for a month. "I would like two more MU360s which would give me six. I could then turn them widthways so, in two moves, I could cover the whole of the pitch, whereas now, with the four, it takes five movements. If we stay up (Cardiff were in the relegation zone at the time of writing), I would like to think we have a chance; fingers crossed."

Liam talks me through his



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Getting Personal

Liam James - Ronaldo and a smell that made us ponder if he's ever actually smelt it?

Who are you?

Liam James, Head Groundsman, Cardiff City Football Club.

Family status. Partner, with a little one due on 14th August.

Who's your hero and why? Cristiano Ronaldo - he's a real athlete and the best player in the world.

What would you change about yourself? Nothing.

What's been the highlight of your career so far?

Working out in France for Wales at the training ground for Euro 2016, and being made Head Groundsman at Cardiff City in 2018.

If you could go anywhere right now, where would it be? Dubai.

What's the best part of your job? Mixing with all the players/coaching staff and the perks of the job.

... and the worst? Winter!!!

Do you have a lifetime ambition? Yes, to retire before I'm fifty and to live in the sun!

What talent would you like to have? To be able to play the guitar.

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do? Share it with family and close friends.

What's your favourite smell? One million.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?

Cristiano Ronaldo, Robbie Williams and Jennifer Lopez.

If you could be anyone for a day, who would it be and why? Myself.

Do you have any bad habits? Loads.

... or any good ones? Yes, loads.

Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload? No. Never.

Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with? My beautiful girlfriend Mischa.

What are you reading at the moment? Nothing - I hate reading.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? If you're ever unsure about something, DON'T DO IT.

What do you do in your spare time? Enjoy time with family, down the pub with the boys and playing 5-a-side.

What's your favourite piece of kit? Charterhouse Verti-Drain.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Restrictions with warm-ups, and less under 23s games to be played at the stadiums.



maintenance regime throughout the season. "In the summer, we cut twice a day with our Allett Buffalo 34s - at 25mm for Cardiff City and at 22mm for Wales as the manager, Ryan Giggs, likes us to cut it a little lower. In winter, I like to stay off it as much as I can, so I do a lot of rotary mowing at the start of the week and then double cut the day before a game and on the day of the game. We will rotary, divot and put the lights back on after the match has concluded and let it rest. In between, we will aerate the pitch as much as we can but, with having around sixty games a year, I tend to work around the weather. If we have a lot of rain coming, I will use the Terra Spike at a depth of six inches; if we have little bits of rain coming, we'll use the Toro ProCore at a depth of four

inches. We don't currently scarify the pitch through the season, but Wayne and I have been looking at investing in a Raycam Unirake next season for the summer months. This would enable us to clean it out a bit more so that, going into the winter, it's a bit cleaner. We have overseeded the pitch once so far this season with five bags of Johnsons J4 Turf."

Liam works alongside Mark Atkins of Evolution Agronomics Ltd who provides agronomic advice for the stadium pitch. "Mark takes soil samples every two months and, based on results, he puts a fertiliser programme together to suit our pitch. Mark's advice, combined with having the new Terra Spike this season, has seen us get some great results this year with our rooting. We got them down to four





We know roughly what our fertiliser budget is, so I space that out between three orders, one at the start of the season, one at Christmas and one in April

inches in the summer and, currently, they are at three and a half inches, which is good for a Desso pitch.”

It was a difficult start to the season for Liam and his team as the pitch suffered from a severe attack of fusarium. “It was a strange summer, as we all experienced. The boys and I came in after a weekend and the pitch was rife with it. So we had to spray the

pitch straight away with Banner Maxx and Heritage as a mix; we ended up applying these three times before the fusarium started to clear up. We then overseeded to get the areas back that had been hit quite hard.”

I asked Liam what he put this bout of fusarium down to. “I asked Nick Martin from ICL, and Mark Atkins, and they both

said the same thing; it’s down to the high temperatures. You have to use so much water on a Desso pitch. If we were watering, it was scorching and, if we weren’t, it was burning. It was quite a tough summer, to be honest, but we got through in the end.”

Last year, the stadium held a Stereophonics concert, plus corporate games at the end of the season, giving Liam



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What we tend to do is buy bit by bit, so we buy all our machinery at the start of the season

the challenge of working his renovations around the events. "At the end of the season, we had around five corporate games, then the contractors - Hewitt Sportsturf - came in and shaved the top off the pitch using a Koro with a hybrid reel, before the boards were laid on the pitch and the stage built for the concert. Once these were removed three days later, they then came back in, fluffed the pitch up, verti-drained, overseeded using a dimple

seeder in five directions with twenty bags of Limagrain MM60 grass seed, toppedressed with 90 tonnes of sand, which was then brushed in, and finally a 20:10:10 pre-seed fertiliser was applied. I find the concert compacts the pitch quite a lot, so I was using the ProCore quite a lot at the beginning of the season to try and rectify that."

Most of Liam's machinery is purchased outright through local dealers. "We like to be loyal to our local dealers, so the cutting machinery is purchased outright through Keith Morgan Mowers, and we use Ted Hopkins Machinery who provide the Toro ProCore and the two buggies through a sponsorship deal with the club. Both companies carry out the annual servicing on various machines, and we set our own heights of cut etc."

Liam tells me they are hoping to get a new training ground soon, but they are just waiting for the green light from the owner.

Finally, I asked Liam what his thoughts on the industry are.

"I believe it's getting better, from when I first started the pitches are improving overall with new products and machines coming into the market each year."



Left to right: William Birch, Liam James, Simon Hancock and Kurtis Simpson

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Keynote interview

Polished at the Emerald

In the latest of our 'Keynote' interviews, **Ryan Golding**, Head Groundsman at Leeds Rhinos RLFC and Yorkshire Carnegie RUFC, explains what attracted him to the industry and how things have changed since he started seventeen years ago, after reading a magazine article

Pitchcare: What inspired you to get into the industry?

Ryan Golding: Mine is a similar journey to most. When I was a young lad, I was really into playing football which led to a strong desire to get involved in sport. I saw a government careers article on groundsmanship which took my interest. After reading an article on Paul Burgess, me being me, I wrote off to him to see if it was possible to do work experience at Arsenal's Highbury Stadium. Paul accepted so, whilst still at high school in Leeds, I would go down and do work experience at the club.

What training did you undertake?

Training has been quite varied. I have completed my NVQ level 2 and 3 in Sportsturf and, currently, I'm trying to find time to complete a foundation degree, but it's proving difficult with the new stands being built and the pitch still in play. I also have additional qualifications, including team management, spraying certificates PA1, 2 and 6, plus trailer towing licence B+E.

Explain your career path/journey through the ranks/highlight of career?

My work experience at Arsenal confirmed that I wanted to pursue a career in the

sportsturf industry. I started at Leeds Rhinos RLFC when I was fifteen years old. I'm now thirty-two, so I have been here quite a long time. I sent my details to quite a few places in an attempt to gain an apprenticeship and to get a foot in the door, which is quite hard in this industry because you are waiting for dead man's shoes. Jason Booth was Head Groundsman at the time. Unfortunately, at the beginning I got turned down as there wasn't anything available. I was due to start at a golf club but, on the day before I was due to start, Jason came to my house and said there was an apprenticeship position available. Following on from that, I went





You go from communication and staff management to using science, maths and English - and you do it every day, without even thinking

through the interview process and was lucky enough to get the post. I have worked my way up the ranks from apprentice, groundsman, assistant groundsman, assistant head groundsman to now head groundsman, which I took over five years ago at twenty-seven years old.

What has been the highlight of your career so far?

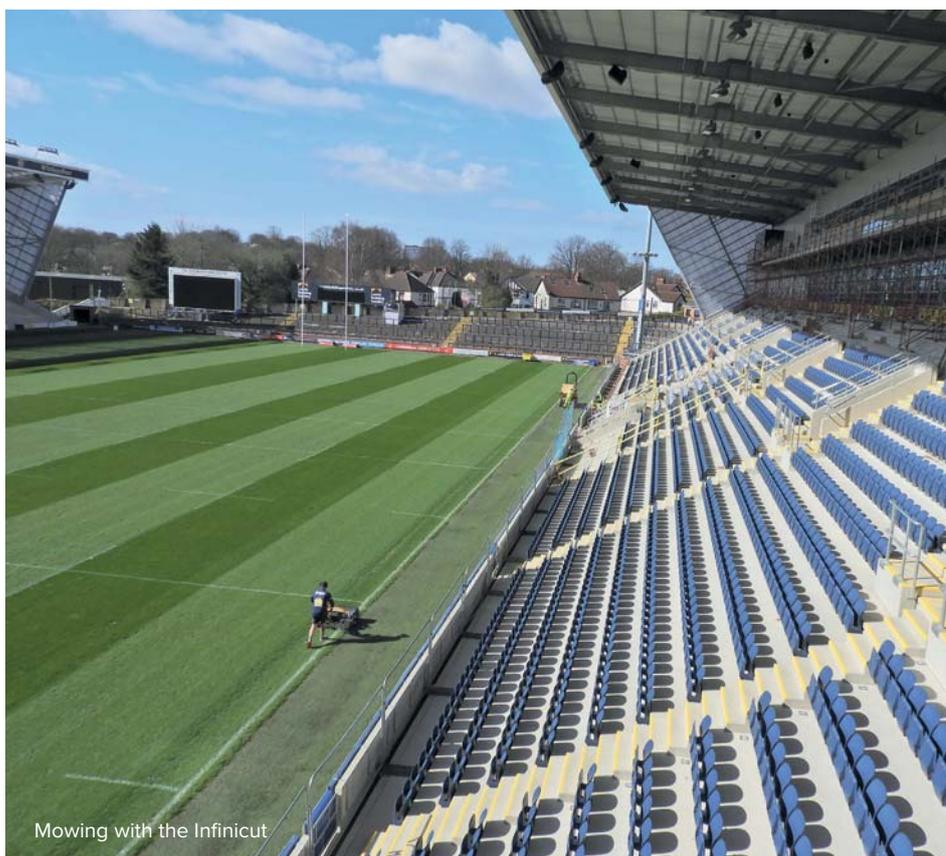
Getting recognition and awards for the playing surface, but it is not really a motivator for me. Real highlights for me are being able to bring lads on and pass on my knowledge. Seeing the way Dan Conner and Leon Pearson have developed in the last few years is so rewarding - they are now

joint assistant head groundsman and work well as a pair.

Other real highlights would be short renovations and having to research that, as well as talking to other groundsmen in the industry, who I really respect, to engage in their opinions on whether certain things can be done. Managing to turn the pitch around in twenty-seven days after renovation for play is always a challenge. I'm also proud to be one of only six head groundsmen in the history of Leeds RLFC; it's a unique place to be.

How has the sportsturf industry changed during your career?

Obviously, chemicals coming off the market will make us all think a bit more. Carbendazim was a big one for us and we have had to start being a lot more proactive with worm control; our training ground is right next door to a river so, as you can imagine, we struggle a lot with worms. Where we historically would have sprayed with Carbendazim, we now have to use a lot more cultural practices and a lot more brushing etc. Contact fungicides were almost used as a get out of jail card - a lot



Mowing with the Infinicut





of groundsmen use it as a badge of honour not being able to use fungicides as if it's a proud thing to do. Yes, that's good but practically, within a stadium environment, when you've got a lot of heavy dew, not a lot of airflow, shading problems and a lot of games, I can't be drag brushing every two seconds to keep on top of it culturally. So, as a get out a jail - yes I needed it! To get around this, we have now devised a programme with ICL which worked well last year and, with a few tweaks and timings, it will work well this year. I'm a big believer that, if you don't know if it is working, why would you chuck it on - I just don't get that? We will use base feeds, fill in with conventional feeds and then top up with biostimulants, liquid feeds plus anything extra, if I feel it's required.

The introduction of lighting rigs has made a big difference. We have two SGL MU18s, which we use in the scrummage areas, and we have had sockets put in place in the new North and South stands in some pop-up boxes. We are currently in the planning phase to bring in some bigger rigs, which will help with shading caused by the new

stand; I believe them to be a necessity to keeping a quality playing surface throughout the year. It's safe to say, with the technology we have available now, we should be able to provide a quality pitch, week in week out, but you have to have an appropriate budget in place.

The job has definitely changed since I was a kid to where I am now - it's like chalk and cheese. I'm very conscious, as a groundsman, that you can have all you want technology-wise, but you still have to know the basics of groundsmanship. I'm a massive believer in data collection and PQS but there is no point having Clegg hammers, shear tests and theta probes if you can't just walk onto a pitch and say it's too wet. You cannot lose that - it's a skill.

What machinery developments have helped you the most?

Mower-wise, we are now using the Infinicut from Cub Cadet which I think is brilliant. Floating heads on a mower - who would have said that ten years ago? But, in reality, when you look back it's common sense and I can't understand why we didn't have them



I believe as groundsmen, we have a moral duty to get more people interested in a career in the sportsturf industry

until recently. With us having a Fibresand pitch, we have to be quite resourceful when it comes to level management, particularly when we are coming out of winter around this period of the year. We were finding the levels of cut were off and we didn't have a continuation of height across the pitch but, with the floating heads, you can see more at this time of year that they are moving around a fair bit and the Infinicuts give a great uniformed cut.

What's the best part of your job?

I could use the old clichés; you never know what's coming, you don't know what you are doing from day to day, it's varied, you get to talk to different people. But, mostly, I'm lucky that I'm in a job that I thoroughly enjoy. I work alongside some great people. It's a challenge here; I find enjoyment from being told 'that won't work' and then proving people wrong or finding a way around a problem.

And the worst?

The weather especially. With it being a dual-use club, you are not just looking at the weather for one set of fixtures, you're looking at two, which also involves training. It can be difficult sometimes pleasing both sets of coaches, but it's all part of the job.

Is there anything you would have done differently, professionally and personally?

I may be a bit too direct and at times, I've got better as I've got older and realised that I probably shouldn't be as forward as I am - but that's my passionate personality, The Yorkshire in me comes out! One thing I do like, is to help people out and encourage the young lads as much as possible; however, that has sometimes come at a cost to me personally, given the time it takes when they have problems or issues. I wouldn't have it any other way though - I can always look in the mirror and say 'I have tried to do the right thing'. Personally, you can always say you would like to spend more time with your partners but, as we all know, that can be difficult.



New Directors Suite



I'm a big believer that, if you don't know if it is working, why would you chuck it on - I just don't get that



What are the main pressures of the job?

My job role here is varied. I go from overseeing the surfaces to changing sponsor boards, right through to making car parks and stands accessible in winter then supervising flood defence installation at the training ground. The main pressure is keeping the stadium pitch at the highest possible standard and that means a lot of communication between myself and both sets of coaching staffs plus club staff. At times, I end up being like Kofi Annan and bringing out my diplomatic skills. Carnegie might want a session before their game but, if it's hammering down, you haven't let them on. If Rhino's want one the week after and they're let on, Carnegie are well within their rights to ask the question, then you have to go and explain the decision which consumes a lot of time.

Where do you see your future?

I'm comfortable and I enjoy it here. I

appreciate the club, the people and I enjoy the game. I help out in the sport as a whole, whether that's rugby league or rugby union, I always try and help people outside of the sport and I get the freedom to do that here. We are unique; I can have direct communication with the director of rugby whereas, in other sporting organisations, you have to go through numerous people to get to the director of a sport. It would have to be a unique challenge for me to consider leaving Leeds RLFC.

Do you find it difficult to attract staff/employ apprentices/offer training?

I'm all for getting young people into the industry and there are a lot of views on this. I always try and help kids coming in, but I can't help but question that, in an era of social media, whether young people are coming into this industry for the right reasons? Do they really want to do the job or just see it as a cool job to be in. Job

titles and social media presence seem to motivate, more than whether you should or shouldn't actually be going on a pitch, due to it being wet through. I believe, as groundsmen, we have a moral duty to get more people interested in a career in the sportsturf industry.

What piece of advice would you pass on to youngsters getting into the industry?

Don't just think it's a cool job - it takes a lot of hard work! If you are willing to put the time in and make sacrifices, the results are worth it.

Industry pay rates?

Fortunately, I am at a great workplace but pay at the bottom, and also at some mid-level positions, is horrendous. It's unjustifiable really and it's like we are not a recognised profession. It actually takes everything you learned at school to do this job and more! You go from communication and staff management to using science, maths and English - and you do it every day, without even thinking. It takes a lot more than some other professions and I don't know why we are not respected as much as we should be.

I also believe a lot of groundsmen should take responsibility for that; it's alright moaning you are not treated equally in your club or environment, but then don't dress scruffily, with holes in your clothes covered in whitening and moan about your manager every two seconds. Build a relationship with your line manager and show a bit of courage - if they don't want to get on with you, at least you have tried. Groundsmen love a moan, but nothing is going to change unless we try and change it.

What are your views on industry shows and do you attend?

I attend all of them; they serve a purpose of being able to have all the companies in one place. To me, the networking side is the biggest thing - being able to see guys you haven't talked to in a while and share ideas over a beer!



Ryan loves the Infinicut

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The Lensbury

A true vocation

For over forty years, **Peter Craig** has served in what he views as his vocation. Like many who have worked in this industry for such a long period of time, he has a genuine passion for what he does, arguably just as much now as he did when he was first blown away by the Old Trafford cricket pitch in the mid-seventies. Blair Ferguson reports



Peter Craig's career has been an impressive one, including two-spells at The Lensbury Club and eighteen years at the prestigious Hurlingham Club, as well as his early years at Leyland Cricket Ground and Ealing Cricket Club.

In September 2017, Peter returned for his second spell by the River Thames in Teddington at The Lensbury, as Grounds and Gardens Manager. It's here at the 4-star club, hotel and conference centre, on an unusually warm February day, that we discuss his impressive career and the challenges he's faced during his four decades as a groundsman.

Clearly, his passion for sport was pivotal in his career choice. Despite living in London

for many years, Peter still travels back to where he grew up to watch Chorley Football Club play and is quick to compliment the work head groundsman, Ben Kay, does for the National League North team and, throughout our interview, he speaks highly of many of his peers.

As previously mentioned, it was a visit to Old Trafford that sparked Peter's interest in turf and would shape his career for the next seven years. "I used to play cricket a lot up until my late teens. My dad was a big cricket fan and he took me to Old Trafford cricket ground in the mid-seventies and I remember being blown away by the presentation of the ground, it was hatched out and looked absolutely amazing."

"Fast forward a little bit and I went to







So I wrote a letter to Old Trafford. They hadn't advertised for anything, but I wrote them a letter saying how I loved the way the grounds looked, that I was a big cricket fan and I'd love to know how you get a cricket ground looking like that



The Lensbury Hotel looking across the rugby pitches



Peter Craig

college to take A-Levels and realised that wasn't my thing, and because of that I didn't put a lot of effort into it and found myself close to the exams knowing I wasn't going to pass and knowing that I didn't have anything to do after them."

"So I wrote a letter to Old Trafford. They hadn't advertised for anything, but I wrote them a letter saying how I loved the way the grounds looked, that I was a big cricket fan and I'd love to know how you get a cricket ground looking like that. Fortunately, from that time, the new head groundsman, Gordon Prosser, took me on as an apprentice in 1978 and I never looked back."

"I was there for a couple of years and then moved back to live with my mum in Chorley and got a job at a cricket ground in Leyland. It was the first time I'd looked after bowling greens and they also played grass hockey there, so that was a first as well. I spent a couple of years there with one part-time assistant."

"One very wet day, I had a visit from a couple of guys from the Manchester Ship

Canal Recreation Club which was the club for the company and, at the time, they were one of the biggest companies in the country. They had a cricket square, crown green bowling green and a couple of football pitches, and this is where I had my first experience of managing grass tennis courts. Five years there flew by."

A spell at Ealing Cricket Club brought Peter to work in London for the first time in 1986 and, after four-years, he moved to The Lensbury for his first spell in charge, before moving to the Hurlingham Club. For Peter, this marked a career highlight, a move he regards as the biggest and most significant thing to happen to him.

"I regarded it as one of the best jobs in the industry outside of the real high-profile Wimbledons and Wembleys and jobs of that standing," he explained. "I had fantastic resources, however, the sports turf facilities were not of the standard befitting a high profile club and, over the eighteen years I spent there, the standards were improved dramatically, both technically and



I'd say that of my eighteen years there, sixteen of them were the happiest of my life. But things started to turn sour and eventually I left



Looking towards the River Thames



Off pitch area



Having spent eighteen years in a shirt and tie overseeing one of the finest facilities of its type, my first day at King's College sat on a mower in my greens was kind of a 'what have I come to' moment

aesthetically. This was reflected in the demand for my advice and experience from organisations such as the New England Turf Grass Association. They flew me to America to do a presentation on grass tennis court maintenance alongside Neil Stubley from Wimbledon,”

“During my time there, we staged three world croquet championships and, due to the significant improvement in the grass tennis courts, many of the world’s top tennis players were drawn to the club, including

Andy Murray and Rafael Nadal, and they were fulsome in their praise.”

“I’d say that, of my eighteen years there, sixteen of them were the happiest of my life. But things started to turn sour and eventually I left.”

Peter is very honest about the impact leaving the Hurlingham Club had on him and his passion for the job. For anyone, leaving their dream position would be very difficult, but he quickly got back into groundsmanship and applied for a job at

Kings College School in Wimbledon as a groundsman.

“After I left Hurlingham, I went right back down to the shop floor. Boredom had become an issue and there was a job at Kings College School, which is a fantastic facility, and I got a job there.”

“Having spent eighteen years in a shirt and tie overseeing one of the finest facilities of its type, my first day at Kings College sat on a mower in my greens was kind of a ‘what have I come to’ moment. I saw it



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When I came here the first time, money was no object, there was a fantastic budget. It changed gradually when I was there from being wealthy to being far more realistic



Karl Smith's work in evidence



through, and everybody was fantastic. I was there for six months and can't praise the place and people I worked with enough."

Despite going through a difficult time in his career, forces were at work to bring Peter back to The Lensbury. Initially, he was contacted to consult on the grass tennis courts and, as the focus on their rugby pitches changed for the Teddington based club, they began to consider bringing in a full-time head groundsman, eventually leading to Peter's return in September 2017.

As would be expected, the club he returned to was very different from the one he left. When he first joined, the whole site was owned, operated and funded by Shell, and himself and a team of twelve full-time staff maintained four cricket squares, four football pitches, three rugby pitches, six grass tennis courts, twenty artificial tennis courts, a flat rink bowling green and a grass

hockey pitch on a 45-acre site.

By the mid-nineties, Shell changed the status of the club from being purely subsidised into a self-financing private enterprise. This meant, over a period of four years, Peter's staff was halved through natural wastage and as a result of Shell selling a majority of the land across the road, thus reducing the workload to a football pitch, cricket square and the grass tennis courts. This led to Peter seeking a new challenge in the shape of the Hurlingham club.

So, how much more has the club changed in the time Peter has been away? "When I came here the first-time, money was no object; there was a fantastic budget. It changed gradually from being wealthy to being far more realistic. You had to justify what you were spending and every penny spent was carefully watched and had to be



The Lensbury grounds team l-r: Andrew Gess (Apprentice), Karl Smith (Head Gardener), Peter Craig, Trevor Kerr (Gardener), Paul Treadgold (Groundsman)



The hotel's patio area



The area is manageable with five staff, but the rugby pitches weren't our responsibility until 1st January 2019, so we've got 15,000m² more of turf to look after than we did last year

justified, which is the way it should be."

"When I came back, the connection to Shell was still there and you can still feel it and see it, because a lot of people still come here that work for Shell, but it's very much a business now and it's run as such by very professional individuals who are aware."

"It feels different in a way that is difficult to quantify or describe. Maybe it's because the dynamic of the people I'm working with has changed."

"On my return, there were two members of staff who were still here from when I left in

1998. Paul Treadgold has been here for forty years and Trevor Kerr for thirty years, so they have a lot of experience on this site."

"Our Head Gardener, Karl Smith, does a fantastic job and has been here for seventeen years and started just after I left. Between those three people, you've got almost ninety years of service at The Lensbury. One thing the club has done, and I'm really appreciative of, is take on an apprentice groundsman. Andrew Gess is on a two-year apprenticeship at Merrist Wood College and has shown real enthusiasm for

what we've asked him to do."

"The area is manageable with five staff, but the rugby pitches weren't our responsibility until 1st January 2019, so we've got 15,000m² more of turf to look after than we did last year and only one extra member of staff, but it's doable."

"The club has invested a significant amount of money into a Jacobsen TR320 ride on triple mower, a smaller Jacobsen GP400 greens mower and an Infinicut electric mower, which I absolutely love. So, the money that was being spent on the



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Our biggest issue with the Fibresand pitch is having enough water. In 2018, we found out a lot about what our irrigation is like compared to what it should be like



The Riverside Fibresand rugby pitch



contractors is now being spent on the extra material we're going to need to manage the pitches."

"Renovations are still being contracted out, but we're doing all of the feeding and all the maintenance in-house, so that's added significantly to the budget. However, the club has shown a real commitment to providing the resources required to get the standard that we and they want."

"The pitches are now a significant source of income for The Lensbury and I think that's what helped them make the decision to bring someone in full-time. They recognise that they need to protect that income and maintaining the two pitches every day does that."

Catering for professional rugby began in 2015 when eventual tournament winners, New Zealand, picked The Lensbury to be their base for the Rugby World Cup, following the construction of a Fibresand pitch. The standard of the pitches is now a top priority for Peter, but an issue that needs to be overcome is irrigation.

"The Riverside pitch is Fibresand and its initial construction was done during the winter of 2013/2014 in anticipation of the 2014 World Cup. Fortunately, the weather at the time meant there were no drainage issues. Afterwards, there was a lot of retrospective work that had to be done to impact it, but now it's an extremely free draining Fibresand pitch."

"Our biggest issue with the Fibresand pitch is having enough water. In 2018, we found out a lot about what our irrigation is like compared to what it should be like. We have a borehole and we're limited to 6,000 cubic metres from 1st April to 31st October. That limit has been set for twenty years, but the development of the club and the usage has changed, but because of the environmental situation when we asked for more, we weren't able to get it."

"So, once we use that, we then have to go onto mains water. We had what we thought was an adequate 10,000-litre tank installed which we found out was good to have, but the water was going into it at one-hundredth



Rugby training in full swing



The grass tennis courts

of the rate it was going out.”

“As a result of the experience last year, we’ve spent the last four months looking at improving our irrigation to make our Rain Bird system more effective. We can take water from the river, but we’re limited to 20,000 cubic metres a day and it’s not an option we can currently use because it needs to go through a UV filter. We have looked at installing a pump and filter as an option, and that’s one of a number of possibilities we’ve looked at.”

Whilst infrastructure changes are in

motion, Peter believes communication with users is the key. Regular conversations take place with coaches and training is spread across the pitch rather than being concentrated in one quarter. Off-pitch areas have also been developed for heavier work and have been fully embraced by the teams, helping Peter and his team to provide the best surfaces possible.

A full renovation of the Xtragrass pitch is set to take place to remove poa, with the establishment of a new profile and sward planned to really improve the overall quality.

//

We can take water from the river, but we’re limited to 20,000 cubic metres a day and it’s not an option we can currently use because it needs to go through a UV filter

Regular aeration with a Toro Pro-Core and Verti-Drain will also take place and it is hoped that, once they are into the growing season, the differences will start to show.

Away from the rugby pitches, concentration turns to the grass tennis courts. After attending a seminar at Wimbledon, Peter was blown away by the quality of the courts, much like he had been when he first went to Old Trafford. From that moment, grass courts became his obsession, to the point where he was interviewed for the head groundsman job at

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Wimbledon, with the position going to Neil Stubley, who Peter refers to as ‘the right man for the job’.”

Peter’s work on the courts also highlights how the change in climate has impacted the way grass is maintained. He said: “It’s scary to think how long I’ve been in the job because it’s been forty years now but, back then, the climate was different. You got to a certain time of the year and growth did almost stop completely and you could put the mower away in the garage. Now you get significant growth throughout the year and that impacts disease and worm control; and it’s so much more difficult now because you can’t just throw down a chemical and leave it to it.”

“The turf is now under more pressure in the climate we have because the dramatic changes in temperature put the plant under more stress. It’s vital that the plant is in top condition all-year round to resist disease and that’s a big part of the job now using the right nutrition and aeration and constant monitoring, especially during the winter months as you don’t get recovery until growth starts on a regular basis, so disease attacks can be devastating.”

“My programme on the grass courts is a combination of turf hardeners, feeds and conditioners that we use on a regular basis and we haven’t had a disease attack on the grass courts for eighteen months ... and I really wish I hadn’t said that,” Peter said laughing with a slight hint of nerves.

“We haven’t put fungicide down for the last eighteen months, so the mix is wonderful stuff, and that’s what I need to do with the rugby pitches as well. It’s prevention rather than cure, because there really isn’t a cure now. I take a lot of advice because I’m not a scientist and chemistry baffles me, so that advice combined with my experience and knowledge gives me the answers that I need. I know it’s a cliché, but you never stop

learning and that’s why I’m never afraid to ask a question.”

“We either very heavily scarify or Koro the courts every year now and virtually start again from scratch. If you’ve got a lot of poa there is invariably a residual seed bank which will re-establish, so it’s an ongoing programme. However, I’m really happy with the courts as they are now and there’s a healthy even sward with very little weeds and I can’t wait to get them open in May.”

Peter’s hope for the courts is to have professionals use them for pre-Wimbledon training, as they used to in his first spell at the club. Attracting professional athletes to the club is important for members and guests alike. Every area of grass around the site is either for professional users, amateur users or casual observers.

The impact a well-prepared lawn, pitch or court can have on an individual should never be underestimated. Turf, unlike people, has the ability to give the ultimate first impression. It displays hard work, skill and pride through the effort it takes to present it in that way and can provide a feel-good factor.

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Abbots Bromley Cricket Club

**The heart of
the village ...**

In the pretty Staffordshire village of Abbots Bromley, teamwork has seen an ambitious plan to create a new community sports hub grow from vision to reality. Pitchcare caught up with joint Trustee and Chairman, **John Stevenson**, to discover more about how the project is progressing

Back in 2010, the future of Abbots Bromley Cricket Club was hanging in the balance. Abbots Bromley School, which leased the club its existing ground, needed the land back. Although an alternative site was offered, the enormity of establishing an entirely new ground caused the committee serious concern.

“When it was suggested that the club might fold, my immediate thought was ‘Over my dead body!’. Having been involved with the club for over forty years - both as a player and on the committee - it was unthinkable that cricket would no longer be a part of village life.” Thus began a labour of love that has seen John Stevenson

spearhead a project to create a new hub for village sport, with community spirit and joined-up thinking key to its success.

Joined-up thinking

The school offered a 13-acre field to the edge of village as the new site for the ground and, with the village football, tennis and netball clubs also needing a permanent home, the ‘acorn from which an oak would grow’ was sown. In 2011, several keen locals formed a working group to take the project forward - but it wasn’t all plain sailing, as John explains:

“Initially, two or three people formed the working group to create the sports ground. Looking back, I have to say we were rather



John Stevenson



Before



When it was suggested that the club might fold, my immediate thought was 'Over my dead body!'. Having been involved with the club for over forty years, it was unthinkable that cricket would no longer be a part of village life

naïve in our understanding of the task at hand. With a lot of water under the bridge, research and time spent speaking to experts, those two or three rather naïve people worked very hard to gain a greater understanding of the project and realise what it would really take to bring vision to reality."

One of the things to come of this learning curve was the decision that, for the project to be a success, a more formal management structure was required. In March 2013, the Abbots Bromley Sports Association Charity (ABSA) was formed. John was appointed joint Trustee & Chairman of the new development committee alongside fellow Chair Chris Wood; heading up an eight-strong board of trustees. With representatives of the village sports clubs working together on the board - including

Cricket Club chairman Mark Hurst - ambitious new plans began to take shape.

The original £1m budget was reduced to a more achievable £750k; with specifications and design adjusted to make not only securing funds but the association's ability to fund match more feasible. Within the revised budget, facilities at the new ground would include a clubhouse, twelve wicket natural cricket table, junior and senior natural football pitches, and three artificial tennis courts also marked for netball. Not only would the village clubs make use of the new facility but also the school itself; ensuring the new sports ground is truly at the heart of village life.

Influential in guiding the group on its course was David Bates, lead consultant at TTS - a Sport England Framework Provider of consultancy services for natural grass





After

pitches. John approached David for advice early on in the project, and his expertise and constructive advice was invaluable in helping the group see the bigger picture.

Blood, sweat and tears

Over the past five years, the association has worked tirelessly to realise the dream, with planning and fundraising for the project taking up much of John's time. A 100-year lease was secured on the site, but inevitably issues arose during the planning phase, with the costs for provision of services, highways access queries and planning delays all causing headaches which were ultimately resolved.

TTS was appointed lead consultant for the design, procurement, project management and establishment of the entire new ground. As part of this remit, David undertook a thorough survey of the site in June 2016. Taking into account the site's geomorphology and climate, a topographical (levels) survey, electromagnetic inductance (EMI) scanning, analysis of proposed pitch layout and grading based on SE guidelines, soil sampling, review of existing drainage infrastructure, an agronomic assessment and the results of a Performance Quality Standards (PQS) assessment, a feasibility report was compiled. This included a thorough specification of works for the project's groundworks contractors and twelve month maintenance programme.

TTS handled the contractor tender processes on behalf of the association, narrowing it down to two contenders before the client held interviews and selected DW Shotton as lead contractor for the project. TTS then completed the final parts of the vetting process and brought together the contracts for both parties. They also undertook full specification and procurement of all materials and project manage works on site; allowing the board to focus on the ongoing fundraising drive and approach numerous sources for support - some with more success than others, as John explains:

"One of the things you quickly develop when fundraising is a thick skin, and also learn not to take 'no' for an answer. On several occasions, we were turned down by a funding source but took on board their objections, amended our plans accordingly and approached them again when the next round of funding became available. In several cases, this persistence paid off."

Funding streams tapped into for the project include Sport England, the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB), East Staffordshire Borough Council and the Football Foundation, Staffordshire FA, Abbots Bromley Parish Council, Staffordshire County Council, Tesco, Waitrose and The Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation. Donations from Abbots Bromley Sports and Recreational Association, alongside generous gifts from



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One of the things you quickly develop when fundraising is a thick skin, and also learn not to take 'no' for an answer. On several occasions, we were turned down by a funding source but took on board their objections, amended our plans accordingly and approached them again when the next round of funding became available



local residents and business sponsorship, have all helped to swell the funds. The clubs themselves have also worked hard; hosting events and fundraisers to support the association in reaching its match funding target, which sits at over £100,000. At the time of writing, the charity had just secured a £250,000 grant from the FA; taking the entire sum raised to date to in excess of £600k and bringing the target £750k even closer.

The future's bright

With funding in place, plans fully approved, contractors appointed and materials sourced by TTS, work on site began in August 2017. The priority of 'Phase 1' was the construction of the new twelve wicket natural turf cricket table, with the aim of the

square being ready for action in the 2020 season, until which time the club is able to use its existing ground.

TTS oversaw all works on site; ensuring contractors followed the detailed schedule of works and assessing work for quality at every stage. A maintenance plan was also provided for the club to follow, which saw members mucking in to water the newly laid square on long summer evenings. The mild winter of 2018 has seen the pitch come on well and, with excitement building locally about the new development, the target of playing the first season of cricket on the new square in 2020 looks well within reach.

Alongside work on the cricket table, much attention has also been given to the aesthetics of the ground to ensure it sits well within its rural setting. Trees have been planted to the perimeter and will be fitted with nesting boxes aimed at several bird species, including owls, whilst 'balancing pools', constructed to draw

water from the pitch as drainage, will feature reed beds to provide a habitat for newts, fish, frogs and birds.

Phase 2, due to start in spring/summer 2019, will involve the construction of the junior and senior natural turf football pitches to FA performance quality standards, again under David's expert guidance. Attention will then turn to the new synthetic tennis/netball courts and infrastructure, like parking, with phase 3 - the construction of a new £250,000 clubhouse - set to be the cherry on the cake.

We'll be back to visit Abbots Bromley in summer 2020 to see how the project has progressed - and hopefully see some cricket in action on the new square. To find out more about the project, head to www.absasport.co.uk.



Artist's impression of the new clubhouse (right) and plan of the new development. Images © Crestline



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Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate

Starting from scratch

Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate, an independent day and boarding school, is set in a 220 acre estate at Thorpe Underwood, North Yorkshire in rolling countryside. Of particular interest, especially to those in sports turfcare however, is QE's dedicated Sports Village, recently completed in 2016. David Mears went to investigate and met Grounds Manager **Ben Grigor**

Bernard Grigor, known to all as Ben, was appointed Grounds Manager with responsibilities for the 42 acre outdoor sports facilities at Queen Ethelburga's in September 2016 and has played an important part in the rapid development of the new grounds department, a division of the estates department.

Asked about his entry into the industry, Ben commented: "I fell into it initially. I needed a summer job, so went to Crow Wood Golf Club near Muirhead, Scotland." Working in the greens department at the club obviously appealed to Ben and he was offered an apprenticeship there in 1997. He recalled that the work and training was intense and much was expected of him; good career development experience!

Three years later, he went to Mount Ellen Golf Club, a few miles away, as first assistant, gaining more experience. Ben credits his intense apprenticeship at Crow Wood as the reason he secured the position - and at just twenty-one years old! He spent four and a half years there and then returned to Crow Wood as Deputy Course Manager in 2005. In 2008, an opportunity beckoned and Ben made the move to Rangers Football Club, initially as Deputy Head Groundsman at Murray Park and then, in 2011, with the same title, at Ibrox Stadium. He spent nearly eight years with Rangers and acquired additional skills.

In 2014 and gaining additional and varied experience, Ben spent the next two and a half years in management positions with Souters Sports, SIS Pitches and Greenfields UK. This is where he honed his knowledge and skills with the development, production,

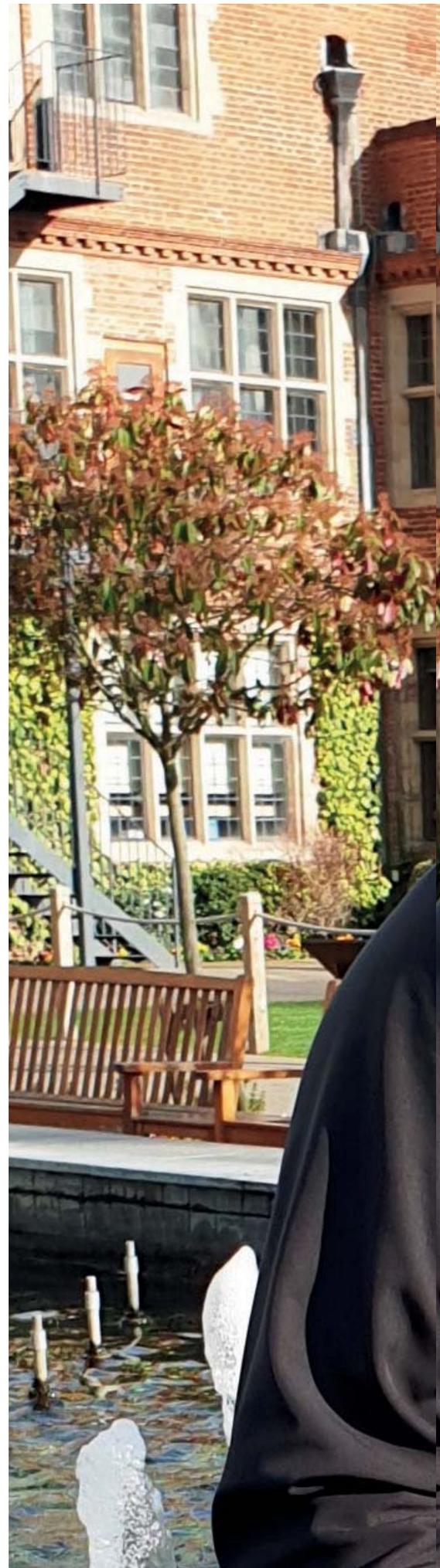
installation and maintenance of natural, hybrid and synthetic sports turf systems. With such valuable experience and knowledge, together with his SVQ, NC (National Certificate) in Greenkeeping and other competency certificates, he was able to secure the position of Grounds Manager at Queen Ethelburga's.

I asked him "Was there one person who inspired you?" Ben replied; "Hard to say. I think there must be two." He said that his dad, who worked for Glasgow Parks Department, inspired him with stories of his work and the characters he worked with. Ben found this so interesting and the camaraderie was appreciated. The other person was Stephen Hogg, Course Manager at Crow Wood. "He gave me so much responsibility and encouragement. He demanded a high standard of work. This ensured professionalism was maintained and a first class greenkeeping facility. Stephen certainly gave me a strong work ethic and he knew how to get the best out of me!"

"Queen Ethelburga's was a great opportunity," said Ben. "Nothing was inherited, so I was able to start from scratch to build a team and department. Along with adding workshop facilities and machinery, I was able to bring my wish list to life!" Asked about budgets, Ben answered: "I had my responses all ready for questions on my kit list, but there weren't any, except why did I need a Dymo labeller!" So no issues with budget then.

The facility and staff

QE's publicity states: 'The outstanding range of high quality facilities on campus enables







The new “sheds” at Queen Ethelburga’s



Queen Ethelburga’s was a great opportunity. Nothing was inherited, so I was able to start from scratch to build a team and department. Along with adding workshop facilities and machinery, I was able to bring my wish list to life!

us to deliver the wide range of sporting activities that we have on offer so successfully’. They claim what they offer is unique; a dedicated Sports Village. Nothing could be truer and it needs to be seen to be believed. This includes a four-lane synthetic cushioned running track and over thirty acres of grass and 3G artificial pitches outside, a 25-metre swimming pool, triple court sports hall, 100 station fitness suite and free weights centre indoors. There are also a number of specialist studios used for; martial arts, wrestling, dance, gymnastics, table tennis, cycling, archery, fencing and boxing.

This impressive facility now is a far cry from its modest beginnings. QE’s history began with a school opening in Harrogate in 1912. The school, under the new ownership of the Martin family, moved to its present location, Thorpe Underwood Hall, in 1991, became independent and was renamed Queen Ethelburga’s Collegiate. A huge investment programme ensued. More recently, an £80m investment has been made in the new Sports Village, new boarding houses, new classrooms and other facilities.

Queen Ethelburga’s is co-educational and has 1600 pupils listed, 1200 of whom are borders.

I met Ben and his team in their new “sheds”, if that’s what you can call such a splendid facility. It was built mainly by QE’s own Estates Department after initial steelwork etc. had been installed by outside contractors. It was designed in-house and is sympathetic to the area, being built in the style of typical farm buildings with low brick walls and timber cladding; they are most impressive!

The team are obviously proud of their facility and intend to keep it in fine fettle. It’s the only sheds I have visited in my career where the staff change into slippers or house shoes before entering the very well-equipped mess room! All sit around a large communal table to eat and they have a microwave, cooker, hob, large sink, dishwasher, fridge/freezer, etc. I was offered a bacon sandwich or more if I wished and a mug of tea or coffee; most tasty and welcome. I’d give them a five star rating! Ben’s office is adjacent, and the storage and machinery sections follow.

So, who does Ben have on his team to



The QE Grounds Team I-r: Greg Croasdale, Ben Grigor, Mark Hayhurst, Ian Dunnabie, Mark Harrison, Alistair Lamond, Matthew Teasdale and Josh Harrison



Queen Ethelburga's floodlit main building

maintain the sports grounds and what are their backgrounds?

The team comprises:

- Ian Dunnabie, two and a half years at QE with twenty-eight years greenkeeping and football club experience.
- Mark Harrison, two years at QE and came from Hull City FC. He has football and latterly rugby league experience and also seems to be the sheds' chef; he certainly

knows how to turn out bacon butties!

- Alistair Lamond, joined in August of 2018 and brings greenkeeping experience with him.
- Greg Croasdale has been with the team for two years and came from The Grove Golf Club in Hertfordshire. All his experience is greenkeeping.
- Matt Teasdale, joined QE's team six months ago - has greenkeeping and

football experience at Rockcliffe Hall Golf Club and Darlington FC.

- Josh Harrison, joined nine months ago as a trainee and, at sixteen, is the youngest member of the team. He has embarked on a distance learning programme.

We were joined by Mark Hayhurst who has responsibility for the gardens and estate grounds and another team. Mark has been at QE for over twelve years and has a wealth of knowledge on the estate and its history.

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The whole estates department numbers over one hundred, ensuring that QE is pretty well self-sufficient. One of the philosophies of QE is that ‘The Team’ should be able to do everything in house!



Rain Bird system in action



Line marking for senior football

Mark, third from left on the team shot, has a close working relationship with Ben and his team and, on occasions, the teams help each other on large jobs necessitating greater numbers. The whole estates department, however, numbers over one hundred and includes builders, electricians, plumbers, carpenters and those with other skills, ensuring that QE is pretty well self-sufficient. As Ben said: “One of the philosophies of QE is that ‘The Team’ should be able to do everything in house!”

Ben’s team, therefore, require little extra help normally as, mentioned above, the Estates Department can be called on for this and advice. They have access to individuals on site responsible for Health & Safety, HR, environmental matters, etc., and there is even medical facilities for pupils and all staff. From an agronomy standpoint however, Ben said that ICL have been particularly helpful.

The soil profile is generally loamy in the surrounding area, but renovation work on pitches has meant changes by the addition of other materials. Ben enlightened me: “We

wanted to create higher performing pitches, especially as there was winter saturation; not enough fixtures and training lessons were being held! We went to iTurf for advice and they made recommendations based on work carried out by Premier Pitches.”

“The work involved removing 5” of native soil to expose existing drainage. We added primary drainage and gravel banding and then replaced the rootzone. We went for 80% sand, 10% peat and 10% topsoil.” Ben explained that they had previously been given permission to half stitch (SIS pitches) but now, having followed the advice of iTurf which has worked so well, this is unnecessary. “The pitch is performing so well now and probably better than a fibre pitch” said Ben.

“We now have much better understanding of pitch profiles here. We need balanced aeration and I guess we were overdoing it. Linear aeration now takes precedence.” remarked Ben. Another investment, proving indispensable, is full Rain Bird irrigation systems now operating throughout the



We now have much better understanding of pitch profiles here. We need balanced aeration and I guess we were overdoing it. Linear aeration now takes precedence



Looking from the MUGAs and basketball area over the senior grass and sand based synthetic and athletic running track to the pool and gym



Twenty20 cricket under floodlights



We can't use germination covers or frost sheets as the strong winds preclude their use! Careful scheduling is especially necessary when spraying! This presents limited opportunities to spray well

facility, maintained in house, but serviced at regular intervals by Carrick Sports. These are controlled by computer or mobile phone app. "Very handy if a teacher strays on to a pitch without permission!" jokes Ben.

Another, and most impressive addition, are the huge lighting rigs. These floodlights (they tell me there are 101 stanchions!) incorporate state of the art LED technology. This makes HD filming possible as light levels are infinitely adjustable ensuring optimum light at all times.

"We use standard cricket covers" says Ben, and added "We can't use germination

covers or frost sheets as the strong winds preclude their use! Careful scheduling is especially necessary when spraying! This presents limited opportunities to spray well." The winds have caused gazebo and marquee issues from time to time. The water table is quite high at QE and flooding can and does happen from time to time. Shade is not really an issue on such an open facility, but winds can cause excessive dry-out.

There are a number of artificial surfaces in the Sports Village: 3G and rubber crumb for football and rugby; all to FA, FIFA and WRU

accreditations. There are also traditional sand-based and modern water-based hockey pitches; constructed to international standards.

Apart from the pitches, other facilities include six MUGA's for netball, basketball, tennis and volleyball. There is also a full size, four lane and cushioned, synthetic running track. All are maintained by the team.

The pitches, cricket square and other facilities are hired out; particularly during the summer holiday period. Professional football clubs often need a first class facility; "We've had well known football clubs ring at the last

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Presentation is not paramount; we pride ourselves in following good practice. We ensure that we achieve a first class playing surface; we will not compromise!" Presentation usually follows!



Presentation is not paramount ...



minute in desperate need of a training pitch!" said Ben. Rugby, hockey and netball clubs also use the facilities, along with those attending summer camps. An example of the variety of external hirings and how QE can attract "big names", is exemplified by the fact that, on 2nd March 2019, the Leeds United Pulcino D'Oro Tournament was held at QE; the first time in England. This comprised sixteen teams at youth level from Leeds United Football Club and included Newcastle, Doncaster Rovers, Hamilton Academicals, Preston North End, Sheffield United, Notts Forest and others from clubs around the country. Commercial hirings are important to the collegiate and bring financial benefits for further investment renovations, etc. in the school and facilities.

Maintenance Regimes

I asked about the importance of presentation. Ben replied: "Presentation is not paramount; we pride ourselves in following good practice. We ensure that we achieve a first class playing surface; we will not compromise!" Presentation usually follows!

All in the team are given a specific area of responsibility (changed yearly), i.e. cricket, rugby, football, or synthetics (football, rugby and hockey).

Ben stresses; "The team pull together and everyone has to be able to carry out all tasks. Some with specific interests or abilities can lead however."

Renovations are not really affected by budgets but by commercial use and hirings! These affect timings and workload. "In the case of Summer Camps, all is well known and planned well in advance however."

As for weather patterns and their effects, Ben says that, as you can't rely on the weather, it is sometimes difficult to plan and have a precise schedule. Work is no longer governed by the time of the year. For example, when I visited, Ben said that they had been seeding in the sun the previous week (w/c 25th Feb). Renovations seem to be being carried out now earlier than before due to changing weather patterns. As Ben remarked: "This helps us, should there be a sudden influx of unexpected event bookings!"



Drone shot showing the variety of pitches



... but follows good practice!



The team pull together and everyone has to be able to carry out all tasks. Some with specific interests or abilities can lead however

Projects

QE's big project was that mentioned earlier; the upgrade to a higher performing pitch which entailed removing soil, adding new drainage, gravel banding and then replacing the rootzone. "The experiment with the first one has been a success, so we now need to repeat the work and upgrade the other grass pitches" said Ben. He would also like to install a hybrid pitch.

Most work is carried out in-house with help from Mark Hayhurst and his team and/or the estates department. However, if outside contractors are required, Ben usually turns to Carrick Sports, Premier Pitches or SIS.

Training, Education and H&S

It is a requirement that all staff are fully compliant with current legislation. Ongoing training takes place and the team were awarded Level 1 Cricket Pitches: Renovation certificates recently, for example. All the team, with the exception of Josh the trainee, have spraying certificates and hold necessary academic qualifications.

Josh has been with the team for nine months and, as Ben remarked: "He's a hard worker and has aspirations. All seems good so far but, as with many young folk, he needs to improve his communication skills!"

There is a health a safety officer employed by the collegiate, backed by a medical department. Ben's team are all first aid trained and there are defibrillators located around the huge site.

Machinery

Machinery is all purchased outright (everything was new when the department was opened just over two years ago) and were purchased from Russell's or Cleveland Land Services in the main. Strangely, and although Ben sent his machinery wish list to many main suppliers, some may not have realised the magnitude of purchase



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Getting Personal

Ben Grigor - it could get windy at his dinner party

Who are you? Ben Grigor, Grounds Manager, Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate, York.

Family status? In a relationship. I have two children Lanah Jane who is seven and Harris who is five.

Who's your hero and why? My dad, he's not murdered my mum. Go dad!

What would you change about yourself? Self-doubt.

What's your guilty pleasure? Lorraine Kelly.

What's been the highlight of your career so far? Being trusted to build a successful department literally from nothing with my guys. Without interference.

What are your pet peeves? People who lack common manners or respect for others.

If you could go anywhere right now, where would it be? California.

What's the best part of your job? My Grounds Team and the people I interact and work with every day.

... and the worst? Having to repeat myself continually to grown adults.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? Buy, fix and sell American classic cars for a living.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Stanley Road, Paul Weller; Guardians of the Galaxy Movie Soundtrack and The Essential, Van Morrison.

Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with? Kelly Brook.

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do? Phone Kelly Brook.

What would you consign to Room 101 and why? Snowflakes. Sense of entitlement agitates me; they have too much to say about things they don't know enough about.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Burt Reynolds, Steve McQueen and Dean Martin.

If you could be anyone for a day, who would it be and why? I would have said Donald Trump to see what I can get away with. However, I think someone else is already



being him for a day. And it's clearly a long queue.

Do you have any bad habits? Several, but none that can be published.

... or any good ones? Erm ... nope.

Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload? Not for the last two and a half years. Sleep like log now.

What are you reading at the moment? - Hard copy or online? James Patterson, Liar Liar. I always read real books, no notifications or beeps.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Never compromise your standards.

What's your favourite smell? My own farts. Isn't that everyone's?

What do you do in your spare time? Spend as much time as possible with my kids and my partner Amy. Working on classic cars.

What's the daftest work related question you have ever been asked? Why is the golf course closed for being too wet? The roads on the way here were fine!!!

What's your favourite piece of kit? If I must pick just one, it's the Toro 648. Any bit of kit is only as good as the person using it.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Considerate, driven, personable.

What talent would you like to have? Play any musical instrument or sing.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Politicians to wear a device that gives them an electric shock when they lie. Would keep them warm in the winter. Not all bad I suppose.



Charterhouse Verti-Brush in action

power the collegiate had and missed out! QE are not loyal to one manufacturer. Ben insisted that the machinery should be site specific, needed to be robust, user friendly, and had longevity. All of the machines perform well but, as Ben says: "Outstanding results are due to staff diligence!" Servicing is carried out in-house or by Russell's.

On the question of a machinery wish list, Ben smiles and says: "This may sound corny but my wish list was met when we started!"

Pests and Diseases

All pest and weed control is carried out in house, with worm control probably being the main issue. QE do suffer with rabbits, but they are kept under control and they are not a particular nuisance at present. Canada geese visit and as Ben says; "No real problem with the actual birds, it's their droppings!"

Ecology and Environment

Local fauna and flora is important to Ben and the whole estate. All is well managed and encouraged. I could not help noticing the vast planting of colourful Primulas around the site. When I mentioned this to Mark, he told me that they plant 20,000 bedding plants twice a year!

The collegiate has a strong environmental policy in place throughout all departments and does work with local agencies and the Environmental Agency. There is an environmental consultant for each department. Recycling is a given!

With ecology and the environment in mind, and apart from the bedding plants programme, there can be seen rainwater harvesting and water saving initiatives (through the drainage system and into the irrigation facility and with a dedicated machinery wash-off). Composting is carried out on site and the estate features a special sewage plant. Bird boxes too are evident.

About Our Industry

Ben believes that our industry has advanced much in the last ten to fifteen years, with technology now to the forefront. He is pleased to see that a number of prominent grounds managers have succeeded in putting a spotlight on the industry! As to being undervalued, Ben has no complaints at QE, but does recognise that that is not the case everywhere. He feels that the situation is improving, but adds: "You have to put your case forward!"



What's in the shed?

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- Toro 1000 Greensmaster
- Kubota Pro mowers x 4
- Powerroll
- Dennis G860 cylinder mowers x 2
- Stihl backpack blowers x 3
- Hand blower
- Stihl brushcutters x 2
- Billy Goat vacuum
- Toro SR72 ProCore
- Toro 648 ProCore
- Sisis Quadraplay
- Sisis Rotorake 1000
- Charterhouse Verti-Brush
- Imants Sandcat
- Raycam seeder
- Imants Shockwave
- GKB broadcast topdresser
- Amazone Smartcut Scarifier
- Charterhouse Verti-Top
- Kubota trailers x 2
- Classen turfcutter
- Hardi 400I sprayer
- Bobcat loader
- Hand tools, linemarkers, fertiliser spreaders etc.

To raise our profile in the industry and beyond, Ben says that youngsters must be encouraged, in the best environment and with the best training. A more positive environment would be achieved by not keep trying to protect your job but doing a good job!

As we wound up, Ben's closing statement was; "The most important thing here is my boys! The department is what they make it.

Relationships with other departments is important and there is a great atmosphere." I could not agree more!



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Holmewood House School

Unashamedly sporting

This non-selective boarding and day school for boys and girls aged 3-13, set in thirty-two delightfully green acres on the southern fringe of Kent's famous spa town Tunbridge Wells, aims for 100 percent pupil participation in sport, regardless of ability. Neville Johnson went there to meet **David Tankard**, the man in charge of grounds maintenance

When Queen Victoria came to the throne, Holmewood House was the home of her physician and gynaecologist Sir Charles Locock. From 1850 until the 1930s, it was the country home of the wealthy Barrow family, but immediately after the war its life as a school began with just eight pupils, all boys. In 1989, it began to introduce girl pupils and went fully co-educational in the 1990s. Now, there are over 450 boys and girls there.

Holmewood House School has outstanding facilities, including a 360-seat theatre, a purpose-built music school, a sports hall, a TigerTurf all-weather hockey pitch with 300-metre athletics track, squash courts and a 25-metre, six lane indoor

swimming pool. Post-war rationing affected lunches and footballs with hand-sewn seams are hard to imagine as I'm welcomed by Head Groundsman David Tankard, signed in at the school reception and ID'd with a lanyard. Everything is relaxed and homely, yet utterly professional.

We walk to David's office with cuppa brewed in the teaching staffroom, then chat about his life as a groundsman and pitch care at Holmewood House.

He says he actually worked at the school, as a gap student, back in 1995-6 whilst taking a year out between A levels and going to Brunel University. His aim then was to go into teaching, but course changes altered that and, before making a fresh career choice, he spent a summer working



with the greens team at Crowborough Beacon Golf Club, thanks to family connections there. In his words, he fell in love with the work, and his working life began to take shape.

After a couple of years working on grounds run by Crowborough Town Council, he was head hunted for a position at the Nevill Ground in Tunbridge Wells where he stayed for thirteen years, nine of them in charge at this Kent CCC outground. During his time at the Nevill, he studied groundsmanship by day-release at Hadlow College and achieved NVQ Level 2.

It was 2015 - nearly twenty years after his thoughts of going into teaching - that did see him move into the world of education. At the very start of that cricket season,

Tonbridge School had hired the Nevill for a couple of matches. It was a pivotal event for David.

"One of the Holmewood House teachers, whose son was playing for Tonbridge, told me that the school needed someone to take over as head groundsman," he said.

"I applied for the post and, within a couple of weeks, I took up the appointment."

"After many years in the capable hands of a head groundsman who had retired, a contractor had been given the job of looking after the school's pitches. It would be true to say that the standards had dropped as a consequence and, when I started here, it was clear that a lot of work was needed to improve things."

David has now been at Holmewood



David Tankard, Head Groundsman at Holmewood House School

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After many years in the capable hands of a head groundsman who had retired, a contractor had been given the job of looking after the school's pitches. It would be true to say that the standards had dropped as a consequence

House for what he describes as four very happy years.

He is an unashamed sports fan. He loves football, and admits to being torn between Brighton and Hove Albion and Manchester United and, when younger, played cricket and hockey until knee surgery ruled them out. These days, he is golfer when time allows. It is quickly apparent that having a part to play in the sporting life at Holmewood House clearly fires him.

As we talk about the impending cricket season, and our shared love of the game, he utters an unmatched name-drop. When he was a border at Radley, he was in the same year group as former England Captain Andrew Strauss, he tells me.

Working with David at the school are his assistant Ian Hindley and Fiona Gillman, who looks after all of the gardens and everything ornamental. David works under its Estates Manager Anita Randall.

David and Fiona start work at 7.30am and the first essential job every day, rain or shine, is to clear the whole site of any debris using back-pack blowers.

On most days, Ian starts at 8.00am, but has the job at the end of the school day of acting as 'lollipop man' at the crossings on the school's roadway. It is part of the grounds team remit and they will each don the high viz jackets if needs be to man the crossing between 3.20-3.50pm and 4.15-5.00pm each day.

Daily at 8.30am, they meet together to discuss the jobs for the day and any issues that require their attention.

David will only use outside contractors for work where specialist equipment or additional labour is required. All seasonal spraying work, for instance, is carried out for him by Lamberhurst-based firm Weed Management, and this is always conducted during school holidays to ensure absolute safety.

As far as the artificial surface hockey pitch is concerned, David and Ian handle the routine brush upkeep, but specialist



The school's artificial surface hockey pitches and running track

contractor Spadeoak comes in twice a year to do a deep-clean renovation.

"It takes a day and they do an excellent job," said David.

One major project is in the offing; that of a complete renovation of the main rugby and football pitch. David has engaged Bourne Sport to do this for him and the contractor is due on site for the main work as soon as the summer holiday starts. Some of the verti-

draining will have been conducted during the Easter break and, after further such aeration in early July, the overhaul will include the spreading of a hundred tonnes of sand, ahead of topdressing and reseeding.

"It has been three or four years since it has received major attention," said David.

"This is our principal winter games pitch and the only section of our turfed grounds

with drainage. It will be vastly improved by this work and, after eight or nine weeks specialist attention, it will be ready for the new season at the beginning of the autumn term."

At Holmewood House, for boys it's football first until the late October half-term, then rugby until three weeks into the spring term. After that, it's hockey, and then cricket in the summer term. For girls, it's hockey

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David heavy rolling the main cricket square

during the autumn term, then netball in spring, and now a mixture of rounders and cricket in summer. David describes the rapidity of changeover as challenging.

In David's care over the autumn and spring terms are two under-13 size and seven or eight under-10 size football pitches. For rugby, there is one under-13 pitch, two under-12, two under-10, two under-9, and three under-8. For hockey, there are a full-size and two half-size pitches on the all-weather area, and one half-size turf pitch. In the summer term, much of the grassed area accommodates cricket outfield for which there are two main squares and a smaller two-wicket square, plus eight prepared quick cricket strips around the site and six rounders pitches.

"All of our pitches are used pretty well all of the time," said David.

Underlying soil conditions are very heavy clay and there are big drainage issues. Only the main rugby pitch, about to be renovated by Bourne, has any drainage. The rest rely on whatever spiking and slitting David and Ian are themselves able to do.

When it's belting down with rain, David's heart sinks because heavy pitches and surface water will surely follow.

The school takes huge pride in all its sport. There has, however, been a noticeable push for rugby since the new headmaster Scott Carnochan took up the reins in September 2017. The fact he was once at junior international for Scotland may have something to do with this.

Total pupil participation in sport is unashamedly the school's philosophy. Each child, regardless of ability, is encouraged to enjoy games sessions. All of them are

encouraged to experience matches and controlled competition. Skilled and experienced sports staff help develop knowledge and skills and instill a love and passion for a variety of sports from nursery age to year-8.

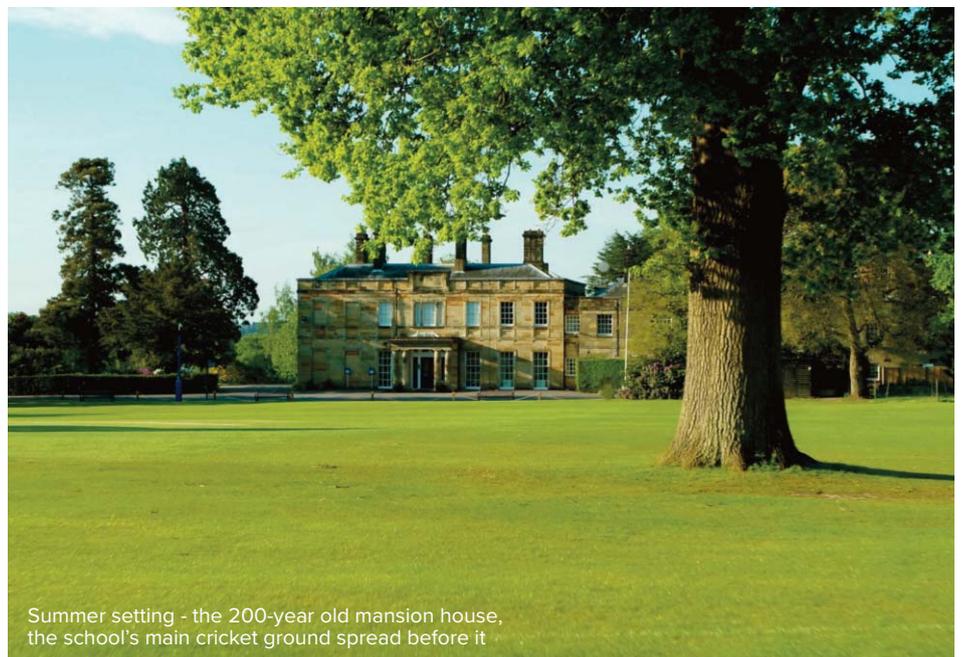
"Sport is a very important part of school life at Holmewood House for every one of the pupils, not just for those that excel," said David.

"Wear and tear on the pitches is massive all year round. There is no respite, but we love our role."

"Working in an environment with very young children does sometimes pose difficulties, but their welfare and safety always comes first and we are mindful of this every single day. I never use granular fertiliser, for instance, anywhere other than on the main cricket square."



Sport is a very important part of school life at Holmewood House for every one of the pupils, not just for those that excel



Summer setting - the 200-year old mansion house, the school's main cricket ground spread before it



The under-13s first 15

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Working in an environment with very young children does sometimes pose difficulties, but their welfare and safety always comes first and we are mindful of this every single day

Depending on the time of year and outdoor conditions, break times are often spent on all grassed areas, and liaison between teaching staff and the grounds team is crucial. David and his team have to know where the children are going to be at all times, so they can regulate the use of machinery. To this end, there is a weekly

operations meeting involving heads of department and key support staff.

As we speak, at the end of March, it is very much crossover time in terms of school sport and pitches. David has less than five weeks to convert winter games surfaces into cricket outfield. The main first-eleven cricket ground still has two junior football

pitches on its outfield, but Ian Hindley is busy cutting ready for summer term action.

David is in the process of gradually reducing grass height everywhere from its 35-50mm winter levels to 12-15mm ready for summer sports.

"Height and density have not been what it often is at this time of year because it has

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Ian Hindley cutting the soon-to-be cricket outfield

been unusually dry," he said.

"For me, twice weekly outfield cutting is the best of jobs. Apart from the satisfaction of producing a neat and lush playing area, it gives me time to think and plan without distraction."

"We'll soon be spiking and slitting in two directions ready for overseeding, and these are 'must do' tasks ahead of summer term."

David uses a tow-behind seeder and will be overseeding with Barenbrug Multisport mix, a new choice this year to infill some of the bare outfield areas; elsewhere he plans to use a new variety with creeping ryegrass he was keen to try on other worn areas.

He had also set about pre-season rolling of the main cricket square. It's a sign that summer is just around the corner.

David lists Avoncrop, Vitax and Supaturf as regular suppliers of materials. For sports equipment, like posts, nets and flags, he uses Kent firm Bob Woolmer Sales, which is an interesting past connection with the

school because the late Kent and England all-rounder and Pakistan coach once coached cricket here.

David says they are about to get involved in a project in association with Brogdale, the home of the National Fruit Collection at Faversham in Kent. The plan is to give over an area of the grounds to regionalised fruit trees as an educational aid to pupils, encouraging them to learn about nurturing and harvesting.

The grounds team's environmental remit already includes the upkeep of a wild meadow area where beehives produce the school's own honey. A pond renovation project is also looming for them, so there's never going to be a dull moment for David and his small team.



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Epsom Downs Racecourse

Derby dreams dominate at Epsom



The grandstand was renewed in 2008, with minimal use of the course during this time pinpointed as a possible cause of chæfer grub invasion

Home to the Investec Derby, and synonymous with Flat racing for even the most casual follower of the sport, Epsom Downs is used to being in the news. But last year it hit the headlines for the wrong reasons when its September meeting was abandoned at the 11th hour due to an infestation of chafer grubs causing unsafe footing. Jane Carley reports

The circumstances which led to the chafer grub issue and how the grounds team tackled it are rooted in the nature and origins of this unique course.

"If you were planning a racecourse on this site now, people would think you were mad and it would never be approved," observes Jockey Club Regional Estates Manager Craig Williamson, pointing out the swooping downhill Tattenham Corner and the sharp camber to the inside rail approaching the finishing line of the Derby, recently recognised officially as the leading three year-old race in the world.

Racing began at Epsom in the 1640s but, after the sport was banned under Oliver

Cromwell's Commonwealth in 1649, the first recorded meeting in England took place in the town on 7th March 1661.

Race meetings became a regular fixture on the Epsom Downs in May and October from 1730, with the Derby first run in 1780, a year after the first Oaks for fillies.

The course follows the undulations of 600 acres of chalk downland, which are protected in legislation - the Epsom and Walton Downs Regulation Act of 1984, updated from its 1936 predecessor. The act gives the general public right of access for 'air and exercise' on foot across the downs, although racehorse training has priority over other users before midday.

Conservators manage the downs via





Clerk of the Course Andrew Cooper and Regional Estates Manager Craig Williamson



Epsom's distinctive features include a sharp camber to the winning post



The Derby start, with a climb equal to the height of Nelson's Column in the first half mile. Undulations are one factor which make the turf prone to damage from horses' hooves

Downskeepers, who work to protect the habitats provided by the chalk grassland in cooperation with Jockey Club Racecourses, which manages Epsom Downs Racecourse.

One stipulation is that there should be no more than sixteen meetings per year, and the fixture list currently stands at eleven.

"Everything we do is geared towards the Derby, and it is the climax of the year," explains Clerk of the Course Andrew Cooper, "Although we have a meeting before it in April, and a very successful series of summer evenings before the season draws to a close in September."

Andrew and Craig also oversee nearby Sandown Park, which hosts National Hunt racing in winter and flat racing in summer, and the workload largely dovetails neatly.

"The main jumps season at Sandown finishes in March - although we have a meeting which

is mixed jumps and flat at the end of April - and then the focus switches to Epsom," says Craig.

Sandy loam soil - as shallow as a few inches in places - over chalk subsoil makes for a free draining course, but Craig comments that the surface is highly prone to damage, not least because of its undulations, with the Derby course rising the height of Nelson's Column in the first half mile.

"The course damages quite readily and we do ask a lot of it in a short space of time, so keeping the turf healthy is key."

Whereas in the 1960s the surface was un-irrigated and all meetings were run across the full 30m width of the course, modern racing requires better turf husbandry, explains Andrew, and the profile of the Investec Derby demands the highest standards of all.

It is a race which has seen plenty of change - traditionally, the



Tattenham Corner has a sharp downhill bend, one of the features which makes the Derby a unique test for three year-old racehorses



Most of the turf in the parade ring is laid temporarily on a brick surface for the racing season; it is used for parking at other times of year



Close co-operation is required with the local authority, which maintains the Downs, used for public viewing on Derby day

Derby was held on the first Wednesday in June and the meeting continued until Saturday. In the early 1990s, it fell slightly from grace, with overseas trainers targeting other prestigious international prizes.

New sponsorship from Vodafone in 1995 saw the first Saturday Derby as the centrepiece of a three-day festival and, eventually, the Sunday was dropped, allowing the focus to be on presenting the optimum ground conditions for Friday's Oaks and Coronation Cup and the Derby itself.

"A number of injuries to horses on the Flat in general were being attributed to firm ground," comments Andrew, "There was a

concern that, if a promising and potentially highly valuable horse was injured in the Derby, he could be out for the rest of the season. In conjunction with the then head groundsman Nigel Thornton, we planned to ensure our ground was as safe as possible. The goal was to run the 1996 Derby on ground no quicker than good to firm, which remains our mantra to this day."

With the potential for 30°C plus temperatures in early June, instigating a positive irrigation programme was key and, over the years, the system has been gradually upgraded to the present three Briggs booms supported by tow lines and an updated ring main.

Andrew points out that irrigation is still contentious at times, but the improved ground conditions and a drive by the all-conquering Coolmore breeding organisation in Ireland to win this unique test of a three year-old colt revitalised the race. Its influence continues - Coolmore's 2001 winner Galileo became one of the most successful sires of his generation fathering three Derby winners, and victorious horses are now valued in six figures.

It's a constant challenge to present that optimum going, however, as Craig acknowledges. "You can think you have put too much on, but it's easy to underestimate how quickly the ground dries. The going can



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A grubby problem ...



Chafer grub populations were measured at 200 larvae/sqm on the worst affected area in 2018

Chafer grubs were first observed on the track at Epsom in 2008, and their impact felt in 2009. The building of a new grandstand meant that the course was only used for the Derby meeting for two years, and the limited programme seemingly allowed the grubs to become more established, including on the neighbouring golf course.

"In 2009, we returned to a full season of racing and, in September, we had to abandon two five furlong races due to unstable ground in the chute from the chafer grubs' activity, although we held the rest of the meeting," explains Andrew.

Pesticide treatments seemed to tackle the problem, although one race had to be swapped for another of a different distance in 2010, and there were no further issues until 2018, when the early September meeting was abandoned.

"From 2009 to 2016 we had the insecticide Merit at our disposal; however, we could only treat the track, so the downs were alive with chafer grubs. We monitored them through 2017 - you don't need traps for that as there are so many, and they are visible at the Derby meeting."

"The ground issues in September 2018 were identified on the Monday and we were due to race on Thursday, and there just wasn't the time to address it," explains Craig. "We were able to hold our final meeting by adjusting the programme to avoid the area."

Acelepryn had been used after Merit was withdrawn, and Craig comments that the label recommendations were followed to the letter.

"We used a good contractor, in the correct spray window and watered it in, and on 80% of the track it was 100% effective. The main issue is that it's a relatively new

technology and it's hard to get the active ingredient into racecourse turf, which is 10cm thick."

Two furlongs in the back straight were badly damaged with the turf becoming unstable and, when it was peeled back, 200 grubs/sqm were discovered in the treated area, compared with the expected 1-2 grubs/sqm.

"Acelepryn can only be applied once in a year, but I'm confident that it is an effective product in general. The difficulty is that the damage is hard to spot on racecourse turf; because it is watered so much, it doesn't die back or show stress symptoms. There wasn't even any badger or bird damage."

Craig is working with manufacturer, Syngenta, to improve the product's effectiveness on racecourse turf, but he believes that feeding and watering to keep the turf healthy and strong may be the best defence.

"We're looking at how to get Acelepryn into the soil profile, the use of water and wetting agents and timings. Syngenta also helped to confirm the type of chafer grub - they are predominantly Garden Chafer which have a one-year life cycle and should be easier to treat than the Cockchafer with a three-year life cycle."

Pheromone traps are also being deployed to help catch and move the insects from vulnerable areas, as well as highlight the worst affected areas.



Damage between the running rail and lawns



Deputy head groundsman Chris Youngs begins the mowing process with a Ransomes 493 ride-on

change from the soft side of good to the fast side of good in a day. The only answer is to start irrigating early and keep the moisture in the soil profile, putting on 2-3mm/day."

Watering also has to take into account the surroundings - avoiding the impact of irrigator noise on horses in training, and not disturbing those frequenting the public house at the end of the home straight, so often takes place at night.

"We're mains fed, having been unable to gain permission for a borehole, and whilst we've never been short of water, there is ongoing concern that, during a drought order, it might be restricted," comments Andrew.

And it doesn't help that, whilst the soils are consistent, Espom's weather is highly localised; to the extent that when the legendary filly Enable passed the post in the Oaks in a downpour in 2017, it was dry at the stables!

"We had trainers phoning asking if the going had changed to soft, but we started the Derby the following day on good ground," Craig recalls.

The mild 2018-19 winter has left the course in good condition, with the turf getting away well during the unseasonal February temperatures.

"Putting it to bed properly at the end of the season is essential - I use Seavolution and iron in autumn, and again in spring to harden off the turf," he explains

Granular fertiliser is used throughout the season, including Marathon and then Blaukorn to help the turf peak for the Derby.



Turf damage on the course due to the activity of chafer grubs in September 2018, making the surface unstable and thus unsafe for racing



The public have constant access to the Downs for air and exercise, including equines!



A Wiedenmann Terraspikes XF provides effective aeration with minimal heave, giving a gentle action and avoids the risk of pulling up the underlying chalk on shallow soils

The shallow soils are testing to renovate - deep aerators could pull the chalk up, so can't be used.

"We have a slitter, but after using a Wiedenmann at Sandown I decided to try it here. We know the soil profile on the track and I've got some very good operators who are aware exactly what depths they can work to. The Wiedenmann XF can be set with minimum heave, so it's kinder to the turf than a slitter."

Away from the track, turf work is minimal - the Downskeepers prepare the downs, which form the free-to-enter public areas for the Investec Derby, and lawns are compact in size.

The parade ring has its own secret; apart from a small permanent lozenge of turf at the centre, the rest is hard standing parking for most of the year. Turf is laid straight onto the bricks at the start of the season and is fed and watered liberally to keep it green.

"We first started using this method in 1996. Before that, the horses walked onto the bricks, and I felt that temporary turf was safer!" says Andrew.

With seven road crossings on the track, it is effectively a series of separate grass

areas, so mowing is handled by a Ransomes 493 ride-on, which has not only proved more manoeuvrable, but incorporates three castor wheels on each deck, keeping them level for a high quality cut.

"We can be mowing three times a week in the season," says deputy head groundsman Chris Youngs, "but the Ransomes seems to have less impact on the turf with wheel marks than its predecessor, and the finish is much more even."

The Duralock rail is moved out for the early meetings and the last mile is finally moved back on the Friday night after the Oaks, ready for the Derby the next day, when twenty runners can span across the track.

"Regardless of the conditions, we can always present fresh ground for the main part of the Derby," Craig comments.

There are five full time groundsman at Epsom, who also do duty at Sandown.

"The two courses are so close it's easy to share staff, and it's also good for their development. They might experience building jumps at Sandown, for example, which they would not get chance to do here," comments Andrew.

The multiple narrow crossings mean that transporting equipment around requires a trip out onto the busy surrounding roads with tractors and trailers; the stables are also some distance from the parade ring, so moving horses before and after each race is a complex process. One road crossing on the 5f chute can only be closed for two hours on race days, so it's a sprint to put mats out and dig them in before reversing the process after the race. All part of Epsom's quirks which provide a unique working environment for a groundsman.

As we go to press, the public continue to enjoy their 'air and exercise' on the Downs although, as Craig points out, they are remarkably respectful of the track itself, seemingly unaware of the air of anticipation building as the team prepare one of the world's most famous racecourses for its day in the spotlight. On 1st June, another Investec Derby champion will be crowned and another racing legend will begin.



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Warner Leisure

Holme is where Mike's heart is

Set in fifty acres of gardens in the Wye Valley, Holme Lacy is one of Herefordshire's treasures and a hotspot for visitors all year round. Garden supervisor, **Mike West** has spent a generation steering the gardens to their award-winning status. Greg Rhodes reports



Yes, we're thrilled to have been awarded the RHS and Heart of England in Bloom Gold Award," says Mike, "but we'll be hoping for more, of course, as we never stop trying to excel in what we do



Warner Leisure runs fourteen widely differing destinations, from modern coastal resorts dotted along the south and east coasts to centuries-old architecturally important properties once graced by royalty.

Offering year-round entertainment indoors and out for mainly forty plus somethings (Warner's TV advertising is clear on its 'only adults' policy), the operator runs a bustling programme of musical acts and comedians - stars of their day and major draws currently.

Set in stunning countryside, the heritage properties themselves sit in stately gardens. Warner has raised to the former grandeur of earlier times as it bids to present guests with

the complete staycation experience.

The Grade 1 listed mansion was completed in 1674 and reportedly visited by Charles II and by Prime Minister William Pitt, who held cabinet meetings in the gardens.

Holme Lacy has attracted a diverse spread of owners since its birth. The Seudamore-Stanhope family who made Holme Lacy their home in the 1820s, transformed the gardens' looks and layout, introducing Monkey Puzzle trees from Chile and Californian Sequoias, along with rhododendron varieties that include the "dreaded" Ponticum, the late-flowering

purple peril that can prove so invasive, whilst impressive magnolia grandiflora specimens thrive in the orangery.

The estate passed to Australian entrepreneur Lucas Tooth, before the Wills cigarette family acquired it in the 1920s, who bequeathed it to Herefordshire council. It also saw duty as a recuperation hospital for the war wounded and a mental institution.

Today, Holme Lacy regales guests with archery, crossbows, tennis, bowls and



croquet amid both formal and landscaped settings that Mike and the four-strong grounds team tend.

After his apprenticeship in horticulture and commercial experience in a large nursery, Herefordshire born and raised Mike West (63) moved to the county council's parks department before spotting an advertisement for the head gardener's position at Holme Lacy.

"That was in 1994, when the Rank Organisation owned the property, one of the most important 17th century houses in the county, before selling it to Warner in the early 2000s," Mike recalls.

"I started in September 1995, as a £6.5m construction programme began on the house and gardens, including upgrading the existing pool, creating a leisure club with gym, Jacuzzi, steam room and restoring the orangery."

Six years later, Mike set up the gardening team at the then newly acquired Thoresby Hall in Nottinghamshire, another of Warner's heritage sites. "Each property has differing

acreages, with differing demands," he explains. "The grounds teams meet twice a year to discuss their plans for the year and to swap ideas - time well spent I think."

Mike saw his own team disperse over time and, in 2013, he moved to a supervisor's post at Holme Lacy.

In looking after allocation of resources across the estate, Mike reports to maintenance and grounds manager Simon Farley-Higgs, who will pass proposals for new machinery and equipment and other capex projects valued over a certain threshold to Warner's Hemel Hempstead head office.

"The basic structure of the gardens was still in place when I came here. The grounds include nearly a mile of yew hedging, between 200 and 300 years old, mentioned in horticultural books as unique in the country. Lawns and paths were overgrown. As the gardens are Grade 2 listed, we have to be extremely cautious and careful about managing them and the fertilisers and chemicals we apply."



It's a suntrap on the south side and attracts up to fifty guests daily round the year, so it can become heavily compacted and encourage moss





We try to spread colour throughout the year as Holme Lacy is always open for guests. Palmatums and Japanese maples create a splash of colour

The sandstone and loamy soil is ideal for working down and preparing beds but it can lose moisture quickly, Mike notes. "The huge quantity of leaves, clippings and cuttings we generate is composted to be applied leaf mould and manure across the gardens, parterre boxes and hedges. The expansive root system of the yew hedging sucks up nutrients phenomenally so keeping it fed is a priority."

The outlook for guests gazing out from the

south side of the mansion has been further improved recently, Mike explains. "The grounds of Holme Lacy horticultural college border ours. They are keen to maintain and improve their own environment and improve wildlife diversity, so have restored their parkland to its 17th century origins, when lime, oak, fir and beech predominated. Their work has opened up the views to the lake and beyond dramatically."

Speaking of the lake, the 2.5 acre

expanse is home to some prize-winning carp - guests have landed specimens weighing up to 18lb, Mike reports - as well as perch and tench but "where there are fish, you'll find herons".

Team member Martin Williams, 34, arrived from Kenchester Water Gardens two and half years ago. "His company renovated our formal ponds in 1995, we had a strong connection with the company," Mike explains.



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Garden Supervisor, Mike West

“It was clear at the interview that Martin was keen and willing to learn, so since taking up the post he’s been training up on machinery maintenance, planning and ordering the season’s plantings. I suppose you could say I’ve taken him under my wing until the time comes for me to retire.”

Old copies of Country Life magazine dating back to the 1860s record Holme Lacy’s collection of pear trees – still lusty and fruiting today. Their care is in the capable hands of team member Louise

Hodgkinson, who joined last autumn and works on site three days a week.

“Having gained experience with a fruit growing enterprise in the region, Louise can put her pruning skills into practice, to keep this nationally important collection in prime condition, carefully training the trees against our walled garden.”

She’s actively involved in the planting process too, selecting plants for the orangery and house and choosing the ranges of bedding plants the team grows on



in their two greenhouses and polytunnels before planting out at the end of May to early June.

“Dahlias and canna lilies are the summer showpieces,” Mike says, “but we try to spread colour throughout the year as Holme Lacy is always open for guests. Palmatums (Dogwoods) and Japanese maples create a splash of colour for them to enjoy.”

Louise brings “a different thought dimension” to the team, Mike adds. “She’s forward-thinking and adds a fresh perspective, is very hands-one - mows and strims - and has introduced an effective plant-labelling system.”

Andrew Dodwell returned to Holme Lacy five years ago to work outside, following his earlier spell indoors, focusing on house maintenance. “He’s adept at mending machinery,” says Mike, “and does a fair bit of tractor mowing and hedge trimming. The trimming programme usually runs from the end of September to early November, but this winter has been so mild, we were still on the case until early March.”

The yew hedges are particularly challenging for the team. “Some of them



Warner is hot on using PPE and we are trained to be alert to danger at all times, as guests can suddenly appear from nowhere whilst you’re working





Wherever possible, it's important to limit application of chemicals, but you can't avoid using them to some extent

are high so we have to bring in a couple of specialised cherry-pickers then move to scaffolding to complete the job.

For a public site attracting many thousands of guests annually, health and safety is "massive", Mike states. "We erect plenty of signage and warning tape to alert guests to non-accessible areas. Time management is critical for us and we are keen to complete a huge task as quickly and efficiently as we can. But you have

to remember that guests are on holiday and they like to ask questions about what we do, so you have to be friendly and approachable. We encourage guests to give feedback about their experience with us. They'll report favourably on a helpful grounds team."

In this guest-rich environment, Mike is conscious of the interest the turfcare machinery and equipment generates. "Feedback tells us that guests like to know

about the kit and to see it in action," he says. "Each Warner garden selects its own kit. Most of our major pieces are John Deere. The local dealer is in regular contact and the back-up and parts service is good and reliable."

"Our 2653 triple mower is the workhorse - it's eleven years old but still going strong. Both our compact tractors have mid-mounted decks - 2036 was new last year and backs up the 2025 we bought ten years ago.



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Time management is critical for us and we are keen to complete a huge task as quickly and efficiently as we can

The team aren't tripling all year round though and work round periods of heavy guest traffic in the gardens. "We bring out the 2653 around mid-March and cut down to two or three inches on the large grassed areas and give a higher clearance in winter. Backlapping we do in-house and avoid regrinding as far as possible to trim costs. In any case, the 2653 is only used about 100 hours a season. The Dennis FT 551 walkbehinds, "with all the accessories", keep the grassed areas controlled in the formal gardens."

The 18-hole putting green, Mike's brainchild, along with the croquet lawn, is the most intensively used sports facility on

site. "It's a suntrap on the south side and attracts up to fifty guests daily round the year, so it can become heavily compacted and encourage moss. The Verticutter and Sarel spiking roller come in handy then. They can be changed over in a couple of minutes. The Groundsman Aerator hollow cores the surfaces too.

Moss has proved an issue and Mike brought in contractors to apply selective herbicide and prepare and reseed the surfaces.

Top of the shop is the 30in Atco Royal. "The machine's 23 years old now and working well, with new bottom blade. Some guests recognise it and want to know how we keep it in such great condition."

The Honda HRH Pro mower with roller is also used regularly across the sports surfaces as are the two hydrostatic units. "Bought in 2001, regular servicing and replacement of filter plugs and blades keeps them fully functioning."

"Before fertilising, we bring out our SISIS spiker roller and the chisel slitter over winter. We've introduced iron to control moss in selected areas. We buy in one tonne bags of topdressing to apply across the sports areas, but limit overseeding on the putting greens because grass cannot establish itself due to heavy footfall."

Although turf machinery is diesel-based, hand tools such as Holme Lacy's Stihl trimmers and hedgecutters are increasing electrically powered. "We're moving over to batteries as that's more environmentally friendly - no fumes and quieter."

Under the continuing programme to upgrade the formal areas surrounding the main house, the team are renovating the two formal ponds. "The butyl liners laid by Kenchester in the mid '90s to replace the cracked concrete bases are remaining in place," says Mike. "Although they have a 20-year lifetime, they are costly to replace so we'll soldier on with them for now as they are still in good condition."

Gravel pathways criss-crossing the grounds need constant attention, if only to ensure the safety of guests. Spot spraying

Other Warner gems:

Littlecote House, Hungerford, Berkshire

Grade 1 listed Tudor manor house built in the mid-1500s.

Henry V111 courted Jane Seymour here and the D-Day landings were planned within the house, which contains the only surviving Cromwellian chapel in private hands.

Magnificent 17th and 18th century walled gardens - with extensive lawns and herbaceous borders - which contain an ornate Roman mosaic floor and settlement remains.





Thoresby Hall

with Roundup herbicide does the job, says Mike. “Martin’s just finished that task for the time being. Wherever possible, it’s important to limit application of chemicals, but you can’t avoid using them to some extent.”

Formal gardens and parterre surrounding the main house have been restored to their original design by improving and landscaping existing lawns, planting fresh beds and 800 yews and 2,500 box shrubs - opening up views of the mansion from the lake.

The team’s sterling work has not gone unnoticed. Last year, it won the coveted RHS and Heart of England in Bloom Gold Award. “Yes, we’re thrilled to have been awarded

that,” says Mike, “but we’ll be hoping for more, of course, as we never stop trying to excel in what we do.”

“With Martin and Louise taking their chainsaw certifications, the team continues to broaden its skills base and health and safety is particularly important, for guests and for us.”

“Warner is hot on using PPE and we are trained to be alert to danger at all times, as guests can suddenly appear from nowhere whilst you’re working. The company’s health and safety officer visits regularly to check on trip hazards.”

The large signature trees peppering the grounds have to be health checked

//

The huge quantity of leaves, clippings and cuttings we generate is composted to be applied leaf mould and manure across the gardens, parterre boxes and hedges

periodically and necessary remedial work undertaken. “This is Simon’s area. He brings in a local tree surgeon to look over the big limes, yews, coastal redwoods and oaks. One old copper beech, going back to the 1800s, needed priority work to remove dead material. Trees are scanned to create a pictograph that shows up the state of the tree inside.”

As hawks wheel overhead and the treecreepers and nuthatches scurry along the tree trunks, overdubbed with the seasonal rapping of woodpeckers in the distance, Holme Lacy offers a wildlife haven for those here to soak up history, horticultural prowess and some gentle sporting pursuit.

Many may seldom, if ever, realise the unending process of groundcare underway through the seasons to ensure this remains one of Warner Leisure’s most hypnotic destinations.

As Mike sums up: “When the frost and snow descend, it can all look quite magical.”



Putting green at Thoresby Hall



Life at Nidd Hall

At characterful Nidd Hall, it's a tale of two homecomings for head gardener Harvey Parnaby and his boss, maintenance manager Gary Taylor.

Positioned in picturesque North Yorkshire country between Harrogate and Ripon, the 18th century pile was built by a wealthy Bradford wool merchant. Sporting a 'pot pourri of architectural styles', the country seat is rumoured to have been the place where Edward VIII in waiting met Wallis Simpson.

"I first worked here twenty-three years ago," says Gary, "leaving as Head Gardener, then returning two and half years ago after moving into maintenance."

Harvey and his team of four report to Gary, who has the say on how the 45 acres of award-winning gardens shape up. "At our weekly meetings, we walk the grounds and Harvey tells me his ideas and the money he wants to put them in practice. I don't always give him what he wants though," Gary smiles.

The gardens present a mix of the formal and informal, including a three-acre wood and two-acre lake, replete with fish for guests to try their hand at catching.

Sporting facilities include double tarmac tennis courts and outdoor synthetic turf bowling green, one of very few Warner sites boasting one.

"We have a small beach in the grounds too," Gary reveals. Harrogate-by-Sea? "No but plenty of sand and deck chairs. It's fenced off to prevent animals doing their worst."

Among a fine selection of trees are numbered specimen oaks and some old sweet chestnuts, as well as mixed conifers. Gary has just committed funds to an assessment of Nidd's arboricultural needs. "A tree surgeon is arriving soon to check what needs doing, particularly overhanging branches and dead wood. As a public site, everything is done on a risk basis, with buildings, pathways and car park the priority areas."

The gardens go back a century, a time when the Edwardians loved nothing better than taking their constitutionals among bracing North Yorkshire country air among manicured borders and beds, exotic trees and shrubs from around the world, brought here by pioneering plantsmen.



Going back twenty years or more, the once grand layout had fallen into disrepair and neglect, but the years since have seen a dedicated team restoring them to their former glory.

"When I first came to Nidd Hall, the gardens they in a sorry state," Gary reflects. We were haymaking the grassed areas they were so wild. It's been a twenty-year-plus project to restore them."

All that hard work has paid off - Nidd Hall lifting the Yorkshire in Bloom Gold Award for the last three years.

The terrace, parterre and formal beds clustered around the hotel are the jewels in the crown, with prime roses and colourful bedding plants a delight on the eye, Gary explains.

"The 'Bloom' awards are judged partly on developments planned. "In our case, these involve overhauling the parterre and revitalising the old box hedging."

"Harvey conducts hour-long tours twice a week for guests, taking in the Japanese garden, another draw for visitors," Gary says. "The gardens are key to our offer. We strive to entertain guests outdoors as much as we can, with archery and rifle shooting as well as the sporting elements. They are all part of the mission to retain guests on site."

After leaving the destination to take up maintenance projects, Harvey, 50, returned refreshed five years ago in pursuit of excellence once again.

In what is a deeply rural setting, Harvey focuses on creating conditions for wildlife to thrive. "The grounds team have built plenty of bug hotels and hedgehog homes to encourage the right environment for them," he explains.

Surrounded by a private estate, as Nidd Hall is, brings its own rewards, he adds.

"The owner releases pheasants for shooting and some of the carrier ones skoot over into Nidd Hall to escape the gun, and we benefit."

Large stretches of lawn set off the woodland areas, however the team is not too precious about the cultivar mix. "As we pursue green practices wherever possible, we don't mind a few weeds in the sward," Harvey says.

"We tend to keep application of chemicals to a minimum," Harvey says, "as this goes against our wildlife policy. The Husqvarna rideons do the job, while Hayter Harriers are nimble enough to handle the finer, smaller areas between beds."

After heavy workload over winter, spring arrives in a rainbow of rhododendron and azalea colours. "All the team are qualified to use knapsack spraying and chainsaws, so it's all hands on deck to keep paths weed-free and trim back shrubs and any unwanted growth."

Nidd Hall's own apprenticeship scheme is running well, Harvey explains. "Luke Kay is training up with us at the moment. He's a grand lad and works as hard as any of us at keeping up the high standards here."



At our weekly meetings, we walk the grounds and Harvey tells me his ideas

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Hunter Industries Headquarters, San Marcos, California

Supply and demand is a core concept in business. With rainfall occurring on an average of just forty-four days a year, and situated close to the Pacific Highway - the main route between the Californian cities of San Diego and Los Angeles - Edwin J Hunter and his son Paul chose a perfect location for a startup company consisting of just thirteen employees; San Marcos. **Dan Hughes**, Maxwell Amenity's Sales and Marketing Director, dropped by to find out more

Fast forward thirty-eight years from the conception of Hunter Industries, and their vision to build a global irrigation company, based on innovation and service excellence, is very much being realised by newer generations of the Hunter family and the 1900 employees which serve the business.

Walking into the reception, a warm Californian welcome and beaming smile greet us. In front of us is a large open plan office with bespoke designed colourful landscape patterned employee booths. In bold writing; 'Customer Service is an Attitude, Not a Department' displays from the ceiling. It is already apparent that this is a company with strong values.

Steve Hovel, our host, arrives. A Product Manager for twenty-nine years at Hunter Industries, he immediately begins to impart his advanced company knowledge, satisfying our intrigue by explaining how Hunter's marketing team were tasked with

creating inspiring employee work stations featuring imagery integral to conservation, technology and the environment.

This is America, it's different, but to me already this is very different to any of the many factories and business headquarters I have visited in my role at Maxwell Amenity. Already I could tell this wasn't just going to be just another visit; genuinely, I was learning and captivated by this experience.

Core to Hunter Industries' ethos is what they term the three P's; People, Planet and Profit.

Hunter's San Marcos base employs 700 of the 1900 people that work for Hunter, with 1200 based over the Mexican border in Tijuana where labour resource and production costs are favourable. Steve explains that the Tijuana premises is strikingly similar to the impressive modern site we are visiting.

By UK standards, a site facilitating employment for over 700 people is regarded as a large employment site.



Steve Hovel, Product Manager

Despite the scale of this business, the family ethos and origins are very visible in the culture of the staff and teams we encountered. It's very evident when you meet a happy and vibrant workforce; staff smiles, polite welcomes, friendly exchanges, combined with professionalism and productivity that almost smacks you in the face. Such environments aren't created by chance, they are the product of investment in people, success, fairness and excellent leaders.

Steve explains the importance Hunter place on staff happiness and creating a positive family atmosphere and working environment, where it feels like you are working alongside friends. The company provide an onsite gym, with three dedicated fitness trainers, where a contribution of only three dollars a week is required. The detail, creative thought and investment that Hunter place in staff is no more evident than in the warehouse we are passing through.

Large HD digital screens display core

business information, such as where the performance of the business is against targets and goals. Steve explains this helps to keep all employees 'driving in the same direction'. The screen content changes and two names are displayed next to party balloons, communicating staff who are celebrating birthdays that week. Friday is 'sports jersey day', where individuals proudly sport their favourite baseball, American football, soccer, ice hockey or basketball attire. There is a 'bring your sons and daughters to work day' and free charging points for environmentally conscious staff who drive electric vehicles to work.

It is perhaps no surprise that everything is spotlessly clean, from the warehouse packing areas to the office booths; my colleague and I both comment on the exceptional standards and facilities.

Steve proudly talks about the main warehouse, which holds over 10,000 pallet spaces and currently holds around \$45



Hunter's LEED warehouse, covered by solar panels



Hunter Helping Others volunteer group engaging in a community clean up in La Jolla, San Diego

million of stock, including raw materials and finished products. Built in 2008 as a 'LEED Building'; accredited as Leadership Energy, Excellence and Design, the roof is entirely covered in solar panels which serve to power the whole site and provide surplus energy which is sold back to the grid.

Moving through the corridors we meet Bryce Carnehl, Hunter's Corporate Social Responsibility Manager. Bryce, previously a Landscape Architect Project Designer before he joined Hunter as Product Specification Manager, proudly explains that Hunter are one of only two core landscape sector companies that employ a dedicated CSR professional and produce an annual CSR report.

Bryce emphasises two words important to Hunter which resonate with me; 'community' and 'sustainability'. Hunter have a commitment to charitable causes, giving a percentage of corporate profits to non-profit organisations, with a core focus on those that support education, help the

communities where employees live (both in California and Tijuana) and improve the environment. Hunter actively encourage staff members to engage in projects as diverse as water provision to African villages, local litter picks and education projects.

As we tour through the site, Hunter's permanent team of six gardeners are working on improvements to the grounds. Steve explains the team are removing lawned areas on the site, which require significant water provision and replacing the turf with more sustainable, minimal input Californian tailored landscape planting schemes.

The central building is home to the accolades and awards that Hunter has achieved. There are many presented for the community and charitable work, but the room is dominated by innovation and manufacturing excellence mementos, a number of them reflecting the genius of founder Edwin J Hunter credited, amongst

many things, for inventing the single stream gear driven sprinkler that replaced the impact sprinklers of the day and revolutionised the irrigation industry.

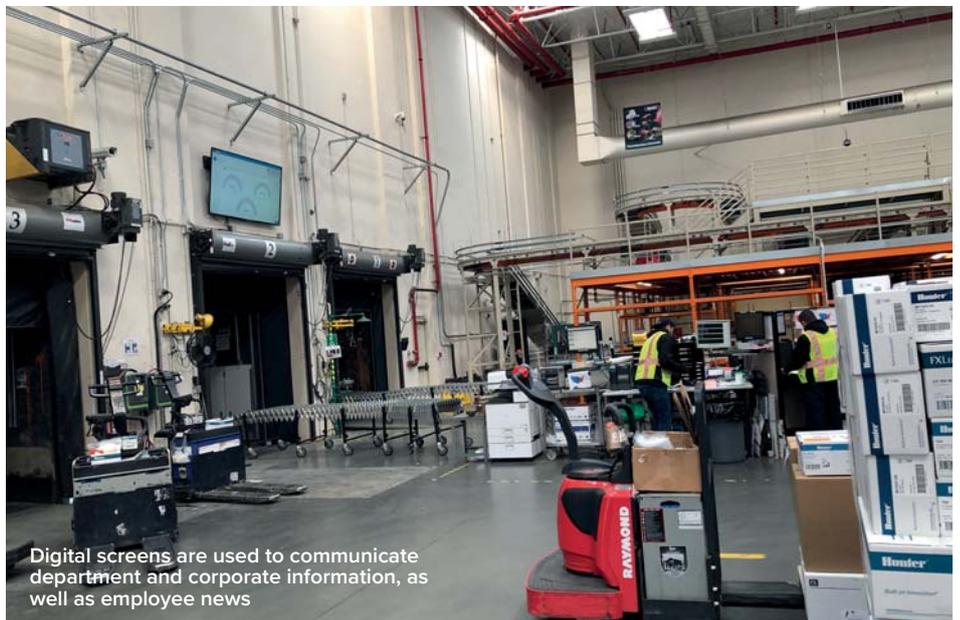
A large plaque displays the total of 88 US patents of founder Edwin J Hunter, the company has gone on to be successfully awarded over 250 patents, an outstanding reflection of its engineering excellence.

We chat over lunch with Todd Polderman, Hunter's Vice President of Marketing, Landscape Irrigation and Outdoor Lighting. Todd tells us how the company has excellent market share in the commercial and domestic irrigation sectors, and are now focusing more on developing their sports market share with new innovations, plus investment in more marketing and resource. The week prior, they had exhibited at the Golf Industry Show (GIS) and tripled the contacts and leads from the previous year's show.

With invention and product development cemented in its core, Hunter has incredibly



It is perhaps no surprise that everything is spotlessly clean, from the warehouse packing areas to the office booths; my colleague and I both comment on the exceptional standards and facilities



Digital screens are used to communicate department and corporate information, as well as employee news



Hunter's team of gardeners, creating a sustainable landscape area



The central building is home to the accolades and awards that Hunter has achieved. There are many presented for the community and charitable work

stringent and advanced product testing. We visit two areas, both employing dedicated full time teams, where sprinklers are tested through advanced computer linked spray pattern dispersion measurements using two different catch can methodologies. The team also conduct other quality experiments, including assessing UV light degradation on products over a number of years, ensuring the highest testing standards are met on all products in the portfolio.

The latest addition to Hunter's sports portfolio is the new I-80 rotor. Designed for sports turf and large park applications, the I-80 is built with a dirt-tolerant gear drive that offers a high torque output and a radius range up to 29.6 metres.

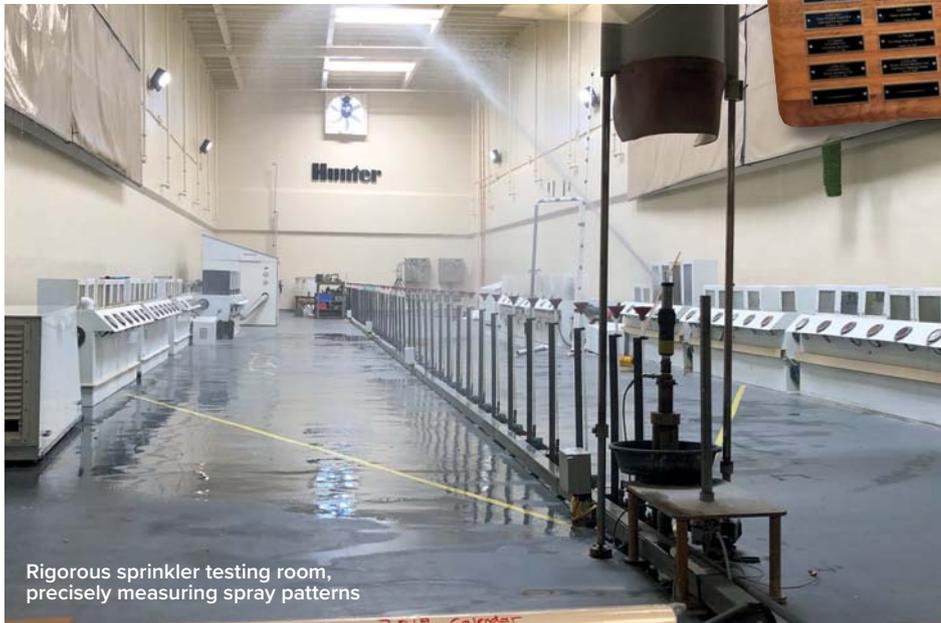
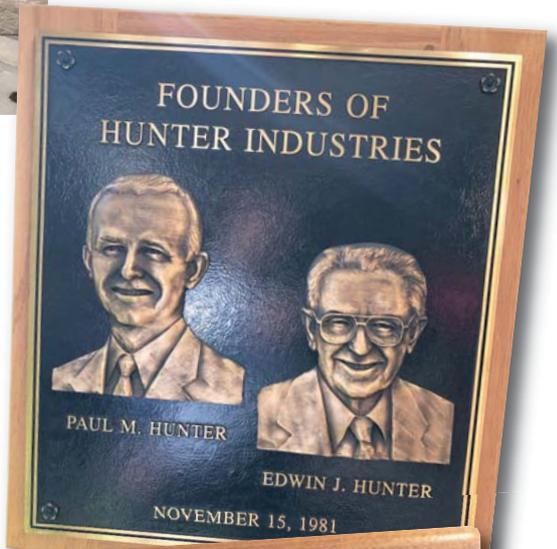
Mark Ganning is Hunter's North Europe Area Manager and is extremely positive about the impact the new addition will have. "The UK sports turf market has and always will be an important market for Hunter and our products. The recently introduced I-80

rotor fitted with the ProTech Turf Cup System, an industry first no-dig totally top serviceable solution for rotors located in the area of play, is a prime example."

The I-80 continues Hunter's legacy of developing products at the forefront of irrigation technology. The company believe there is nothing else like it available.

Considerable thought and engineering creativity has gone into the features of the I-80. The no-dig device features efficient dual-trajectory, wind-fighting nozzles and provides total top serviceability via its integrated, surface-mounted snap ring.

For optimum display



Rigorous sprinkler testing room, precisely measuring spray patterns



The room is dominated by innovation and manufacturing excellence mementos, a number of them reflecting the genius of founder Edwin J Hunter



The I-80 sprinkler launched recently by Hunter

integration, the I-80 also offers an advanced ProTech Turf Cup system. With ProTech TC, living or synthetic turf is retained in a cup mounted to the top of the rotor and installed flush to the surrounding turf. The retaining rings in the turf cup add surface area for increased root adhesion, which helps keep turf securely in place. The no-dig ProTech TC is also top serviceable and features no-tool, quick-release removal of the turf cup, arc adjustments without riser removal and a fully contained riser assembly that stays together when removed from the sprinkler's body. An impressive c.v. of advanced detail for a sprinkler.

We enter Hunter's production facility and are met with a plethora of robots and automated lines, precision engineering and assembling everything from the tiny plastic components, through to assembled sprinklers. Immediately, you are mesmerised by the complex network of expertly constructed precision manufacturing lines

overseen by the site's forty electronic engineers. In keeping with the rest of the site, it is immaculately clean, almost to the extent it doesn't feel like a factory. We watch a sprinkler seamlessly travel along a production line, whilst components are added along the process, there are a limited amount of people and teams sparsely scattered around the factory floor. Steve points to the final assembly test and a reject pile, where between 1-4% of sprinklers fail the final stringent automated quality check.

You can't help think how the process must have evolved from the people intensive manufacturing processes of the 1980s when Ed Hunter founded the company. It is testament to Hunter that automation hasn't replaced people; the Gym Trainers, the Gardeners, the Corporate Social Responsibility man, Hunter has clearly used manufacturing efficiencies to advance the company in other areas, for the benefits of staff, customers, communities and the

environment. Indeed, Greg Hunter, current CEO, has no shame in stating they are not a business that simply cares about the bottom line.

Whilst innovation and manufacturing are core to the identity of this company, they are steadfast in ensuring absolute customer satisfaction, a family work-like atmosphere where employee respect is integral and a commitment to enhance and improve the communities they work live and play in.

The privilege of being a global supplier of systems to disperse water, one of our planet's most valuable natural resources, isn't lost on Hunter; it's embraced in a way that they integrate stewardship of natural resources into the company culture.

You can't help but leave impressed, inspired and, to some extent, in awe of what a genuinely brilliant business Hunter Industries is. The infectious enthusiasm and belief for doing what's right is undoubtedly a shining beacon for the amenity industry.



You can't help think how the process must have evolved from the people intensive manufacturing processes of the 1980s when Ed Hunter founded the company. It is testament to Hunter that automation hasn't replaced people





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Disease management

Time to be proactive



Pictured left: Tom Day, far right: Steven Whitfield and centre is Sharfin Hussain, supported intern from the Heart of Birmingham Vocational College



In recent years, we've seen a continually changing landscape in our industry, relating most notably to the chemical armoury we have available to us. The days are gone where we can reactively treat disease, nor now is there an approved chemical out there to inhibit worm casting or the activities of chafer grubs and leatherjackets.

David Lawrence, Grounds Manager, and **John Lawrence**, Assistant Grounds Manager at Edgbaston Priory Club, spoke to Kerry Haywood about the changes they are making

As turf managers, we are having to become better at predicting what is going to happen to our surfaces; not just in terms of sward health, but also activity in the soil and the impact of the surrounding environment. As a result, we have had to come up with management approaches which offer greater and greater levels of integration. Buzz phrases, such as Integrated Pest Management, Integrated Disease Management, and Integrated Management Plans, are ways of describing approaches that we as groundsman have probably always been implementing. Ultimately, they're just a fancy way to describe 'joined up thinking.' In our eyes, this has meant assessing each maintenance task we carry out, and every chemical and nutritional input we apply, to determine what its positive impact will be and what, if any, the negative side effects may be.

The challenge we now have of course is that, as we alluded to at the start, we now have less and less chemical inputs we can turn to solve problems. This is

meaning that we are having to be exclusively proactive; reactive management is now longer possible.

This is exemplified by the evolution of the fungicides available to us. Around a year ago, Pitchcare published an article penned by John Handley titled 'Iprodione loss - the best thing that could ever happen.' We suspect that there were plenty of raised eyebrows from some quarters within the industry as a chemical which had been a staple of most people's defence against disease outbreaks was no longer going to be available. Iprodione was the last of the old school curative fungicides available to us, and the idea of having no reactive response to disease pressure was an understandably uncomfortable position for some. However, the salient point of the article, as we interpreted it at least, was that in order to continue progressing the quality of sports turf surfaces, innovation would be key.

Historically, we've always referred to fungicides as being our industry's equivalent to antibiotics in humans. This was of course true of curative active ingredients



Renovation - Scarifying - September 2018



Even before Carbendazim lost its licence approval, we were already moving towards other control methods, and since then we've avoided the temptation to use other products off-label to stimulate a side-effect solution

such as Iprodione - the plants got sick, and we gave it the antibiotic to make it better. The problem we have now is that the antibiotics have gone, so we have to think differently. Preventative fungicides are very different to the curatives we used to have. Where the curatives we had in the past could be applied reactively, we now have to be proactive in our approach to disease management. In that sense, the preventative fungicides we now have are more like vaccines. This means we're now in a situation where we have to vaccinate our plants before they get sick - a little bit like going to get your winter flu jab before flu season begins.

On paper, this sounds great; if the plant doesn't get sick in the first place, then there will never be any disease outbreak in the first place. The problem, of course, is that our preventative fungicides only work for a limited time-frame, much like some vaccinations which need topping up. The

challenge then is to identify periods of disease pressure and make applications before outbreaks occur.

This is easier said than done; applying too often will lead to wasted money on unnecessary chemical applications, whilst not applying often enough (or at the right times more specifically) will allow disease outbreaks to occur - and with no curative fungicides to then treat the outbreak, as turf managers, we're still stuck!

So, how does all of this impact us at Edgbaston Priory? Well, for us, it has necessitated a change in mind-set with our approach to managing our eight championship grass tennis courts. Perhaps the biggest piece of work we undertook was back in 2017, when our Senior Groundsperson, Sue Lawrence, was tasked with carrying out an audit of all the chemicals we had applied in recent years, as well as anything we had in our chemical cabinet. The key thing we wanted to understand was what we were trying to achieve with each chemical we used, and to begin to try and come up with alternative ways to achieve our goals, should the chemicals go off the market.

In reality, this is a process that we had been implementing in the long term anyway on an ongoing basis. For example, anyone who has read our articles on dealing with casting worms will know that we'd been investigating alternative avenues to Carbendazim long before it was taken off the market. However, with the changing climate in relation to chemical usage and the sudden rush of chemical withdrawals, we felt it would be prudent to carry out a full audit of our processes.

The bottom line is that we just do not know how long each active ingredient will be around for, and so we wanted to try and put ourselves in a position whereby, if we suddenly, for example, lost all fungicides, we would already have a plan in place to deal with such a scenario. We should stress that this doesn't mean that we are going to stop using fungicides, but rather we're trying to reduce our reliance on using fungicides to as



Spraying - Centre Court - March 2019



Everything we do has the potential to provide gains, however small, but also create additional problems too

close to zero as possible while we still have them as a safety net option. It's much less daunting to try and do something different and innovative if we know that, in the event our experimenting goes off course, we still have a solution in the chemical cabinet to bail us out!

On that basis, going in to the 2018/19 winter, we identified two key threats to the quality of our grass courts for the following season; disease pressure and damage

from casting worms. Our plan then was to come up with an alternative approach to using fungicides through the winter, whilst integrating a maintenance approach which would also mitigate any potential damage caused by casting worms. One of the first things we've considered in this light is soil pH. In reality, we've been addressing this issue for several years now, primarily with regular applications of sulphur chips through the winter to lower our pH. One

of the challenges we face is that the mains water we irrigate with through the summer is alkaline. If left unaltered, the soil pH will become more and more alkaline over time. As well as the use of sulphur chips, we've also been paying more attention to the pH of everything we apply to our surfaces; whilst many of the chemicals and fertilisers we use will equate to relatively small pH movements in the soil, we buy in to the principle of marginal gains. In our minds, a lot of small

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**David Lawrence, Grounds Manager,
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Worm cast clearing - close up



Air2G2 in use

adjustments could lead to one big jump in the right direction.

The most obvious reason for monitoring and manipulating our pH, is to try and discourage casting worms. It's well established that worms prefer neutral or slightly alkaline soils and so altering the soil in which they live will hopefully discourage and reduce their activity. We have noticed a reduction in casting activity in the areas where we are attempting to amend our pH, versus some of the ornamental areas we are responsible for where we do not have the budget to carry out such treatments.

Of course, this isn't a complete solution, rather part of a wider process we undertake, but more on that later. Maintaining a lower soil pH also has a number of benefits to the health of the grass plant. For example, there are plenty of research papers relating to soil pH, and prevalence and growth of diseases

such as fusarium. In short, the majority of turf diseases are less prevalent where the soil pH is slightly acidic.

In addition to this, many of the nutrients needed to support healthy turf become unavailable to the grass plant, or are 'locked up' at higher pHs, particularly micronutrients (with the exception of molybdenum) which tend to become locked up at pHs above 7.5. A note of caution should be applied here, as it is also possible to lock up nutrients at lower, acidic pHs too. Phosphate is a good example of this; at pHs above 7.5, phosphate ions will combine with calcium and magnesium. Similarly, at lower pHs, phosphate ions will attach to aluminium and iron readily. In both scenarios, the compounds formed by these chemical reactions are not easily taken in by the grass plant. This means that managing pH is essential to ensuring nutrients in the

soil are accessible to grass plants, which will in turn have a direct impact on the health of the sward.

Our target is to get our pH to a value as close to 5.5 as possible. This is of course slightly acidic, which is considered ideal for growing rye grasses, such as those that we use for tennis courts. It also allows for the many additional benefits listed previously, such as discouraging casting worm activity, inhibiting the prevalence of turf diseases, and whilst improving the availability of many nutrients in the soil profile. There will be some that will, correctly point out that, at a pH of 5.5, we may end up locking up a small number of nutrients (such as phosphate, as mentioned above), however we have also then looked at the way in which we feed our courts, particularly through the winter.

Another aspect of our winter management plan has involved looking at the way in which we feed our courts through the winter. In previous winters, we've combined some granular feeding with the use of liquid foliar feeds; those who have read some of our previous articles will know that, in recent years, we've incorporated turf hardeners



Events lawn and Clubhouse - Spring 2019



We've have had to develop an aeration plan to ensure that, during the wetter months of the year, the courts drain as freely as possible



into our winter programmes. However, for the 2018/19 winter, we've moved entirely to liquid foliar feeds in order to get as much of our chosen inputs in to the plant, as quickly and as directly as possible. This means we have to get on to the courts more often, as foliar feeds do not have the same longevity as some granular feeds, however they are likely to be more accessible to the plant.

For this winter, we combined a number of different products to form our winter nutritional programme. Each product was applied every six weeks between the start of November and mid-March, with the aim being to improve turf health and therefore reduce incidence of disease. The first component of our programme was Maxwell Turf Hardener, of which the primary ingredient is a chelated calcium (CaO). In recent years, more and more research has been carried out on the benefits of using

The bottom line is that we just do not know how long each active ingredient will be around for, and so we wanted to try and put ourselves in a position whereby, if we suddenly, for example, lost all fungicides, we would already have a plan in place to deal with such a scenario

calcium, rather than traditionally used products such as iron, as hardening agents to toughen the plant up during periods of potential stress and disease pressure. The take away from these research projects has been that calcium is much more effective at literally hardening the grass plants than iron. In basic terms, calcium literally hardens, or toughens, the cell walls within the grass plant, which makes it tougher for diseases to penetrate in.

We also chose to apply phosphite to the courts, in the form of Maxwell Bullet Phosphite. Our reasoning for this lies in the results of work conducted by John Dempsey, the Course Superintendent Curragh Golf Club in Ireland. We would implore people, if they haven't already come across it, to seek out John's article for Pitchcare, 'Phosphite – what's all the fuzz about?' The article has since been followed up by a thesis in 2016, 'Suppression of Microdochium Nivale by Phosphite in Cool-season Amenity Turfgrasses.' The basis of Mr. Dempsey's research has been on the effect the use of phosphite has on Microdochium Nivale, commonly known as fusarium. The interesting thing for us with phosphite is that it has the capability to inhibit the ability of the Microdochium Nivale pathogen to grow and spread. As Microdochium Nivale, either in the form of fusarium or snow mould, tends

to be the most prevalent disease we see, it has therefore been a no brainer to include phosphite in our programme.

In addition to the calcium and phosphite inputs, we've also included the Maxwell Bullet Trace Element mix, to ensure that all micronutrients required by the plant are available and accessible. We also included Sea Action liquid seaweed as a bio-stimulant to promote good soil health, in order to stimulate beneficial fungal and bacterial activity within the profile. As a final component, we also included Maxwell Bullet Chelated Iron; whilst we've noted some success with using iron as a turf hardener historically, in our case it has been included purely for its aesthetic value. Research has shown, pretty conclusively, that calcium based turf hardeners are far more effective than doses of iron. However, being a private members club means there is always pressure to maintain the courts in an attractive condition, and so being able to 'darken' them up a little in the winter with the use of iron is a plus point for us.

As we alluded to above, this approach is only effective if we can get on to the courts with enough regularity to apply the products. This is where granular feeds would have their most obvious advantage, due to their comparative longevity within the soil profile. That being said, foliar applications do allow



Centre Court - Winter 2019



The problem we have now is that the antibiotics have gone, so we have to think differently. Preventative fungicides are very different to the curatives we used to have



Mowing and sarel rolling

for the nutrients being applied to get in to the plant more directly. This means that as well as offering faster results, we also bypass the soil profile and reduce the risk of locking up some of the ley nutrients we are attempting to get in to the turf.

As part of our longer term approach, we are investing a lot of time and effort in to researching what is actually in our soil profile and how we can alter it beneficially, however as we're sure readers will be aware this is not something that is a quick fix. In order to create a base line for the chemicals and elements within our soil profiles, we have started carrying out annual broad spectrum soil chemical analysis. From this, our aim is to amend the make-up of our soil profile in order to further reduce our reliance on synthetic inputs through methods such as spraying and applications of granular products. This, of course, will take time so for now we've settled on a programme of foliar products as a means to keep our courts in good health.

To allow for this approach though, we've had to develop an aeration plan to ensure that, during the wetter months of the year,

the courts drain as freely as possible. Our starting point with aeration is the use of solid tines during our end of season renovations. This not only helps with alleviating some of the consolidation that has built up through the playing season, but also aids the amelioration of new top dressing in to the profile during those works.

On top of this, we also make use of an Air2G2 air injector during the autumn (normally late October or early November) in order to open the profile up at greater depths. Currently, we alternate between 7 and 11 inch tines annually as we only have the means to hire in the machine once a year. However, the results from the Air2G2 have been so impressive that we have added the machine to our capital expenditure wish list. We've no doubt if we had greater access to a machine, we'd be carrying out the process several times each winter, as a minimum.

The major advantage of the Air2G2 is the depth at which it can reach, with very little surface damage or displacement. It's a little bit like putting a drainage down pipe through the profile, as the machine is able to blast

right through the soil profile and in to the drainage layers below. 2018/19 was the fifth winter that we've utilised the machine on our courts. In the first few years we only worked on off court areas, and as we began to see the positive results we were having, as well as no evidence of any adverse effects, we extended our work to include the in-court playing areas.

Of course, as well as improving drainage through the profile, the Air2G2 also benefits the health of the overall soil profile. The strap-line 'Air is anything to everything that lives' sums the machine up fairly well. Getting more air in to the profile promotes increased beneficial microbial activity, for example, which also ties in to our aim to reduce our use of synthetic inputs to maintain turf health.

The final part of our winter aeration plan is regular sarel rolling, which is a very simple process but has also proved extremely effective. We've moved to a point now where, after any mechanical works during the winter months, such as mowing for example, we always follow up with a sarel pass. Obviously, this does not open the



Centre Court - Autumn 2018



Practice Courts - March 2019

profile up to any sort of depth, but helps to get moisture away from the surface more quickly, in part by opening the very top of the profile up, but also helping to break up any moss ingress which will otherwise help to hold moisture at the surface.

All of this aeration has contributed to keeping the courts drier through the winter months, which in turn has allowed us to move to applying foliar feeds with more regularity. That being said, aiming to keep the courts and the soil profile drier is generally a good idea regardless. It promotes a healthier soil profile which in turn aids turf health. It also helps to reduce incidence of disease by keeping the profile drier, reducing the opportunities for disease pathogens to spread.

Having a drier profile, and surface, have helped us to reduce disease incidence. However, it isn't the only thing we have done which will have helped to reduce incidence of disease. For the winter of 2018/19, we made the decision to lower our winter height of cut from 15mm to 12mm, in effect a twenty percent reduction. The reduction in height has allowed for greater air movement across

the turf sward, reducing disease pressure. Additionally, the shorter height has allowed us to spot potential disease more quickly and deal with potential signs before they result in serious outbreaks. Because our disease pressure has reduced so much, with the management plan we now have in place, we are in a position to spot treat potential signs, rather than spraying whole courts. This offers a huge cost saving as a bottle of fungicide goes a lot further this way, and also reduces the probability of pathogen resistance building up.

In truth though, reducing the height of cut was not actually primarily a tool for easing disease pressure. In fact, the direct rationale for reducing our winter height of cut was to allow us to manage worm casting better on the courts. Anyone who has read our previous articles on managing casting worms will know that we prefer to take a more holistic approach to dealing with the issue. Therefore that is why, as mentioned above, we pay so much attention to soil pH, in order to deter worms in the first place, rather than other methods. Even before Carbendazim lost its licence approval, we were already

This doesn't mean that we are going to stop using fungicides, but rather we're trying to reduce our reliance on using fungicides to as close to zero as possible while we still have them as a safety net option

moving towards other control methods, and since then we've avoided the temptation to use other products off-label to stimulate a side-effect solution.

Ultimately then, we do have to accept that we will have casting worms within our profile, and as a result we will get some casts (albeit a diminishing amount as the pH becomes less hospitable) on the surface. This is something we accept because the positive impact of having worms within our profile outweighs, in our opinion, the negatives related to the casts they leave. Worms aid with aeration, they help to filter our organic matter and they aid nutrient availability. This does however mean that we have to come up with a way of dealing with the casts that do occur.

This is where the idea for the shorter mowing height came in; if the grass is shorter, it is much easier to clear the casts up. The biggest problem we have faced in previous years with worm casts has been trying to clear them up prior to carrying out work on the courts; no matter how much time was invested, it's incredibly difficult to find and clear every cast from the surface when the grass is longer. As a result, when mechanical operations such as mowing took place, the outcome was a lot of smeared casts on the court surface, which then had to be addressed.

Our plan therefore, was to reduce the height of cut through the winter to make it easier to clear casts from the surface prior to mechanical works, thus avoiding the smearing in the first place, rather than having to address the problem afterwards. In addition to reducing the height of cut, we've also adjusted the way we clear casts off the surface. Whilst on sandier soil types using a dew-switch cane can be effective in breaking up casts, we find on clay soil the cane just smears the casts in to the grass. The same can be said for drag brushing, and even drag matting.

As a result, we've taken to bolting dining forks to 3 foot lengths of wood; this has resulted in some fairly strange looks from passers-by, but has been incredibly effective



Match Courts - March 2019



Renovation - Top Dressing - September 2018

in dispersing casts. We then follow up behind with a blower to clear the dispersed casts off of the courts completely, which also helps to clear any additional surface debris, prior to carrying out activities such as mowing. This may sound time consuming, but in reality it is an extremely quick process. For example, we can send out a three person team to clear eight courts of worm casts, and the job is normally complete within a couple of hours.

This approach has been extremely effective this winter. It has meant we have been able to continue working on the courts, as and when the weather allows, without causing damage to the surface by smearing casts.

This sort of success has been evident across our whole approach this winter. For example, we've also drastically cut our use of fungicides through the winter. Ordinarily, we'd expect to apply at least three fungicides between October and March. Normally, we'd expect to react to disease pressure at least twice, perhaps

once in the autumn, and again in late winter/early spring. Additionally, we'd look to apply a preventative around Christmas when traditionally staff take annual leave and so we have less of a presence to spot and treat proactively.

In reality, since October, aside from occasional spot treatments, we've only applied one full fungicide treatment. This was in November when we felt that the amount of spot treating we were having to carry out indicated that a significant disease outbreak may be possible. There is a chance that with the programme we had in place that a serious disease outbreak would never have manifested, but whilst we still have access to the safety net solution, we have the option to use it if necessary.

Having the safety net also gives us the chance to try and refine our programme in order to improve its effectiveness. For example, for next winter we're considering reducing the window between applications on our practice courts from six weeks to

just four weeks. Whilst on our Centre Court and match courts, visually the courts have maintained their colour and health, we noticed a deterioration in the aesthetic quality of the practice courts between the fourth and sixth week of our programme cycle. This deterioration is a good visual indicator that turf health was likely suffering and would therefore require addressing.

This observation also ties in with the results from the broad spectrum analysis we had completed across all the courts. The results showed that our block of three practice courts have a lower Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC) than the rest of our courts on site. Pitchcare Technical Sales Area Manager, Mark Allen, describes CEC as 'the pantry of the turf; the bigger the CEC, the bigger the pantry.' In relation to our observations on our practice courts, this makes complete sense. Effectively, our practice courts appear to have a lower holding capacity for nutrition within the soil profile, so in order to maintain turf quality and health, we have hypothesised that reducing the time between foliar applications of our winter programme, we should be able to improve the consistency of turf health throughout the programme cycle.

This sort of observation, and willingness to adapt our approach, is kind of what we feel like John Handley was talking about in his article last year, referenced earlier. It isn't enough anymore to just continue doing the same things we've done in the past because they worked before. Improvements can only be borne out of change, and whilst some of the changes we are having to make are borne out of necessity with changes in chemical legislation, having a perspective that sees these changes as an opportunity, rather than an obstacle, is key to continually improving our surfaces.

This is why we're being ambitious with our approach to chemical inputs; we don't know what is going to be next in terms of label approval revocation, and so any changes we can make to reduce our reliance on synthetic products, such as fungicides, whilst improving turf health in the process is, we



Mowing - Centre Court - March 2019



Wildlife Area - Spring 2019



The reduction in height has allowed for greater air movement across the turf sward, reducing disease pressure

Management Plans are so vital. Applying joined up thinking to the processes we implement is becoming ever more important; everything we do has the potential to provide gains, however small, but also create additional problems too. Everything we do has consequences, so it is vital we consider each action in a broad context, in order to avoid creating those aforementioned potential additional problems. There's no point solving one issue by creating another, especially in a legislative climate where we have less and less access to chemical safety nets. Reducing our reliance on chemicals, and coming up with alternative maintenance methods is vital to ensuring that we continue to improve the surfaces we care for.

believe, a sensible move.

We should note that we don't profess to be taking a totally 'organic' approach; realistically that will always be a tough ask, especially when considering the environmental challenges we have and the pressures of hosting an international sporting event. We will probably never manage to be one-hundred-percent fungicide free, but to aspire to be is a sensible and hopefully sustainable

philosophy. Similarly, we accept that nothing we apply is truly non-synthetic - applying seaweed through a sprayer, for example, isn't exactly natural! However, by moving towards what we would identify as lower-risk products, such as leaning on phosphite applications rather than true fungicides, means that the products we rely on are products we're fairly comfortable aren't going to be disappearing any time soon!

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Water aeration

It's the name of the game

With the huge growth of online sales in recent years, the aeration market has become filled with a mass of products for ponds, lakes and reservoirs. It's almost too easy to get caught up in the volume of options available, so how do you find the right product for you? In order to find the right system, having an understanding of what aeration is and which systems are the real deal is vital, says **Reg Varney**, international region manager for water quality management specialist, Otterbine





What is water aeration?

Dissolved oxygen is what allows aquatic plants, animals and beneficial bacteria to respire. In an artificial pond or lake environment, adequate dissolved oxygen must be added during the day and night, as both plants and bacteria respire and consume oxygen continually. It's a hard balance to strike, but the right amount of dissolved oxygen in the water will help to keep plant and aquatic life healthy and aid beneficial bacteria which keeps the ecosystem in balance.

Aeration is a tried and true water quality management tool which adds dissolved oxygen to your water body, preventing the negative, often harmful side effects caused by a lack of oxygen.

Why is aerating water important?

Without aeration, your lake, pond or reservoir could start to see a multitude of issues arise. Taking a shallow pond for instance, there are four main symptoms

that will appear when there isn't enough oxygen: excessive algae, pond weed, a bad odour and finally, dead fish. Similar consequences will be seen in larger bodies of water too. When it comes to maintaining your water body, you have two options: wait and see if the symptoms appear before trying to fix them or take vital preventative measures.

Now, more than ever, ensuring you have the right aeration system is incredibly important. In recent years, demand for aerators has been boosted as populations have grown and non-point pollutants such as phosphorus, fertiliser and road run-off have increased at astounding rates, and the impact on our water bodies is palpable.

Whether chemical or biological, the build-up of substances from multiple sources making their way into our ponds and lakes creates an increase in biological oxygen demand (the amount of dissolved oxygen needed by biological organisms to break down organic material present in the



Otterbine's Fractional can be relied upon to keep the ecosystem of any smaller area of water in perfect balance thanks to its ability to transfer an impressive 1kg/2.2lbs of oxygen per hp/hr and its pumping rate of 115m³/ph. Lewis Mattholie, deputy greenkeeper at Brickendon Grange Golf Club, says of the five-in-one aerating system seen here: "The water quality has vastly improved. Gone is the problem of stagnating and smelling water."



Any manufacturer that is serious about helping its customers keep their lake or ponds aquatic ecosystem balanced and clean will happily provide you with OTR test results for its products



Reg Varney, Otterbine international region manager

water) and, as such, oxidative stress becomes a real issue.

When placed under oxidative stress caused by an imbalance of harmful pollutants in the water, plants and aquatic life struggle to counteract or detoxify the harmful effects of this pollution. This can accelerate the natural process of anaerobic digestion, whereby bacteria is used to break down organic and biological waste into carbon dioxide, methane and water.

Although anaerobic digestion is a natural occurrence, the process reduces the oxygen levels in the water. When sped up by chemicals and pollution, if adequate oxygen is not being added to the water to compensate, it can lead to a build-up of harmful bacteria and hydrogen sulphide as well as causing unpleasant 'pond sludge' and odour. This causes harm to other life in the environment, starting with the beneficial bacteria. This is why supplemental aeration is so vitally important. With the right aerating system, preventing this build-up in your water body is made simple.

How do you find the best aerating product?

Many groundsmen are faced with water management issues when it comes to their lakes, ponds and reservoirs. Having to learn about the methods that have been determined to be the most effective and practical means of preventing or reducing non-point source pollution (pollution not confined to a single identifiable source) to help achieve water quality goals, can be an

arduous task and hard to get your head around.

With a multitude of companies entering the aeration market, it can be hard to differentiate between those with the scientific knowledge to honestly advise potential customers and those interested only in the sale. Be careful of those who may 'muddy the water' slightly to gain a competitive advantage. Regardless of the type of aeration system offered, the name of the process is the same; aeration. Putting air (oxygen) into the water. But how can a person determine how much oxygen an aeration product puts into the water? Not enough and the upset in the balance brings negative effects soon after, so it's important to get it right.

The appliance of science

This is where science provides the answer. The scientific measure of an aerator's capability to supply a lake with oxygen is its Oxygen Transfer Rate (OTR). This now industry standard measure was created by the American Society of Civil Engineers after they began developing test protocols and parameters in 1977 to determine an aerators OTR, eventually completing and finalising the tests in 1984. A recognised organisation used across multiple industries and referred to for important data, the American Society of Civil Engineers 'Measurement of Oxygen Transfer in Clean Water' has been widely regarded as the gold standard for an aerator's OTR. When looking for the right aerator for your water body, it's always worth



Designed to give the best of both worlds by offering function and beauty, the Gemini surface spray aerator can move over three times as much water than decorative patterns thanks to its open-throat propeller design. Seen here at Old Thorns Golf and Country Club, it has the capability to easily manage aquatic environments for clean, clear, healthy water

asking what a system's OTR is.

Any manufacturer that is serious about helping its customers keep their lake or ponds aquatic ecosystem balanced and clean will happily provide you with OTR test results for its products, performed by an independent third party and tested to the exacting standards set by the American Society of Civil Engineers. It's the industry's only comparative benchmark and anyone who tries to hide the results or doesn't provide them should be avoided.

What works best for your water body?

With expert third party testing, we can also learn valuable lessons about which aerators work best in different types of water bodies, which is why all Otterbine systems have been tested for OTR by the

University of Minnesota or Gerry Shell Environmental Labs. Independent testing has shown that, contrary to popular belief, diffused aeration is not the best solution for everything. In fact, a surface spray aerator is 100 percent efficient in water up to five metres deep, but any deeper and the oxygen may not reach the bottom of the water. For water five metres or deeper, a diffused air system is always the most efficient option.

Following this advice can make a real difference in having a system that works and one that doesn't stop the damaging effects as a result of oxidative stress. For example, if you use a diffused air system in a lake four metres deep, you lose fifty percent efficiency; so be wary of those selling a 'one

fits all' system, they just don't!

It's also important to remember that you can't over-aerate water. In fact, water's capacity to hold dissolved oxygen reduces as the temperature rises, so ensuring you always have enough oxygen isn't the easiest task when dealing with the change in seasons. A rise from 14 degrees to 27, for example, can see the water's capacity to store dissolved oxygen reduced by 40%, so making sure your aerator is always meeting the dissolved oxygen saturation point is highly important. It's recommended to aim for around 80% over the saturation point to allow for changes in temperature and other external factors.

So, when looking for an aerator system, make sure the people you deal with know what they're talking about. The scientific community has developed a tool to help us choose the most effective aeration device and, as such, responsible manufacturers will have third party, independent tests at the ready to share with potential customers. Be sure to ask for a copy when you are in the market for an aerator. With the information from these tests you can be confident that the aerating system you buy will work to help improve and maintain high water quality and deliver the best possible results.



To find out more visit: www.reesinkturfcare.co.uk/partners/otterbine

Model	Flow Rate	OTR
1HP High Volume	920GPM	3.28lb/hr
1HP Sunburst	530GPM	2.75lb/hr
1HP Air Flow	N/A 4.35 M depth	2.72lb/hr
1HP AirFlow	N/A 2.5 M depth	1.59lb/hr
1HP Phoenix	150GPM	1.32lb/hr
1HP Mixer	N/A	0.3lb/hr

3rd Party Testing completed by the University of Minnesota



Pesticides - Part 2

Pesticides of the future

In the last issue, Maxwell Amenity Technical Manager **John Handley** stated that the case in favour of chemical pesticides is that they have worked in the past. But, the inherent disadvantages that accompany their use - widespread toxicity, secondary pests, resistance and escalating costs, has brought us to the point where there is a need to use alternatives

Integrated Pest Management is mandatory as part of UK law, whereby “biological, physical and other non-chemical controls must be preferred to chemical methods if they provide satisfactory pest control.” In an amenity context, pests are defined as any organism harmful to plants - *Microdochium* patch, *Microdochium nivale*, a fungus affecting turf grasses, is a pest in just the same way as a leatherjacket larvae, *Tipula paludosa* or *T. oleracea* is considered a pest.

IPM and pesticides

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a philosophy of pest management - although a practical philosophy rather than a specific, defined strategy. Within modern horticulture it has been practised, in effect, for a century or more, in that it combines physical, cultural,

biological and chemical control and the use of resistant varieties. IPM isn't a modern approach, Stern *et al.* (1959) calling it 'integrated control' defined it formally with a statement of principles.

One might imagine that the intention of pest control is total eradication, but this is not the general rule. Rather, the aim is an economic one: to reduce the pest population to a level below which no further reductions are profitable, i.e. below which the extra costs of control exceed any additional revenue (or other benefits). This is known as the economic injury level or aesthetic injury level for the pest. The economic injury level is the most basic of the decision rules; it is a theoretical value that, if actually attained by a pest population, will result in economic (or aesthetic) damage (Perdigo *et al.*).

The economic threshold (ET) differs



from the economic injury level in that it is a practical or operational rule, rather than a theoretical one. Stern *et al.* defined the economic threshold as "the population density at which control action should be initiated to prevent an increasing pest population from reaching the economic injury level." Although measured in pest density, the economic threshold is actually a time to take action, i.e., numbers are simply an index of that time. If a control action is delayed until the point at which an economic injury is observed, then control costs are likely to be higher, costs may be incurred in repairing the injury and the pest may be more difficult to control due to the higher population density.

The relationship of the economic threshold to the economic injury level and action times is shown for a hypothetical pest in Figure 1.

System Modelling

These theoretical values help us develop models that can be used to identify optimum points in time to undertake a management action, e.g. apply a fungicide to control a disease. Sports Turf professionals commonly carry out this kind of assessment informally: a walk over the grass sward and the sight of some disease activity on an indicator area (the green or region of the pitch which commonly suffers first) might instigate the response of applying a fungicide. So why formalise this process?

As stated in the previous article, the nature of modern pesticides is that they will need to be more targeted on the pest and less harmful to the environment. They will contain less of the Active Substance than their predecessors and will be active for

shorter periods. As a consequence, modern pesticides need to be applied in a more precise and considered approach which requires us to develop our understanding of how to use them in order to obtain the desired level of control.

The ET is a complex value that depends on estimating and predicting several difficult parameters. The most significant of these include:

- I. Variables within the Economic Injury Level (this is because the economic threshold is based on the economic injury level).
- II. Pest and host ecology and life cycles.
- III. Pest (and host) population growth and injury rates.

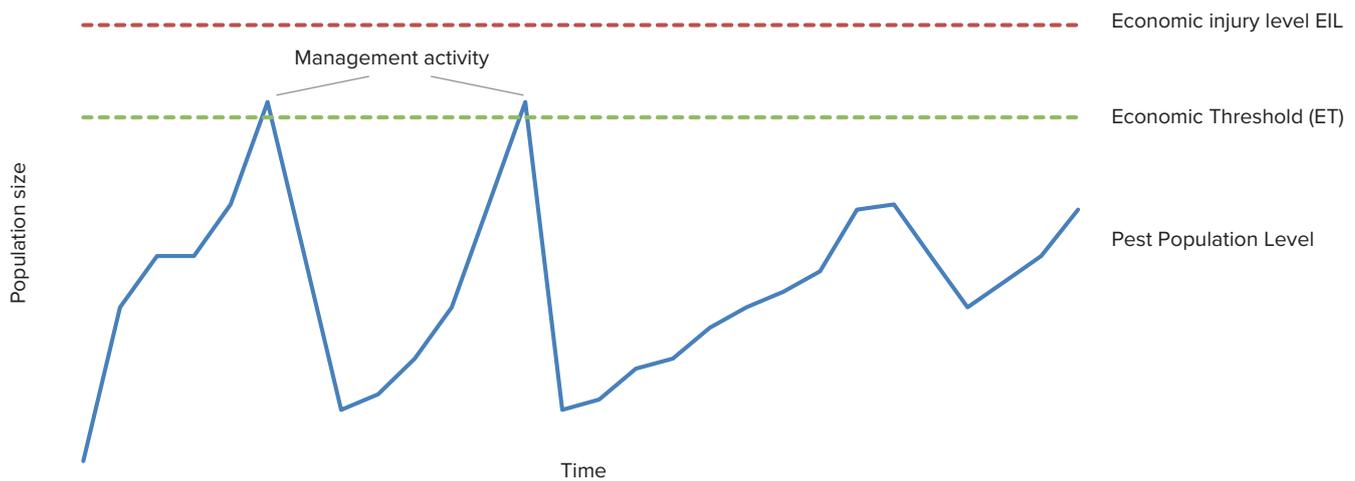


Figure 1. Diagram showing the relationship of the economic threshold to the economic injury level and time of taking action through management activity in response to pest population level.



IV. Time delays associated with the IPM tactics utilised.

The development of models will be increasingly required as we adopt new technologies such as biological control. Physical, cultural, biological and chemical controls are all interlinked and aren't used in isolation. Professional turf management has been a bit of a late arrival at the party, we've been pushed toward looking at biological controls rather than embracing them enthusiastically. When asked what practitioner's thoughts are relating toward biological controls, my experience is that there is a shuffling of feet, followed by "I haven't used them", when asked why, the muttered response is invariably "they're not very effective because you've got to get the environment right, temperature and moisture and timing." Contradictory statements, at odds with the results obtained in other parts of the horticultural sector whose members have been successfully utilising a variety of

technologies for several decades. So what can we learn from them?

Biopesticides

'Biopesticide' covers a wide spectrum of potential products used as plant protection products, the Health and Safety Executive divide these into four broad categories:

- Products based on pheromone and other semiochemicals (for mass trapping or trap cropping)
- Products containing a microorganism (e.g. bacterium, fungus, protozoa, virus, viroid)
- Products based on plant extracts
- Other novel alternative products

Approvals are granted by HSE's Chemicals Regulation Division (CRD) on behalf of Ministers under a range of specific pesticide related legislation.

The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (ADHB) funded a project called AMBER (Application and



We know that the form, quantity and timing of nutrition is one of the key determinants of the composition and playing quality of the sward, as is our approach to irrigation and aeration



Spraying at St Mellion International Resort



There's a lot that we have to learn, the key question is; what is the best way of going about this and then practically implementing the findings?

Management of Biopesticides for Efficacy and Reliability), a 5-year project with the aim of identifying management practices that commercial nurseries can use to improve the performance of biopesticide products within IPM. Ideally, funding would be organised and available within the sports turf sector to undertake similar research but, in the absence of this resource, there is still plenty that can be applied from the outcomes of this project. Further articles will focus on developing an integrated approach to resolve specific problems but, in this article, it is helpful to highlight some of the key findings from this project.

Knowledge gaps

Existing knowledge about biological control mechanisms has been collated to identify areas of knowledge clusters as well as highlighting any knowledge gaps. Further research efforts can then be directed into the most constructive areas. Research relating to biopesticides in the commercial nursery sector is currently developing understanding of the impacts of pest survival rate, fecundity, stage length, initial numbers, biopesticide spray timing, efficacy, age class susceptibility, population structure and persistence.



It is also seeking to utilise technology effectively to assist with decision making and knowledge of the parameters that are relevant to Economic Thresholds.

Technology

Computer models have been created that simulate detailed pest and disease populations accurately based upon environmental conditions within a commercial nursery setting. The models are location specific but the data can be grouped regionally or nationally to enable commercial horticulture production managers to receive advance warning of potential problems.

Product Application

Product application is a key aspect of success for both biopesticides and for chemical pesticides. Research is focusing on optimum water volumes, including studies looking at retention of substances on the leaf, efficacy and longevity.

The variables tested were nozzle type, forward speed, pressure, nozzle flow rate, applied volume, boom height, nozzle angle and nozzle configuration. The spray volumes applied covered the typical range of water volumes recommended for biopesticide products, from 500 to >1000 litres per hectare. Contrary to expectation, lower volumes were the most efficient at depositing spray liquid on the plant, as

it resulted in a greater proportion of the spray volume adhering to the plant foliage. The data suggest that the most efficient application strategy is to apply a higher concentration of biopesticide product in a lower volume of water (Ellis), and that there is a false perception among managers that increasing the water volume gives better spray application to the target.

There is a significant opportunity to improve all areas of biopesticide application, including product storage, product preparation and mixing, spray equipment set up and maintenance, optimising application volume and tank cleaning. Given some of the findings, this is likely to impact existing practices and could significantly improve product effectiveness, demonstrating how important research is, and how this can undermine existing assumptions.

Relevance to sports turf management and amenity horticulture

With so much to learn, yet with no approved products, why should we engage with biopesticides at this stage? A small number of biopesticides have been available to UK growers for some time, though no product crop approvals currently exist within amenity grassland or managed amenity turf, however, an increasing number will be entering the market in the next few years. Biopesticides now represent over 50%



Research is focusing on optimum water volumes, including studies looking at retention of substances on the leaf, efficacy and longevity



of new active substance applications and have done so since the beginning of 2016, so it is no small issue. Within ten to twenty years, the number of biopesticide products available is likely to exceed the number of conventional synthetic chemical pesticides (Cary).

Commercial nurseries have been successfully using biological controls for several decades (Mizell). Knowledge of pests, lifecycles, monitoring systems, sanitation, pheromones and lures, and the conservation of competitors, antagonists and beneficial organisms (natural enemies) by judicious use of pesticides is an already accepted practice. But how similar is commercial horticultural production and professional sports turf management?

Ornamental plant production nurseries utilise different growing media, the pests and diseases are far more comprehensive because commercial growers produce

an extensive range of plants. There is large-scale use of enclosed systems or glasshouses where lighting, humidity and irrigation can be closely monitored and controlled. Is sports turf a different situation? Where surfaces are open to the elements with no control of the environment, the number of pests and diseases are more limited, and the growing media is at least partially dependent on local conditions.

Within the sports turf sector there has been little commercial impetus to engage in this pursuit because the products that utilised broad-spectrum synthetic chemistry were cost-effective and available, but the rules of the game are changing and as professionals we need to be prepared to change too. As turf managers we understand and control the substrate: by selecting the appropriate dressing, we determine the ability of both water and nutrients to move through

the surface and into drainage systems. Most facilities have the capacity to apply water through irrigation systems allied to evapotranspiration levels - the total sum of the evaporation of free water from surfaces and transpiration by plants of soil water over time. We also have models of moisture flows, gains and losses, that can help us decide when and how much water to apply.

We know that the form, quantity and timing of nutrition is one of the key determinants of the composition and playing quality of the sward, as is our approach to irrigation and aeration. To argue that we're not controlling or managing the environment is evidently delusional, but we may need to adjust our thinking to account for a world we've not been considering. We currently have a good understanding of the physics and chemistry of the environment in which the host and pathogen exist; however, biology is currently a 'black box' into which we've only just started to look.

There is recognition that biology is important: catalogues are full of biostimulants such as seaweeds, sources of carbon, humic, fulvic and amino acids as well as elicitors. We would benefit from developing our understanding of how these link with the microscopic world of bacteria and fungi and the physical, cultural and chemical management we utilise.



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For example, the same broad-spectrum fungicide we apply to control *Microdochium nivale* might prove detrimental to the population of beneficial microbes we have been attempting to support. That can be absolutely appropriate but the important thing to recognise is that it is an informed, conscious decision where we know what we are doing and our decisions determine the outcome.

Biorational product solutions

Ideally, as managers we need to predict the outcome of the operations we undertake and the products we use. This is becoming increasingly important if we are undertaking contradictory actions without thought or understanding, we are not going to get anywhere, i.e. aerating to stimulate bacteria but then applying ferrous (iron) sulphate to target another problem which then kills

the bacteria we've encouraged to assist with the original concern. Use of biorational products will be a key determinant of our ability to effectively develop a best practice integrated pest management approach which enables us to deliver nutrients and control pests without negatively affecting non-target species or the beneficial microorganisms within biocontrols.

The term biorational describes substances or processes that, when applied in a specific system or ecological context, have **little or no adverse consequence for the environment and non-target organisms**, but cause lethal or other suppressive or behaviour modifying action on a target organism and augment the control system. Regardless of origin, these agents might be developed from natural or synthetic models, and generally exploit the evolutionary divergence of physiological systems in the



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As turf managers we understand and control the substrate: by selecting the appropriate dressing we determine the ability of both water and nutrients to move through the surface



target organism from non-target species, including humans. If properly designed and deployed, a biorational agent should be nearly fully compatible with biological controls as envisioned for 'selective insecticides' by Stern et al. (1959) (Horowitz *et al.*).

The term biorational is not restricted to the product being applied to control a pest or disease. If we are looking to support a complex ecosystem that can support beneficial microbes, we need to know that the fertilisers and biostimulants we use will also achieve these ends, otherwise this isn't an integrated strategy.

Dangers

As with any new technologies, the ability to utilise them effectively will be related to our understanding of how they work. Biological

controls and biopesticides are potentially a safer option than the alternatives which they replace, both for the people who apply them and for the environment.

In an attempt to identify potential solutions, managers will be tempted to try biological solutions; products that are not approved are already being imported into the UK and being sold for people to use. It would be interesting to know how much support is being offered to customers who have no experience or training in how to use these types of products. As already indicated, biopesticides operate in a different manner to conventional chemical pesticides: there is a need to account for more factors which requires greater understanding of many of the things discussed in this article. If managers don't comprehend what is required to obtain

effective control, there is the risk that a failure will result in the perception that these technologies don't work, compounding the foot shuffling views expressed earlier. For any type of solution to be successful; chemical, cultural or biological; implementation of an appropriate, integrated strategy in which relevant factors have been taken into account and best practices have been applied is necessary.

It was heartening to see what the AMBER project was achieving: recognition that there are gaps in knowledge and real research has been undertaken to fill those gaps. This research was well communicated, at an appropriate level for nursery growers, the respective target audience, to be able to apply what was being discussed and improve their ability to use an array of solutions.

There's a lot that we have to learn, the key question is; what is the best way of going about this and then practically implementing the findings?

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Frank Newberry

In the first of a two-part article, Frank Newberry, tutor at Grounds Training, reported on the perils of giving people feedback on their performance at work. In Part II, Frank tries to find other ways of getting feedback across and accepted by people



Sharks and Dolphins II

As far back as I can remember there has always been the fear that, if you criticise someone's work performance, their performance will get worse; perhaps a lot worse, before it gets better.

The conventional wisdom quickly became that supervisors and managers should not directly criticise people (shark behaviour - see definition in part 1), but instead start a conversation about work that encourages the individual to be self-critical about their work performance, i.e. the supervisor acts more like a dolphin (definition in part 1).

This works fine when underperforming people have good self-awareness and regard constructive criticism as functional and necessary to maintain good work performance.

What if they do not actually care

But what if underperformers have low self-awareness? What if they think their performance is just fine? And, if it is not fine, then it is someone else's fault? Someone or something else is stopping them performing well. What if they do not actually care about good work performance? What if they believe that it is the supervisor's job to care about performance. What then? Tricky one, especially if there is a skills shortage and they have shown, in the past, that they can do a good job for you.

As a young supervisor, I was very afraid of getting this corrective feedback wrong. I dreaded slipping into arguments about the facts and watching helplessly as the individual and/or the team's morale plummeted.

I felt ashamed and a failure

Why was I so worried? Because I hated being criticised myself! A fair portion of the criticism I had been given in the past did not encourage me to improve. No, it was handled so badly that I felt ashamed and a failure.

Worse, when I myself became a team leader, I saw the majority of my team members had also had bad feedback experiences with previous bosses (it only takes one).

Groundrules for feedback sessions

It might help if we agree some Feedback Groundrules. If you are new in your job – you might do this straight away. If you are an experienced supervisor, consider telling team members that you want to improve, and YOU would like some feedback from them.

Team members are more likely to give you meaningful feedback if you have groundrules for the process. If you have people with low self-awareness (as described above) then maybe have the Feedback Groundrules discussion as a team.

If you have individuals who are timid, have low self-awareness or have had bad experiences with bosses in the past, then consider also seeing them individually and privately.

Not everyone is naturally positive

I would invite you to also consider telling team members that an important part of working for you is the demonstration of a positive attitude and a cheerful disposition. Negativity in the workplace can have such an adverse effect that it is worthy of discussion occasionally.

Of course, if the weather is consistently bad or there is a flu epidemic, people will be more downbeat than usual, and this is understandable. However, whilst there may be no link between mood and performance, there is evidence that people stay longer in a job (in the UK) where the atmosphere at work is a positive one.

You will have seen that I used the words 'demonstration of a positive attitude' above. This is because not everyone is naturally positive. However, people can put on a brave face and 'act positive' as part of their job. After work, they can go home and be as negative as they want to be!

Start the Groundrules ball rolling

To start the Feedback Groundrules ball rolling, you might suggest some yourself to help your team members to be honest when they give feedback to you, e.g.

1. Strictly by appointment and private (information and location - can be a public place)
2. Individual to review positive performance aspects first, then any performance problems or shortcomings
3. No taking it personally, no 'payback' or punishment if the feedback is negative and/or hard to communicate
4. Always cover each performance problem individually and how the problem impacts on the work and the team
5. Set improvement goals, where appropriate, so that progress can be made - and seen to be made
6. Commend and thank people for their honest feedback. Regard the feedback as a gift.

How to receive feedback

Before they set their Feedback Groundrules, consider having a discussion with them about how they might receive feedback, e.g. the receiver should:

1. Confirm which Groundrules are applicable - make any changes for this session.

2. Assume good intentions (now) and look forward to positive outcomes in the future
3. Ask for examples and indications if necessary
4. Try not to take the feedback as evidence of failure
5. Treat the feedback as a springboard for progress
6. Thank the person giving the feedback and agree an early date for a progress review.

A word or two of encouragement

Consider making sure that people have signed up to Feedback Groundrules by making a Feedback Contract (agreement) with them. This will indicate how seriously you are taking their performance and the maintenance of the good morale at work.

Finally, if you are the feedback giver; before you finish work for the day, go and find the person you gave feedback to, maybe give them a word or two of encouragement, perhaps a nod and a smile, and check that they are okay.

They may have reviewed the experience in their mind, or with another person, and may be feeling dejected (a little or a lot).

Next day, you may wish to greet them in a friendly manner so that they know you are all still friends at work.

So, good luck with giving feedback at work that gets accepted, and may work performance always improve!

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RECRUITMENT

Would you enthusiastically rehire everyone?



Ask yourself this question... “Would I enthusiastically rehire everyone on the team today?” Cringing a little at the answer? Here’s an exercise to help you evaluate this question. It is called the Player Grid

The Concept: place each member of your team into one of the four boxes: **A-players, B-players, C-players, and B/C-players.**

A-players are those employees that are aligned to your core values (the right who) and are producing the results they are paid for. A-players want to play with other A-players. They will leave if leadership tolerates the nonsense of C and B/C-players. You also need to spend time with A-players, giving them opportunities to grow and excel. They are the fuel to scale the company. That is what makes them an A-players. Successful companies consist of predominantly A-players.

B-players are those employees that are aligned to your core values (the right who) but are not yet producing the results they are paid for. They are either in the wrong seat, or they need to be coached to elevate their performance. These players typically welcome the opportunity to grow and improve, so it’s a worthwhile investment.

C-players are those employees that are not aligned to your core values (the wrong who) and are not producing the results they are paid for. Don’t spend any more time with these employees. Terminate them. Do it right, but do it now. You are already short of time. Stop wasting it on these people.

And finally, the **B/C-players**, who are probably the most dangerous people in the company. While they are producing results (often exceptional results), they are not aligned to your core values. They are a distraction and a constant source of negativity. Leadership tolerates them and allows them to stay because they are delivering the goods. But trust me, they are killing your company. They are creating a toxic culture that will slowly eat your company alive.

B/C-players need to be coached (very directly and consistently) to become an A-player or dismissed. Trust me, everyone in the company is looking to leadership, asking the question, “What gives?” And if you don’t do something,

you are sending a message that core values in your organization don’t matter. A-players have options and they will leave for a better culture.

Why the players you choose to hire (and fire) matter.

The decision to say ‘yes’ to starting the family business or taking over the reins is often driven by the desire to be your own boss. These same leaders often think leaders are like mavericks, making up the rules as they go along, not conforming to anyone else’s ideas.

And then reality hits. A company’s ability to survive and scale up is not built around one person, but a team of the right people surrounding the entrepreneur/leader who will be integral to the strategic thinking and operational execution to grow and scale up the business.

So who are these right people? There is an adage that states, “We hire people for what they can do, and we fire them for who they are.” We



A company’s ability to survive and scale up is not built around one person, but a team of the right people surrounding the entrepreneur/leader

have the process backward. We need to start hiring people for who they are **FIRST**, then for their capabilities. You can teach how (the skills), but you can’t teach who (the values).

Jim Collins, in his book *Good To Great*, discovered the #1 characteristic that separated the good companies from the great companies was that great companies figured out “who first, then what.” In other words, the first thing they did was get the right people on the bus, the wrong ones off, and everyone in the right seat. Then they figured out what to do and how to win in the marketplace.

To get the right who, a company needs to define its core values, and then hire people who align to them. Core values are neither right nor wrong...they are just yours. They are your handful of rules (behaviours) that define your culture, are alive among your people today, and remain constant. A toxic culture eats strategy’s lunch every day. You’ll know if you have truly discovered your core values when you are willing to fire an offender and/or take a financial hit to maintain them. That’s powerful.

As the leadership team goes, so goes the company. Your leadership team - including you - need to be A-players constantly working to become better. No company can outgrow its leadership team.

Your team is the ceiling to your company’s ability to scale up.

Author: Tom Garrity, managing partner at Compass Point Consulting



Teamwork at Hazeltine National Golf Club

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CLIMATE CHANGE

Finding different ways to be green

In these darkly surreal times, sport sometimes seems to have the answer. Not for sanity, too late indeed, but for tiny moments of bliss. In a recent Sportblog, Tanya Aldred investigates why turf sports will not flourish in a changing climate unless they start planning to make do with less water

In a recent Waterwise conference, Sir James Bevan, chief executive of the Environment Agency, laid out his stall on climate change: "It's not just almost every scientist in the world who believes it's happening, but hard-nosed companies who are making investment decisions based on their belief that it's a thing. They would not be spending hundreds of millions of pounds a year on greater resilience in the face of something for which there was not compelling evidence."

Then, having lightened the mood, he moved on to "the jaws of death" - lines on a graph that exist in all water companies' business plans, and mark the point at which water demand in the UK will surpass supply. He suggested that this point would arrive sometime in the next 20-25 years. By then, we will be battling hotter summers - by 2040, half will be warmer than the 2003 heatwave - alongside a population rising towards 75 million in 2050. Water will become an increasingly precious and scarce resource, even on this damp island.

The supply side lies with the water companies. But the demand side - that is on individuals doing prosaic things such as switching the tap off while teeth-brushing, and big organisations, including sports - particularly turf sports - becoming responsible for the vast amounts of water they



Sprinklers water the pitch at the London Stadium.

© Nigel French/PA

use. "How is your pitch/course so green?" will increasingly become a legitimate question.

Put aside the image of a yellow polyester polo neck beneath a diamond-patterned pullover and prepare to swallow your preconceptions. The sport consistently asking difficult questions about the changing climate is ... golf. Hop over to the website of the R&A, the game's ruling body, and the main menu bar has seven subjects running across the top. Up there, alongside Heritage, Rules and Shop, is Sustainability.

The section marked 'Using Water Efficiently' is stark and to the point. "Water is a precious resource and golf courses should only use what is absolutely necessary. Many golf courses use too much water and golf courses are often criticised for taking water that could be used for a better purpose ... Golf clubs may not be able to afford to buy in as much water in the future so should be looking to alternative, and cheaper, supplies and ways to actually cut down on the amount of water that is used."

It goes on to map out 21 ways for courses to try to reduce their water footprint, from prioritising the greens when it comes to watering, to making water-use figures public in order to show transparency.

Steve Isaac is the director of sustainability at the R&A. The content of Bevan's speech did not come as a surprise. "We're all familiar

with climate change predictions, especially in south-east England. Greenkeepers have been aware of it (the changing climate) since greenkeeping began, but we've been seeing more extremes in recent years."

Last year, the R&A launched Golf Course 2030, an initiative to consider the impacts of the changing climate and pulled in every major stakeholder from players associations to the R&A's sustainability partner, the GEO foundation. Action plans will be published in May.

Golf will look different in the future. Permanent swathes of rolling emerald will just not be possible; instead, Isaac says, courses will need to change with the seasons. Do other sports need to start thinking about their water usage? "Everyone needs to start thinking about it."

But other sports bodies' preparations vary from nonexistent to still-mulling-it-over. There are fundamental problems to tackle. For example: 40% of recreational cricket clubs are on flood plains, while 45% are in mains-water stressed areas. Yet the vast majority of clubs still water the pitch by turning on the outside tap and leaving the hose on.

Clubs must water their pitches to keep them safe - to produce something with even bounce that provides a fair contest between bat and ball. But nudge theory, combined with a little guidance and minimum funding, has failed, in the eyes of Andy Carmichael, a sport and environmental researcher. "If I go to a club and say to some shattered volunteers who have just come home from work, got changed and come straight back out again: 'Do you know you can set up your own rain water harvesting system?' they'll think I'm not living in the real world."

There are relatively easy things that can be done: using a sprinkler instead of a hose, not applying more water than can be absorbed, planting trees to aid drainage. Providing easy access to drinking water. Installing water-saving toilets. Encouraging professional players to set an example and shun single-use plastic water bottles. But Carmichael thinks turf sports need to ask bigger questions, about practices not individuals: if we've got a problem with water, do we want to play on soil? Is it right that we're using drinking water to irrigate the pitch? Should we stop trying to make individual clubs sustainable and move to bigger hubs where pitches can be tended together?

These are stark choices. But for sports to survive and flourish in the new climate reality, they must follow the example of golf, not certain politicians, and urgently make a plan.



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SPRING RENOVATIONS

Pitch perfect at Ballards Ash

A Wiltshire rugby club, which took a huge step four years ago to keep its five pitches and training areas playable, has received a massive boost from one of the top names in English rugby



Keith Kent (far right) discusses his findings

In 2015, Royal Wootton Bassett RFC applied for a Rugby Football Foundation (RFF) grant and sought funds from a Sport England grant for grounds maintenance equipment. With funds in place, and after receiving expert advice from Keith Kent, Twickenham's Head Groundsman, through the RFU's 'Groundsman Connected' scheme, they chose a Wiedenmann Terra Spike XF6 refurbished through Wiedenmann UK's own workshops.

The South West 1 club runs three regular senior teams, six 13-U18 junior teams and six age groups from Under 6-12 years.

Fast forward four years. Keith Kent, on his return, celebrated the efforts of the dedicated volunteer grounds team. Assessing the club's Ballards Ash facility as part of a review programme, he reserved highest praise for those who give up their time for free.

In a written report circulated to club members, he said: "It is a few years since I last visited the club, along with Dave Stubble (RFU Funding and Facilities Manager). I returned with Jon Bendle (RFU, Area Facilities Manager) and was absolutely delighted with what I found. What a transformation. What a club house. What a team of great volunteers that represent this great club."

Special praise was also extended to contractor, Bretton King, who is employed by the club to implement major improvements.

Giving specific advice for improving each of the club's pitches, Keith Kent summarised the combined efforts of contractor and volunteers by commenting: "The renovation works are all in hand with sand, aeration, seed and feed all being done to the highest standard. If we get a half decent summer, pitches will bounce back and be at their best. Please keep up the maintenance work on your pitches in-house. The chain harrows are a great piece of kit and your very own Wiedenmann XF6 has made such a difference to your pitches. Congratulations on buying this machine. I have one at Twickenham and wouldn't part with it for the world. A Wiedenmann Terra Spike is just what I would wish for every club in the country. It is an awesome piece of kit and one that you must use as often as you can. It is the difference between having good pitches and not. Remember, only to go on when the weather and the conditions allow."

Realistically, volunteers try to aerate a full pitch every week in rotation. Applauding Royal Wootton Bassett's future proofing, the top tier Head Groundsman said:

"Your equipment shed is just awesome! I am so jealous of you. I showed the pictures to my staff and they were laughing that you had more room than we have. Well done to the club. They had the foresight to build for the future and that included the groundsman, his team and his equipment."



Excerpts from the report

1st team pitch

This pitch looks really well - despite the drains dropping due to last year's drought, which no-one could have foreseen. The driest and hottest summer for over forty years and it has taken its toll on pitches all over the country.

An invasion of rabbits is not helping your cause at all. Bretton has said that he is going to hand topdress these drain runs this spring. That is fantastic. That is how to do it properly and he is not going to be short on effort in an attempt to get those drains right.

The renovation works are all in hand with sand, aeration, seed and feed all being done to the highest standard.

If we get a half decent summer, this pitch will bounce back and be back to its best.

2nd team pitch with floodlights

This pitch is in need of a lot of work this close season. It is the workhorse of the club with training and games taking place on it every week of the season. It is very bare of grass and the rabbits have had a party digging out your drain runs on this pitch. This pitch needs everything done to it the same as the 1st team pitch. Bretton is going to hand dress the drains on this pitch as well. Do not skimp on anything on this pitch. It needs a lot of TLC.

3rd team pitch

A really good well grassed pitch. There is so much grass cover that it is only down for a fertiliser and in-house aeration. Knowing what we know, the 1st team have agreed to train on this pitch so let's make it look the business from day one of training. Give it an extra feed. Green it up and make it look like a stadium pitch. Cut it and put a really good pattern on it. Make it stand out when people look from the clubhouse. Make them want to train on it! They will ignore pitch 2, if pitch 3 is looking like Twickenham!

4th team pitch

Once again, a really well grassed pitch. Only needs fertiliser, aeration and regular mowing to keep this pitch looking its best. Put a nice pattern on this pitch in the close season and make people want to train on this pitch. If we can afford it, give this pitch an extra feed in an attempt to protect pitch 2.

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POPULATION OF INSECTS

A bug's death!

Alex Sobel MP hosted a House of Commons debate recently about insect declines, sparked by the recent global review of insect declines authored by Sanchez-Bayo and Wyckhuys 2019

The paper states that “rates of decline that may lead to the extinction of 40% of the world’s insect species over the next few decades” and that there is currently an “annual 2.5% loss of biomass worldwide”.

Alex commented. “There is not one problem facing insects, they are diverse animals and are affected by many of the ways we are changing the planet. Without a doubt climate change, the loss and fragmentation of special habitats, and the impoverishment caused by intensive agriculture - of which pesticide over-use is the primary culprit - interact to create a pernicious threat to populations of insects. Species are stuck on islands of habitat, they die or fail to reproduce when they disperse into intervening agricultural land, and eventually blink out when climate change makes their homes uninhabitable.”

Other factors known to be impacting on insect populations include light pollution, air pollution, water pollution, habitat neglect, inappropriate development, worms and flea treatments, wildflower loss, competition and disease spread from captive pollinators, water extraction and sedimentation, under investment in nature conservation agencies, cuts to biodiversity funding, invasive species, a lack of binding recovery targets, nutrient enrichment, and peat use. Whilst some credible risks to insect populations such as electromagnetic radiation remain under-researched and their risk unassessed.

What the government is doing

The following initiatives are good news for insects:

- Developing a national B-Lines pollinator network to reconnect wildlife - map completed in NI and Wales, in development in Scotland, with SG focused on delivering the John Muir Pollinator Way, Defra has announced £60K of funding to complete the England map



What are B-Lines?

B-Lines are an imaginative and beautiful solution to the problem of the loss of flowers and pollinators. The B-Lines are a series of ‘insect pathways’ running through our countryside and towns, along which we are restoring and creating a series of wildflower-rich habitat stepping stones. They link existing wildlife areas together, creating a network, like a railway, that will weave across the British landscape. This will provide large areas of brand new habitat benefiting bees and butterflies - but also a host of other wildlife.

- Introducing a national Pollinator Monitoring Scheme last year - but funding commitments remain modest and short term
- Moving towards paying land managers for providing public goods such as biodiversity and pollination services
- Banning of three bee harming and water polluting neonicotinoid insecticides.

What more the government needs to do Buglife’s top 10 actions to help restore insect populations:

- Ensure that Environmental Principles are comprehensively applicable after Brexit and establish a strong, independent Office for Environmental Protection to hold governments to account
- Establish statutory nature recovery network maps with local authority sign off that will set the B-Lines network into national delivery mechanisms
- Introduce legally binding targets for biodiversity recovery, including, as separate measures, pollinators and freshwater invertebrate life
- Design new Agri-Environment Schemes so that they deliver safe pollinator habitat and a national network of flower-rich habitats - B-Lines
- Support the introduction of EU wide tests to establish if new pesticides are going to harm wild bee populations (UK has been blocking new EU bee testing guidance)
- Reduce the pollution of water courses with insecticides, flea treatments and pharmaceuticals toxic to insect life
- Improve the protection of rare and endangered species in the planning system and introduce measures to reduce light pollution levels
- Undertake a full risk assessment of electromagnetic radiation environmental risks, including filling knowledge gaps, before the roll out of 5G networks
- Find new ways of directing significant new funds to saving biodiversity, such as reinstating the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund or payments for ecosystem services
- Increase investment in the science needed to develop sustainable agriculture, reduce pesticide dependence and halt and reverse the decline of species.

Article by wildlifearticles.co.uk



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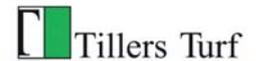
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MACHINERY AND SUPPLIES

Product Update

A round-up of the latest product news announced in recent weeks



GreenMech recently launched the next evolution of woodchippers at The Arb Show.

For occasions where operators encounter either challenging ground undulations, or where levels differ significantly between the two tracks, GreenMech's new SURE-Trak 19-28 model safely overcomes both challenges. The independent pivoting track assemblies allow each track to maintain contact with the ground while following the contours, to provide a surer footprint and improved stability. The patent-pending pivoting track system allows safe traversing and climbing of slopes in excess of 35 degrees. Its assistance in keeping the body of the machine level also protects the engine by keeping it within its approved manufacturer tilt levels.

GreenMech's Arborist 150p, fitted with a 37hp Briggs & Stratton Petrol engine, can offer comparable performance to the higher horse-powered diesel of the existing Arborist 150, but at a much-reduced cost.

www.greenmech.co.uk



Campey Turf Care Systems is giving turf professionals a green solution to mowing with the introduction of the Fleischmann Electric 5 Deck mower.

The mower has five 2.20 metre cutting decks with six spindles per deck, giving a 10-metre overall cutting width. The mower features a braked steering rear axle and the two-point pivoting front mount hitch provides high manoeuvrability, enabling cutting speeds up to 20kph to be achieved.

Each blade on the five cutting decks is powered by a low maintenance electric motor, leaving behind traditional gearboxes and PTO shafts and eliminating the risk of oil leaks. The six high tip speed blades in each deck give more cuts per metre and offer excellent clipping dispersal.

The modern generator used to power the mower is very efficient and lowers all the factors you'd want less of. That's low PTO requirements, low engine revs and lower noise output for quiet operation.

campeyturfcare.com



ICL has announced the launch of two new additions to its leading range of SierrablenPlus fertilisers.

The new products - "Renovator" 11-11-5 + 4CaO + 8MgO and "Turf Starter" 5-28-0 + 16MgO both contain Pearl® Technology, which has been proven to greatly enhance root development.

The mini-granular range of SierrablenPlus fertilisers have for many years been a popular choice for those looking to achieve even coverage at low rates for their sports or amenity turf. This is due to the micro-granular formulation containing Poly-S and resin-coated PACE technology with conventional nitrogen sources to provide the best long-term nutrient release patterns.

Depending on the requirement, there are a wide range of solutions in the SierrablenPlus range to supporting healthy turf growth though the season. The latest products to be added to the portfolio, "Renovator" and "Turf Starter", have been specifically added because of their ability to greatly enhance root development due to the inclusion of Pearl® Technology.

pitchcare.com/shop



Makita launches more 36v cordless professional chainsaws in response to industry demand.

Makita chainsaws are renowned amongst forestry professionals for power, performance, reliability and great value. The new Makita DUC355Z and DUC405Z twin 18V Brushless LXT Chainsaws supply energy to the powerful 36V DC motor drive system inherent in these models. Combining the power and market-leading features that the industry has asked for, these new chainsaws are expected to be well received.

www.makitauk.com

Etesia UK has launch two offers for their range of ride-on mowers.

Etesia UK has announced a VAT-free offer on several of its ride-on mowers, and offering up to £1000 off the price of other models.

The VAT-free offer runs from 1st April until the 30th June 2019 and applies to the Bahia and Hydro 80 ride-on mowers.

If you require a large ride-on mower, Etesia UK has announced a 'try before you buy' offer.

Following a demonstration with an Etesia member of staff in attendance, customers will be presented with a cheque which will entitle them to an additional £500 discount on the purchase price of the Buffalo 100 range (BVHP2, BVHPX2, BPHP & BPHPX

models) or a £1000 discount on the purchase price of the Hydro124 range (H124 DX, H124DN and H124DL models). This offer is in addition to any discount the customer undertakes with the supplying dealer and runs until 31st December 2019.

Etesia UK Managing Director Les Malin said: "The exceptional success of our VAT offer a few years ago meant we were understandably keen to offer the discount again."

*These offers are available at participating Etesia UK dealers until the dates specified above or until stocks last.

www.etesia.co.uk

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OFFSIDE

The not so serious side of the industry

Space burger lands on training ground

When a burger descended from space to land on Colchester United's training ground on Thursday, groundsmen at the club were stumped as to its origin.

Was it a cryptic message from another solar system, or possibly a bizarre ploy from an opposing team to upset United's preparations?



All was revealed when Tom Stanniland, better known by his YouTube name Kill'em, called the League Two club to explain.

"I sent a burger into space using a weather balloon," said Stanniland, who intended to eat it once it had safely returned to terra firma - wherever that may be. It had gone about 24 miles up and the weather balloon popped. It's come back down, travelled over 100 miles and landed right here."

Stanniland was able to determine its location thanks to a tracker he had installed in the box carrying the burger into the earth's atmosphere.

As seen on social media ...



An image of Spurs' new stadium on Facebook was met with the following comment ... "When are they going to remove that crane from the pitch, it's been laying there now for 3 months, do they need to erect another crane to get that one out?"



Let's all take a moment to appreciate the time and effort this guy spent putting a strap on his dirt so it wouldn't fall off

Early shower

Four sprinklers were switched on with a host of players from both teams given a soaking with the score locked at 1-1.

Play had to be stopped deep into added time at the Vitality Stadium, when the sprinklers were switched on during Bournemouth's game against Wolves.

The Premier League clash was interrupted in the 96th minute when the sprinklers suddenly emerged from the grass and started spraying water everywhere.

The referee was forced to stop the



momentum of the game with the sides going for the winning goal.

But the supporters found the funny side as they loudly cheered the drama on the field.

Lickey Hills Golf Course knicker ninja

It's not every morning you arrive at the golf course to find someone has pegged



their washing out all over the course, but that's exactly what happened at Lickey Hills Golf Course.

The Mytime Active club was hit by an April Fools' Day prank, when underwear appeared on every flag on the course, and it was up to Greenkeeper Dave Collins to unmask the knicker Ninja.

The mystery drew to a close with Clare and Beth from the cafe revealing themselves as the culprits.

Well done girls, but I'm sincerely hoping the underwear was clean!



Someone takes a marker pen to the 3hrs 40 at this golf club.

DIARY DATES

MAY

2nd: Football - UEFA Europa League semi-finals, first legs (uefa.com)

3rd-4th: Rugby Union - Pro14 quarter-finals (pro14rugby.org)

4th: Football - Women's FA Cup final, Wembley Stadium (thefa.com)

5th: Cricket - England v Pakistan Twenty20, Cardiff (twenty20.com)

7th-8th: Football - UEFA Champions League semi-finals, first legs (uefa.com/uefachampionsleague)

9th: Golf - Betfred British Masters, Hillside Golf Club (europeantour.com)

9th: Football - UEFA Europa League semi-finals, second legs (uefa.com)

11th: Rugby Union - European Champions Cup final, Newcastle (epcrugby.com)

18th: Football - FA Cup final, Wembley Stadium (thefa.com)

24th: Rugby Union - Premiership semi-finals (premiershiprugby.com)

25th: Football - Scottish Cup final, Hampden Park (scottishfa.co.uk)

25th: Rugby union - Pro14 final, Glasgow (pro14rugby.org)

25th: Cricket - One-Day Cup final, Lord's (lords.org)

25th-26th: Rugby League - Super League Magic Weekend, Liverpool (rugby-league.com)

30th-15 July: Cricket - World Cup in England starts (cricketworldcup.com)

31st: Horseracing - Oaks, Epsom (epsomderby.co.uk)

JUNE

1st: Football - Champions League final, Madrid, Spain (uefa.com/uefachampionsleague)

1st: Rugby Union - Premiership final, Twickenham (premiershiprugby.com)

1st: Horseracing - Epsom Derby (epsomderby.co.uk)

1st-2nd: Rugby League - Challenge Cup quarter-finals (epcrugby.com/challenge-cup)

3rd: Cricket - World Cup, England v Pakistan, Trent Bridge (cricketworldcup.com)

6th: Cricket - England v West Indies, first women's one-day international, Leicester (ecb.co.uk/england/women)

7th-7th July: Football - Women's World Cup, France (fifa.com/womensworldcup)

8th: Cricket - World Cup - England v Bangladesh, Cardiff (cricketworldcup.com)

9th: Cricket - England v West Indies, second women's one-day international, Worcester (ecb.co.uk/england/women)

13th: Cricket - England v West Indies, third women's one-day international, Chelmsford (ecb.co.uk/england/women)

14th: Cricket - World Cup, England v West Indies, Southampton (cricketworldcup.com)

16th-30th: Football - European Under-21 Championship, Italy and San Marino (uefa.com)

18th: Cricket - World Cup - England v Afghanistan, Old Trafford (cricketworldcup.com)

18th-22nd: Horseracing - Royal Ascot (ascot.co.uk)

20th-23rd: Golf - KPMG Women's PGA Championship, Hazeltine (kpmgwomenspgachampionship.com)

30th: Cricket - World Cup - England v India, Edgbaston (cricketworldcup.com)

JULY

1st-14th: Tennis - Wimbledon (wimbledon.com)

3rd: Cricket - World Cup, England v New Zealand, Chester-le-Street (cricketworldcup.com)

7th: Football - Women's World Cup final, France (fifa.com/womensworldcup)

9th: Cricket - World Cup - first semi-final, Old Trafford (cricketworldcup.com)

11th: Cricket - World Cup - second semi-final, Edgbaston (cricketworldcup.com)

14th: Cricket - World Cup final, Lord's (cricketworldcup.com)

18th-21st: Golf - The Open, Royal Portrush (portrush2019open.com)

24-28th: Cricket - England v Ireland Test, Lord's (lords.org)

27-28th: Rugby league - Challenge Cup semi-finals (rugby-league.com/challengecup)

30th-3rd: Horseracing - Glorious Goodwood (goodwood.com)

To have your event included in this magazine diary section, please email details to kerry@pitchcare.com

QUOTE ME HAPPY

"I love to see her doing all right, and if she's not, then I'm sad. But I'm not attached anymore – mentally, emotionally or physically. I got divorced and have a beautiful wife, so I'm living the dream." – **Tony Adams likened his relationship with Arsenal to that of an ex-wife as he has battled to move on from his football career.**

"Nothing is won tonight. In what do I take comfort? Well, Roger Federer put on a majestic masterclass so I am happy about that. Of course I am happy that although nothing won tonight here in this chamber, at the Emirates Arsenal did win 2-0." **John Bercow comments amid Theresa May's Brexit farce.**

"If you think you can do a better job, have a go." **The long-running friction between Chris Kermode and Novak Djokovic contributed significantly to his downfall, leaving the chairman in dead man's shoes.**



Dan Biggar

"Klopp got caught up in the moment, but was it that big a deal? I appreciate why Evertonians hated seeing it. To be fair, if I was in Marco Silva's position, I would have been fuming if I'd seen the opposition manager galloping off in that manner. **Peter Crouch speaks out about Jurgen Klopp getting fined £8,000 for celebration.**

"There has been a lot of chaos. I suppose there was a bit of me during the Six Nations thinking that I couldn't have timed this move a huge amount better. The lads were asking me for the lottery numbers for the following week because they thought I could see into the future." **Dan Biggar claimed that winning a trophy with Northampton would mean more to him than a Grand Slam.**

"Sir Alex Ferguson's legacy has been a millstone around Davie Moyes, Louis van Gaal and Jose Mourinho's necks. It dragged them all down and out of Old Trafford." **Ex-United forward Alan Brazil believes Ferguson is partly culpable.**

"I think my players are at the level where our big clubs have got to open their stadiums. Man United Women let people in for free when they play at Leigh, so why can't you at Old Trafford?" **Phil Neville wants clubs such as Manchester United, Arsenal and Chelsea to "throw open" their stadiums for women's matches.**

It's about obsessing over the little things, the details no one else sees. It's never tolerating anything less than the best. Perfection is a mindset. And that's worth being proud of.

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