

PITCHCARE

ISSUE 106

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2023

WHAT IF YOUR **BUDGET IS CUT?**

PLUS

●
**SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT:
FERTILISER CHANGES**

●
**TOP TIPS - HOW TO
DEAL WITH FROST**

●
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Editor Kerry Haywood

PITCHCARE, BUT NOT AS YOU KNOW IT



Listening to feedback from industry and taking a creative fresh look at our media side, we have made bold steps for 2023 to give our audience a reinvigorated Pitchcare, starting with our magazine.

I have previously alluded to new developments and relationships starting with our partnership with TSP Media who are now fully in the swing of handling all

things advertising and we have much more planned for 2023.

You will have hopefully digested a new concept front cover, along with a fresh new layout of the magazine throughout. Our changes have been driven by feedback from the turf community and we have brought a more streamlined publication with snappier content and shorter feature articles, alongside increased focus on topical news and information aimed at engaging and educating the turf care audience. In a digital dominated era, where magazines increasingly compete for your attention and time, we're very aware that our content must be informative and in a presentable and easily deliverable format.

Our main feature article this issue (page 24) covers the challenging subject of budgets, which is very relevant in the current climate. We have gleaned knowledge and insight from several organisations discussing how they intend to manage budgets going forward in 2023, looking at inflationary factors impacting our sector and variables which might impact the coming months and what you need to consider to navigate the economic climate that exists. Also in this issue is a very honest account of a well-respected industry friend, Ed Ramsden, of his mental health struggle (page 45). We have decided to make our wellbeing segment a permanent feature of the Pitchcare publication.

We are committed to evolving, educating and engaging our community and I would love to hear your thoughts on the new magazine.

Exciting times ahead!

Kerry

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FOREWORD



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Printed by Buxton Press

Advertising TSP Media t: 01952 234000

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My mental health

Ed Ramsden gives a true account of his mental health struggle and emphasises that more needs to be done in our industry

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BIGGA REVEALS FINALISTS

of its annual greenkeeping awards

● An innovative project to restore the historic links that hosted the first Open Championship, a club that hosted its first ever professional golf event and a team that battled Scottish snowfall to construct a new hole have been revealed as the finalists of the British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association's (BIGGA) Awards 2023.

Each year, BIGGA invites nominations from across the golfing industry to recognise the achievements of its members, who play a vital role in the ongoing success of the sport.

The BIGGA Awards are divided into three categories, with the winners revealed at the BIGGA Welcome Celebration with Origin Amenity Solutions, taking place on the opening evening of the BIGGA Turf Management Exhibition (BTME) next week.

BTME is the largest annual gathering of greenkeeping professionals outside America and is held at the Harrogate Convention Centre in North Yorkshire alongside the Continue to Learn education programme.

Awards:

- Championship Greenkeeping Performance of the Year
- Greenkeeping Project of the Year
- Outstanding Contribution of the Year

With incredible prizes up for grabs, the BIGGA Awards recognise that high standards of quality and dedication are vital to the success of any golf course or championship. They reward the innovation of BIGGA members who are at the cutting edge of the profession and any BIGGA member within the UK, regardless of their golf facility's size, age or reputation, can enter. The awards provide golf clubs with an opportunity to showcase their greenkeeping team's talents and celebrate their achievements.

For more information about each of the finalists visit btme.org.uk

Left Championship Greenkeeping Performance of the Year finalist, The Abridge greenkeeping team, alongside PDC Championship winner Pavan Sagoo.

A new era begins for Lloyds and Hunter

● Lloyds Mowers and Hunter Grinders will be making their first BTME appearance since being acquired by the Howardson Group, manufacturers of the Dennis and SISIS brands.

This strategic alliance signals exciting times for the two well respected brands.

Lloyds has always manufactured and supplied products that deliver on performance while requiring minimum maintenance. Hunter Grinders is known worldwide in golf and stadia for their grinding performance on cutting cylinders and bottom blades. The company has steadily built up a reputation for supplying strong, accurate, precision grinders.

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Ian Howard MD of Howardson Group

GMA

non-English language course

● The Grounds Management Association (GMA) has officially launched its first training course written in Serbo-Croat-Bosnian, Nivo 1 Održavanje Fudbalskih Terena (Level 1 Maintenance of Football Pitches).

The online training course is a direct translation of the existing GMA course and whilst it focusses on football, it allows participants to gain an awareness and general understanding of the tasks involved in maintaining playing surfaces.

The course was created after the GMA's Technical and Learning team identified a need for formal training courses bespoke to countries in this part of the world.

"In 2019, I was invited to participate in a turf-based educational seminar in Sarajevo, where, along with delegates from Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia, we discussed the grounds industry in Europe," said Bojan Jovanović, Online Tutor at the GMA.



"As a result, I discussed the possibility of supporting these countries with our Head of Technical and Learning, Dan Prest. Dan was part of a pitch maintenance project in Kosovo and was keen to understand how the grounds industry was developing in former Yugoslavia."

The course is suitable for volunteers or new employees to develop skills and learn the latest best practices.

For more information visit thegma.org.uk/learning

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PROUDLY BRITISH



Trentham apprentice Reece Tomalin alongside Ed Stant

GTC appointment to Greenkeeping Trailblazer Group

● The Greenkeepers Training Committee (GTC) has revealed that Trentham Golf Club's course manager, Ed Stant, has been appointed chairperson of the group that works to produce and administer formal educational opportunities for greenkeepers in the UK.

The appointment was made following The Richmond Golf Club Course Manager, Les Howkins MG's decision to step down as chairperson of the Greenkeeping Trailblazer Group following an incredibly successful tenure.

Trailblazer groups are responsible for developing a new apprenticeship for an occupation and then revising the apprenticeship as needed. Since becoming chairperson in 2021, Les has steered the group expertly, navigating the collaboration with the Sports Turf Trailblazer Group to develop the Level 3 Advanced Sports Turf Technician apprenticeship,

which was approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) in October 2022.

No sooner had the new Level 3 apprenticeship been approved than Les began leading the group to review the Level 2 Golf Greenkeeper apprenticeship. Great strides have been made so far and this work will continue under the leadership of Ed, who will step up from the vice chairperson role. Gavin Sowden, environment and health & safety officer at Woburn Golf Club, will become vice chairperson.

Ed Stant said: "Apprenticeships are such a vital route into our profession and often the building blocks for many young people entering the world of greenkeeping."

For more information on the Greenkeeping Trailblazer Group, email The GTC's Fiona Lyttle: fiona@the-gtc.co.uk

Ipswich GC wins photo competition

● A greenkeeper mowing the 2nd green at Ipswich Golf Club on a misty morning has been revealed as the overall winner of the BIGGA Annual Photographic Competition 2022 sponsored by Syngenta.

Joe is now a two-time champion, having previously won the competition in 2020.

View all twelve images selected to form the desktop calendar on the BIGGA website.



FIFA to ask every country to name a stadium

● FIFA plans to ask every country in the world to name a stadium in honour of the late football legend Pele, its president Gianni Infantino has said.

The former Santos FC star, widely regarded as one of the greatest footballers of all time, died on 29 December aged 82 after a battle with colon cancer since September 2021.

Mr Infantino, who is in Sao Paulo in Brazil for Pele's funeral, told local reporters: "We're going to ask every country in the world to name one of their football stadiums with the name of Pele."



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GAMIE CHANGER

Surrounded by Hampshire countryside, the resort style course at **Skylark Golf Club** is undoubtedly one of the most fun, accessible and well-presented golf courses in the area.

The 18-hole, 5,583-yard par 70 parkland course offers fantastic views at every turn, mature trees, lakes and testing bunkers give real character to the course which, while kind to the less experienced golfer, holds some surprises for the player who enjoys a challenging round.

Skylark has had a variety of owners in its modest history. Starting out as Fareham Woods Golf Club in 1998, then Quindell Golf and Country Club in 2002, before becoming Skylark Golf Club in the spring of 2021, following the Just Develop It (JDI) acquisition in 2013. They quickly made several improvements, with planning

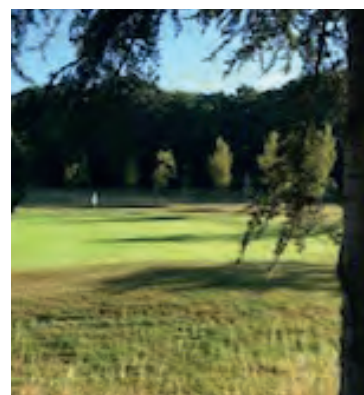
permission sought and granted for a new pro-shop and sports bar, along with improvements made to the gym and spa facilities. Whilst the 18-hole parkland course is famous for its exquisitely maintained course and strategically placed bunkers, JDI also wanted to develop the club as a premier wedding and event venue on the South Coast.

Fast forward to the present day, and Skylark finds itself with a new owner called Time GB Group (Royale life retirement homes), who bought the club eighteen months ago. Things have settled down now for Course Manager Simon Bell-Tye and he looks forward to the exciting future he and his team are planning and

Below:
Left Frosty mornings on the course

Right Course Manager Simon Bell-Tye





TEAM PRAISE

Simon was rightly proud to mention that since he and his team began their journey the club have received recognition from the Professional Golfer Association (P.G.A.) with them hosting four events over recent years. To add to the endorsements of the club's improvements, Hampshire County Golf have hosted numerous championship matches at the club and now have regular fixtures in their calendar. This is praise indeed for all the hard work the team have done.

preparing for over the next few years.

Simon Says

It was lovely to catch up with Simon and, interestingly, it became very apparent that our paths into greenkeeping were much the same! Simon is a very good golfer (and I mean very good), and tunes his game most weekends at his home golf course, Royal Winchester Golf Club, which he personally holds in high affection. Back in his early years, he originally had aspirations of turning professional at eighteen years old, but realised his 2 handicap wasn't good enough to make it big in the world of tournament golf. By coincidence, at the same time, the then course manager at Royal Winchester, Phil Hanks gave Simon the offer of helping out on the golf course. Like most of us who said, "I'll give this turf maintenance a try," the rest is history as they say.

He loved it so much that he realised he wanted to make this his vocation for life. I say vocation, because Simon is like the rest of us in the world of turf - totally absorbed by the role of a sports turf manager (as I'm sure his long-suffering wife will testify)! Simon is a perfectionist, which I believe, all good turf mangers need to be in

order to succeed.

A couple of short years later, South Winchester golf club came calling and he gained his level two at Sparsholt college, before he then returned to his beloved Royal Winchester for a further four years' service. In search of a promotion, Simon moved to Botley Park Golf and Country Club in 2003 to take up the position of Deputy Head and went on to become head greenkeeper. In 2014, Simon made the move to become the head man at Fareham Golf Club (now called Skylark). Simon explained, "I brought a couple of the lads with me from Botley Park and recruited a couple more and we started improving and developing the course."

Simon and his team have continued developing the golf course with an unwavering sense of earnest ever since those early days, and eight years later the foot still hasn't lifted off the proverbial accelerator pedal! "I like to think we've totally revamped the golf course," Simon explained. "We've 'tidied' the course by removing problematic and overgrowing tree areas, gradually improved the turf composition on the greens by adopting a robust (three times a season) bent/fescue over-seeding programme, installed £150,000 of fairway



drainage to the bottom half of the course with the help of a company called SpeedCut Contractors (thank you Barry Pace), built (in-house and from scratch) a new putting green and practice area by the clubhouse and re-built all 39 bunkers, taking the opportunity to add much needed drainage and installing artificial eco bunker edges and faces, which has massively improved their playability.”

I had the opportunity to witness first hand some of his ongoing projects, namely greens drainage with the assistance of DJUKE and their very impressive hydrowick system (thank you Cameron McMillan), constructing even more

bunkers, re-building extra tees and improving some existing tee complexes (thank you The McKie Group contractors) and also installing newer sprinkler heads to name but a few (thank you PSI Irrigation Ltd).

“Re-building bunkers and tee tops has been a major game-changer factor for us,” explained Simon. “They are features which every golfer appreciates from a playability aspect to the visual enhancement. We receive a lot of great feedback when these areas are finished”. Simon went on, “Some of our tees were too small and most were uneven. We’ve nearly completed the entire 18 sets of tees and, this winter, we will finish the last 5 tees.”

“It’s a simple process really,” commented Simon. “It starts with our team turf stripping and exposing the soil, then the excavator digs out the drainage at 3 metre centres to an outfall, then we add a 70/30 rootzone to give us approximately 200mm depth of decent material, the contractor then regrades and blends to the surrounding area. Whilst all this is going on, we remove the old irrigation pipe work (which usually runs down the centre of the tee) and re locate new 50mm pipework to the sides. PSI Irrigation then come in and install new heads and set arcs for us. We take the

GETTING PERSONAL.

Who’s your hero and why?

Sir Nick Faldo when growing up because he was the best British golfer at that time.

What job would you love, other than your own?

Head groundsman at Selhurst Park.

What scares you?

In a work scenario, it would be not being able to control disease in fine turf.

What’s your lifetime ambition?

To play all the Top 100 golf courses in England.

What’s your favourite piece of kit?

The Toro sprayer - it’s the most valuable piece of kit.

What law/ legislation would you like to see introduced?

Not necessarily a law or legislation, but I would love to see greenkeepers get more respect for the job that they do with the amount of training and exams required for the job. We aren’t just grass cutters!



Right From left:

GOLF



opportunity to replace the old heads with new Hunter I25's or I20's depending on coverage requirements. It's teamwork at its best really," Simon explained with a grin. "We've done so many everyone knows what to do. We can usually build a tee in a week! To finish the job, our team re-lay pure rye turf and it's allowed to settle for a few months before reopening for play."

Simon has also been very busy improving greens drainage. He has commissioned DJUKE to install their very efficient hydrowick system.



I like to think we've totally revamped the golf course

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WHAT NEXT?

The old irrigation system needs to be replaced and we need to start thinking of creating new water features such as ditches, streams and ponds." But with a smile on his face, he goes on, "But next week we begin to bring in landfill lorries to help create more undulating features around the boundaries of the course, this will help with our finances which can go towards all those new construction projects we have planned for the next nine years!

Simon explains, "This system of drainage has been extremely beneficial for us. The contractors are in and out very quickly and the green is back in play before you know it!" explained Simon. "We've completed fifteen greens so far and our last three will be completed soon. It's made a huge difference to all year round playability to the greens and well worth every penny."

Of course, golf course management isn't always about the exciting building projects but about the everyday. Simon is particularly grateful for the help and support of his local Headland representative, Iain Richardson, and the agronomic (and personal) support

he provides 24/7. "I'm on a full nutritional programme which Ian and I sit down at the end of the year and plan for the forthcoming year," explained Simon, "We take soil samples regularly which helps us formulate the way forward. This not only maintains the good surfaces we already have, but over time has helped to improve all aspects of turf and root health."

Simon and his team have their feet firmly on the gas pedal and don't look like easing off the throttle just yet! Great to meet up Simon, and huge congratulations to you and your team on all your accomplishments so far.

Article by Phil Helmn.



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Ecology drive

Course strategies are placing **Preston Golf Club** on the green road to sustainability, Greg Rhodes reports.



Jonny Roberts
Course Manager



Within a couple of minutes of opening my conversation with Preston Golf club's golf course manager Jonny Roberts, talk turns to the recruitment crisis dogging the sector.

"What will the future hold if we can't attract the next generation to the industry?" he asks, though not really expecting a definitive answer, I suspect.

Given the club's strong links with Phil Lomas of Oldham College (Pitchcare issue 100) Preston could be viewed as sitting pretty in the apprentice education and recruitment process, but as BIGGA northern region chairman, Jonny takes the wider view on the dearth of greenkeepers entering golf. "It's extremely concerning," he states.

Preston's on an environmental and ecological course that promises major advances in the years ahead - recruiting the team to help deliver the vision is critical, Jonny knows.

"One of our apprentices - Adam Reeves, is due to complete his NVQ Level 2 in greenkeeping next year and will take up a full-time position - I like to promote from within wherever we can, and this is a good example of that policy."

"Oldham College courses are work-based, with on-course assessments, which I like. The service is good and Phil provides strong backup in assisting learners."

Talk of unionising the sector, to give greenkeepers more negotiating power in the clubhouse, is "a conversation the industry could have," Jonny says, before adding: "I feel clubs are now realising the value of the greenkeeping team, but there is still more work to be done in the industry."

"We have recently restructured and are changing salaries in line with where they need to be, reflecting what greenkeepers are expected to do and their abilities," he explains.



Green mindset

The appointment last year of Mike Russell as ecology manager marked a major move forward in Preston's environmental mission. His move closer to home to Ormskirk Golf Club hasn't deterred Jonny from the way ahead though. "The team have always shown a keen interest in ecology and we're looking to develop this accordingly moving forward."

"I'm seeking a team mindset that is less reliant on chemicals - one recognising that we are managing and encouraging nature in a woodland setting that offers strong enhancement for members' playing experience. We strive to maintain and develop our course to the highest standard, whilst being mindful of the impacts of climate change, resource constraints and regulation."

The Par 71 parkland course already attracts major tournaments - the England Golf Reid Trophy (the U14's Open Amateur Championship) and the 2023 England Golf Senior Womens Open Championship are just two.

Jonny has called in the specialists to help the team advance its green mission. Sophie Olejnik and R&A ecologist Bob Taylor have developed a five-year plan for maintaining ecology on site, while he's confronting the devastating impact of

'new normal' weather.

"A watercourse, Savick Brook, a tributary of the river Ribble, runs through the site, and intense rainfall in recent years is eroding stretches of its bank," Jonny reports. "In 2020, we lost a bridge to our 17th greens that lies near to the brook, and are now working with wetland engineer Geoff Sweeney to mitigate the risk and effects of flooding. We are running a pilot project with leaky dams to assess if their use will work in our situation. Site won timber is installed across the channel to moderate the flow of water."

The work is being carried out in partnership with The Ribble Rivers Trust, which has contributed funding and volunteers to undertake aspects of flood management.

"The scheme is split into multiple stages," Jonny explains. "Stage 1 is the pilot project to construct the first leaky dams, with more interventions along the brook created in other areas to reduce the flood and erosion impacts."

The remedial work is particularly important for another reason - the danger of losing vital habitats for the kingfishers that nest in the brook banks.

Jonny's also planning to adopt an increasingly popular option for golf clubs - beekeeping. "The team are looking to take a beekeeping

Below:
From left
George Dean
Roland
Ainscough
Martin Eccles
Jonny Roberts
Dan Ibison
Adam Reeves
Colin Procter
Elias Carter-
Darwen
Lucas Patchell



“

We strive to maintain and develop our course to the highest standard





Left Drainage installation around the 2nd green, part of the annual drainage investment plan.

Below Philip Dixon Contractors with drainage camera inspecting existing drainage for any issues.



course with a view to introducing hives. Our new wildflower areas, set around the course, will help us provide a ready source of nectar.”

Volunteer input

The national importance of volunteers to many organisations, such as The National Trust and wildlife agencies, is spilling over into golf. Divoting duties help greens teams focus on key tasks across the course, as they do with a ten-strong posse at Preston, where Jonny has found another key function for volunteers. “Our greens chairman is always asking for members to step up to the plate to help us tackle himalayan balsam,” Jonny reveals. “It’s called balsam bashing, the practice of whacking stems with old golf club shafts. Stems break off easily and

do not grow back. It’s a non-chemical treatment that is effective as long as it’s done before the plants seed. Balsam bashing is also proving to be good for the soul.”

Could this novel approach herald launch of the National Balsam Bashing Championships, staged at courses across the country? Time will tell.

SALARY TALK

The CGCS (Committee for Golf Club Salaries) offers a good tool to be able to demonstrate to clubs the appropriate salaries for their staff. One issue certainly has been that rising minimum wage levels can catch up with mid-scale greenkeepers, who then see the value of their job undermined.

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“

I'm seeking a team mindset that is less reliant on chemicals



DISEASE MANAGEMENT

The relentless move away from chemical treatments for pests and disease is driving course maintenance in new directions. Jonny's working with Germinal and Barenbrug to transform the greens sward composition.

"All 18 greens were predominantly Poa," he says, "and we wanted to change that. Our aim is to introduce ranging cultivars of browntop bent, as they are more disease resilient, with recent gains showing a 60:40% split either way."

"Creeping bents are another option but I'm watching from the sidelines to see how they fare on other courses before we commit to them."

Golf's persistent problem,

birds ripping up greens in search of leatherjackets, may seem an intractable one to many greenkeepers, but Preston has introduced what may prove an intriguing addition to the greenkeeper's arsenal.

"As we have no curative for the issue, we trialled birdscarers last season in the form of raptor-shaped kites attached to the end of fishing rods - one on the worst effected greens."

"Magpies and crows are the chief culprits and their broad beaks cause most damage. However, oystercatchers have arrived this year and they are more surgical in capturing leatherjackets. They have slimmer beaks and are far tidier when removing the larvae."

Course masterplan

Sitting on the club's council gives Jonny a key opportunity to make a powerful case for course improvements and turned once more to the specialists, bringing in golf course architect Marc Westenberg to develop a masterplan for Preston.

"The aim is to make the course the best it can possibly be," Jonny states, "and that includes constructing a new practice green and trailing modern bunker construction techniques with different liners to reduce contamination and the quantity of sand used. It's always about drawing on the experts to create the way forward, then rolling out the plan to a set timeline."

Career

"I worked at Preston for nine years earlier in my career, moving up to mechanic then on to Deputy. Following this, I took the role of Course Manager at Ellesmere Golf Club in Manchester, before returning to Preston. My deputy Dan was a greenkeeper at the same time as me. He also took his mechanical qualifications, helping us to keep the machinery servicing, repairs and grinding in-house, up to the point where welding is needed, and with extraction regulations now in place, we bring someone in to do that."



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Extensive renovations

at Kirby Muxloe

Change is the word at **Kirby Muxloe Golf Club**, after completing a full reconstruction of the 16th tee Complex, plus much more.



Mark Yates
Head Greenkeeper



Matt Gilks
MG Turf Limited

Over the past couple of months, Head Greenkeeper Mark Yates and Matt Gilks from MG Turf Limited have teamed up to give the Leicestershire course an updated and fresher look.

Mark explained what had been done so far. “We’ve done a couple of projects now, including building a new tee on the 16th. Due to health and safety issues from the houses on the left-hand side, we agreed that altering the angle and doubling the playing size was the best option. I’ve worked with Matt from MG Turf in the past, so we got him in to give us some advice and it made sense to instruct him to undertake the work.”

Matt commented: “We rebuilt a complete tee complex on the 16th and remodelled the green surrounds. It was a total redesign of the tee complex; we built the tee, reconstructed, drained and turfed.” When asked about the challenges of the project, Matt added: “Typically, when work commenced, the weather was against us and it absolutely smashed it down, then we got hit by storms, which obviously caused a few problems.”

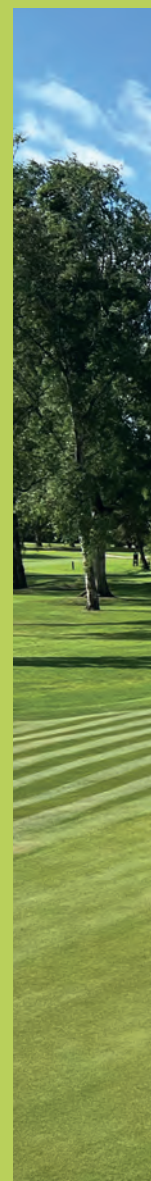
The work didn’t stop there though, as Matt explains: “In the early part of this year, as we

were finishing the 16th tee project, we had a conversation about where we wanted to go next. Mark wanted to add a feature to the 10th hole, so we have subsequently built a new lake on the 12th and channelled water into it from the new feature on 10. Before work commenced, we had to have an emergency meeting with the Club President because of the removal of a tree, so the design I had in my head would work. In general, when planning construction works, the vast amount of trees around the course can prove awkward and it meant getting permission from the council, which can take time.”

Mark then outlined the work that has gone on behind the scenes. “It took me three days to dig 150 metres worth of drainage (due to the dry summer and how hard the clay was) - which I thought would take me a day, however, I understand that being flexible is key when undertaking projects like this. If things need doing at certain times, then we will try and do it, but it’s swings and roundabouts.”

But, what are members thinking about all of the recent changes around the course? “They have been really happy with the previous work, so it was a no-brainer to get Matt back in to help with additional projects,” Mark replied.

Matt then went on to explain further work





QUICK FIRE Q&A WITH MARK

How did you get into greenkeeping?

I started greenkeeping in 2005 at The Belfry, however I initially joined the club as an avenue to turn professional - working part time in the golf bar. As time went on, I began to take on more responsibility and understood that making money in golf needed to be achieved in a different way. One Saturday afternoon, I was in the club house at Atherstone Golf Club listening to members moaning about the course. I had a light bulb moment and I decided, there and then, that I wanted to get into greenkeeping. I did my Level 2 and Level 3 at the Belfry, which took four years and I've now been at this course since April 2016.

How many competitions do you have?

We tend to have competitions every Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday with most club matches then taking place on Wednesday or Thursday. This runs from the first or second week in April until the end of September.





QUICK FIRE Q&A WITH MATT

How much mess accumulated from the work?

We made minimal mess considering the work we have done and earth we have moved, in fact, a golf buggy made more mess than we did. Everything is pretty much done, just a couple more things to do.

How long has it taken, who else has helped?

All in all, the tee reconstruction took four weeks, but we managed to get everything constructed and in the ground in the requested timeframe. Knowing the size of the project, I asked PQuinn Construction Ltd to come in and help.

FUTURE PLANS

What further work is planned?

Over the Christmas period (six weeks) work commenced on the 18th green.

It was drained, we added in four new bunkers as well as adding run-offs around the green and added 75 metres of drainage into the green itself.

We have now completed draining the four worst greens on the course (all in-house), as well as redesigning and constructing four greens surrounds projects. With the two tees MGTurf have built, it means we have have fourteen greens and sixteen tees to go.

that had commenced on the 18th tee and the benefit that members would have from this. "The tee was on two different levels in a funny shape and members were consistently talking about struggling with their balance. So, we decided to move it back a little and create a bigger tee area. We looked at the levels, set it out and everyone was happy." Mark then jokingly summarised: "Putting a digger in the middle of a green or fairway can be quite an eye opener however, the feedback within the last eighteen months has been really good."

"I strongly believe that this perception is also down to teamwork and how hard the guys work - obviously on a daily basis, but even more so when construction work is ongoing. We are a very strong team. I believe that I can't ask my guys to come in at 5 am if I'm not doing it myself."

The importance of controlling budgets throughout all the projects was paramount and the decision was made to undertake the new resin pathways internally. "Part of the reason we did all of our own construction work for the paths was due to the price point," Mark added. "We completed all the training (at a cost of £450 each for myself and one of my team) and we purchased all of the materials."

Budgets are due to affect many in the industry, however,



It took three days to dig 150 metres of drainage

CLUB HISTORY

Founded in October 1893 as a nine hole course which became 18 holes in 1926.

The “signature” hole has got to be the 5th which, from about 1940, has been played from a tee situated some 100 yards off the course in a field. From this tee, the ball is played back onto the course. This is one of only three such tees to be found in the country.



Mark and the golf club have come up with a plan to manage the expected pinch. “Some projects may be slowed down, however, if things need doing and we can do them ourselves then that’s the way we will go. The Greens Chairman has been really good in terms of how big the scope is and our mission is to build something which suits both us the greenkeepers and the golfers alike.”

When discussing the size of projects, Matt suggested he has welcomed the smaller

projects as an introduction to working for himself. “I have been given a great opportunity here at Kirby. It has been a good project to kick on my new business and develop the ability to jump into construction, irrigation, drainage and advise on many aspects of renovations.” However, Mark interjected, saying, “You deem them as small, but we as a golf course look at them as massive improvements and changes.” As seen at Kirby Muxloe, despite a project being small, the bigger picture is quite large.



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Gary Mckie
Head Greenkeeper

Feeling the pinch

How are rising costs affecting budgets?

With the cost of living on the rise and the overall pinch that many have started to feel, we caught up with Head Greenkeeper at Nelson Golf Club, **Gary Mckie**, along with industry experts to attain how budgets are being affected.

After six years of being the head greenkeeper and going through challenges such as Covid, Gary explained why the last four months have been the trickiest to manage so far in his career.

“It’s not been easy. I think club committees do know about the issues, but they have buried their heads in the sand as the problems have built up.”

He went on to express his worry about the constant change in budgets; “They just don’t seem to be realistic now. Ideally the club would need to put their fees up by 15 or 20% to allow for greenkeeper wage rises and management of the course to still be sustained to a high standard.”

He went on to compare his budget to previous years saying; “It’s now about managing all of the aspects of the finances - when the team ask for X, Y and Z, the price for those things is

sometimes drastically different to what they used to be. For example, if a machine breaks down the cost to fix it could have been around £100, but not anymore! The cost now could be upwards of £1000 and a service is £1500, so the machines themselves are costing more to manage.” Gary explained it as being “an impossible task” at times when juggling course standards when everything is on the rise.

The products being used by the club are pretty much the same year on year, yet the budget has to be nearly doubled. The bigger picture surrounding budgets is clear when you take this example: Gary has always used the same fuel but, since 2019, he has seen it double in price. Course development has been cut back by two-thirds compared to the previous year and Gary commented; “Projects have definitely been scaled down this year due to the rise in prices of maintenance, fuel and other aspects of course management.”

With members still wanting to play golf on top-quality playing surfaces, how is



Budgets rarely increase in line with inflation



Clubs have buried their heads in the sand

Gary managing both member expectations and fees? He simplified it for us; “The general consensus is that members are understanding that changes will have to be made in terms of membership fees. We are only asking for more from members because the outgoings have increased significantly. It isn’t a bottomless pot, unfortunately, but it’s obviously a headache for everyone, not just the club. We have to remember that members are also affected by the cost of living at the moment.”

Gary went on to explain that they have no

choice but to increase budgets in order to sustain a quality course, he said; “Your budget is going up 20% because the machinery, pesticides and fungicide prices are going up by that, we have to match it or be left behind in terms of standards.”

Gary also reflected on the supply issues that have occurred due to the demand for machinery and equipment. “I’ve been waiting for a fairway mower now for over a year.”

When asked about the biggest issues with the rising costs of managing a course, Gary indicated exactly why he has been worried about the budget increasing even more this year; “My budget is running away from me. To put it into context, in 2019 it was £43,000 and in 2022 we spent in the high £70,000 brackets including VAT and winter work. I can imagine going forward that the budget into 2023 will be even higher and we will be forced to spend even more. It’s about the price, not the product. Nothing has changed significantly, it’s all about the price increase.”



COST PRESSURES CREATE EFFICIENCY DRIVE FOR EFFECTIVE RESULTS

Everyone is only too familiar with the realities of the high rate of inflation, including the huge impact of high energy costs on raw material production and the knock-on effect on the costs of products for turf managers.

It is also my considerable experience that the turf manager's budget rarely increases in line with inflation, and so inevitably turf managers are being asked to do more with less.

This presents a tough conundrum for manufacturers, where we are acutely aware of the implication of higher production costs driving increased prices, at a time when our customers are struggling to even buy the same products they used last year.

At Syngenta, we are always looking at ways to improve efficiency and optimise costs, while still trying to ensure we provide customers a premium product that offers real value for the results it delivers. That doesn't change.

However, it's not just in the costs of product production, such as raw materials and transport, that we have to address to ensure we can hold down costs as far as possible. As an R&D company driven by proven products, we must ask ourselves if we can make our trials work more efficient or can we move towards digital communications in an effort to reduce the costs to the consumer.

In addition, for me, at Syngenta one of the biggest things we can do is to experiment and

communicate how turf managers can get the best of out the products they buy to ensure they get the best value for money.

Developing our app, in-house training, digital tools such as the GDD calculator or the Art of Application zone on the website, along with Syngenta nozzle technology, are all developments that can help course managers get the best value and efficacy from their products - to ensure they need to use as little as necessary to do the job effectively.

For all turf managers, it is without doubt a time to look to reduce costs as much as possible, but this doesn't always have to be a backward step; it might just mean getting more out of what you already do. Syngenta is committing to both parts of this challenge by looking at ways to be more efficient but also helping turf managers be more effective.



Daniel Lightfoot
MBA MSc MG
MBPR CMgr FCMI
Commercial Head,
Syngenta



James Buckholt
Manging Director,
BMS

Remaining competitive

“We budget and forward plan raw materials, be that steel, recycled plastic, fabric and many other items that we need to keep in stock.”

“We have to forward plan for 3-6 months in advance on some items, then plan into production for staff to manufacture sub-components of our products, which then go into assembly processes, painting, plating, building and packaging before it goes into a box for despatch to you guys.”

“Budgets and pricing will be reviewed in January; many items will not change drastically, but there will be some minor price increases as we look to remain very competitive in the market.”



John Marland
Head of Amenity,
Agrovista Amenity

Flexibility is key

Economists use the phrase, 'the answer to rising prices is rising prices.' It sounds obvious but when you think about it, it's the challenge we all face.

Price increases in the form of fuel surcharges, energy costs, wages, product scarcity and strong commodity inputs saw prices moving skywards throughout 2022. Most fertilisers use large volumes of energy in their production, couple that with haulage increases and raw material costs and we have seen staggering increases in costs, way beyond 'normal' inflation.

So, what prices need to rise?

Simply put, ultimately, our customers will have to pay more for the services our industry provides, whether that be golfers, grass roots, football clubs, village cricket teams or bursars in academia; it is going to cost more to play.

Agrovista Amenity has always positioned itself as a business that offers choice across a customer's spend potential and our core ethos has been to focus on value not price. Turf managers are going to have to be flexible with product choices and will have to be prepared to reimagine nutritional inputs and IPM approaches like never before. I am confident UK turf professionals are more than capable of getting through the season ahead, balancing budgets and still producing world class surfaces. It is my hope Agrovista Amenity can play its part in supporting the industry. In 2023, we will be launching a suite of testing services and a nutritional programme service allowing live weather data to guide product choice.



Gerald Bonner
Managing Director,
Compo Expert

No return to normal trading until 2024

The Fertiliser industry has gone through many changes in 2022 due to a number of external factors impacting the supply chain and every aspect of logistics. Mining and extraction of the elements have been impacted by rising wages, local overhead costs and the availability of labour to mine.

In addition, all of the fertiliser processing plants are faced with the same problems experienced by the mines. The supply chain is pressed on cost by every aspect of the manufacturing and packaging process; pallets, wrappings, cans and associated materials used in the complex process of producing quality chemistry have all seen a dramatic rise in cost.

The rising cost of fuel, gas, shipping and truckers wages has also impacted the final cost to the end user as has the appointment of a customs agent for every UK company as a consequence of Brexit and importing from the EU.

The initial rise in costs started during the Covid pandemic when global shipping came to a cessation and many consignments and containers were out of place in world ports after the 12-month Covid hiatus. This global shipping programme was perfected during a post-World War II period and disassembled in a twelve months Covid period and it has still not properly recovered to the efficient pre-covid point. This disruption has seen shipping costs treble in many situations and reflected in the price of a pallet of fertiliser rising from €70 to €195 from the EU Zone to GB.

Will we see a return to normal trading conditions in 2023? In short probably not, we don't anticipate a return to normal trading until the summer of 2024, and certainly the war in Ukraine will be a major factor in any return to normality. The addition of BREXIT customs administration certainly does not help.



“

It's a tough gig for turf managers

Pay and budgets

We spoke to Golf Course Manager Dale Housden

With all of the strikes going on at the moment in other sectors do you think this is something that our industry needs to consider in terms of pay?

I'm not sure a strike is the best way to approach pay increases, as many couldn't afford that approach. I feel the main objectives and actions should come from industry leaders which would then filter down. Golf Clubs seem reluctant to pass on increased membership fees and that trend seems to be more evident at clubs which are run by a voluntary committee - more so than privately owned. Pay increases have to happen before we see an even bigger decline in quality and the amount of labour at our disposal.

What is your take on the rising prices of maintenance, pesticides and fungicides. How are you managing that?

It's certainly a tough gig for turf managers at the moment. Personally, for the last six or seven years, I've been very conscious of the number of pesticides or fungicides I use, so reducing those in line with budgets hasn't been so much of a shock to me as maybe some. I'd recommend those reliant on 5-8 fungicides a year, wean their areas off them as best they can and look at alternative methods/products. Recent price increases, withdrawals and also the strength of some of the products that we need in our armoury is certainly putting even the most skilled greenkeeper with a decent budget to the test. It's definitely a balancing act for most as to whether apply something that you can afford vs something that is needed.

Has your budget changed due to the rise in industry products?

Yes. This was something I discussed very early on with our board, when the rises began to be rumoured. They have been very supportive and agreed budget increases to ensure that we could not only retain status, but continue to improve our course. My budget had to be increased to ensure that we retained the momentum that we have built over the past three to four years, since my tenure here at Drayton Park.

Do you have any advice for managing budgets and pay in the coming months and years?

I would recommend to keep a vested interest in the club's progress. If you understand the nature of the business, basic finance and the running costs of everything from the entrance gate to the furthest point on the course, it will help understand what resources are available. Thus, saving time having expectations/wishlists that are just not achievable. When it comes to staff pay levels, I'd certainly suggest to consider non-monetary benefits that could be rewarded.

Do you think that these prices will rise or fall in the coming years?

I do not see any huge drops in prices yet! I'm sure they will keep rising steadily until the economy settles. Like most situations, we will get used to budgeting with higher costs. Unfortunately, budgets will just not go as far as they used to.



Dale Housden
Course Manager,
Drayton Park Golf Club



UPLIFTING HATTERS' FUTURE

Head groundsman **Richard Bird** spoke to us during the World Cup break about the pitch ups and downs during his thirty years at Kenilworth Road.

Above
Left A 90th minute equaliser for Luton in a recent home clash with Rotherham

Right Richard Bird, Luton Town head groundsman for 30 years

Few clubs in the Football League have had the rollercoaster ride the Bedfordshire club has had.

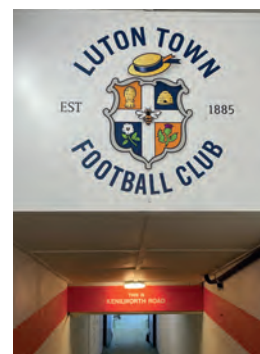
This most traditional of grounds was constructed in 1905, just before Luton Town took up residence as tenants. It bought the ground in 1933 and 56 years later sold it to the town's Borough Council. Since then, the club has had use of it on a rolling 7-year lease at a peppercorn rent.

Redeveloping this famous old ground is well nigh impossible because of its limited site. For the best of reasons its life is drawing to a close because the club's directors recently confirmed that a move to a brand new home just a mile away is very much on. Plans for a 17,500-seater,

state-of-the-art stadium at Luton's town centre Power Court are approved and should become reality in a couple of years.

There is an air of optimism on and off the pitch. Anticipation is mounting and it's very evident when talking to the man who's in charge of pitch matters, Richard Bird, who not surprisingly is known as Dickie to all at Kenilworth Road.

On the 22nd March this year, he will have been Luton Town's head groundsman for thirty years. It was 1993 and he had been working as a greenkeeper at a local golf club. One winter Saturday, he was at a Luton home game with his father-in-law, whose company had a couple of executive seats, and his career changed



Above

Left Kenilworth Road's hybrid surface, trimmed to 23mm in summer and 28mm in winter

Top Part of Luton's Brache training complex

direction.

In a half-time conversation that day about the poor state of the pitch with one of the then Luton directors, Richard mentioned that a bit of verti-draining would help matters considerably. This and other professional observations impressed, and semi-seriously he was asked if he would like to come and work at the club. He thought no more about it until a couple of weeks later he saw in the local paper an advertisement for a job as Luton Town head groundsman. He couldn't resist it, and after a couple of interviews the position was his. A fan who gets paid to see every match: it's a job for life.

The time when Richard took over was just 18 months after the club's six year brave, but

ultimately unsuccessful, plastic pitch 'marriage' had been brought to an end. A re-instated grass pitch was coming to the end of its second season with four home fixtures left. In truth it was a fairly awful surface, Richard recalls.

Looking back to 1985, the club's move to follow the lead of Queens Park Rangers four years earlier in introducing artificial surfacing to top class football was a bold one, and at considerable expense. Kenilworth Road adopted a pitch material produced by French manufacturer En-Tout-Cas called Sporturf Professional. Unfortunately, it was soon unpopular with both players and fans and with some derision became referred to as 'the plastic pitch'. Preston North End and Oldham Athletic

BIGGEST ASSET

Richard reckons the biggest asset of the new pitch is speed of recovery. Re-growth is very impressive. He cuts it to 28mm over the winter months and down to 23mm during the summer.

FOOTBALL.



Above
Left Stitching the pitch in August 2021

Below
The stadium's main stand. Alongside the touchline turf, as a walkway, are remnants of the 80s artificial pitch

also turned to this type of pitch. Eventually, in 1991, artificial surfaces were outlawed by the Football League and natural grass officially became the rule.

Richard's early years at Kenilworth Road were testing to say the least. When he first took over, the pitch was far from satisfactory.

"Black layer was rife," he recalls.

"Since the days of the artificial pitch, there had been a drainage issue. A crushed brick base used for it, about 10 inches below the surface, had been left after its removal beneath the reinstated grass surface. It caused a long lasting problem."

At the time, the club was even then planning to move to a new stadium and it was envisaged

that the pitch would only need to last two or three years. The trucks and equipment used in the pitch swap created what effectively was a compounded sub-surface saucer, a recipe for water retention. That ambition to move did not materialise and the drainage issue persisted and worsened.

Annual renovation thereafter relied principally on brought in hollow tining, then core removal, sanding and reseeding by Richard and a couple of apprentices. Any spoil - just like sand deliveries - had to be piled up in the road close to the stadium's single entrance, such was its limited surroundings.

"The 'luxury' of the new stadium will be such a joy," says Richard.

For years, manual aeration and regular verti-draining kept things in check, but waterlogging remained a thorn in Richard's side until 2009 when he called in specialist contractor Pugh Lewis to install a system of 3-metre spaced drains and a main drain exiting to a storm drain in one corner of the stadium.

Further slits have since been added. The system does a good job and the drainage issue is now pretty much resolved, even in the wettest of conditions.

Richard, however, always knew that more was needed to get a pitch in keeping with the club's Championship status and further ambition.

A couple of years ago, he knew he was taking a chance, but in putting forward proposals and budget for off-season reinstatement, he asked for £10,000 to introduce hybrid surfacing to the penalty areas and each end. He admits he was surprised and delighted when the directors asked him to get quotes for a complete hybrid pitch installation. He did just that and Kenilworth Road had a full hybrid pitch installed in August 2021 by specialists SIS.

Richard recalls the build up to this transformation and the actual installation.

"We had the usual summer renovation carried





“ The pitch has performed immaculately

Above
Keeping the
Brache training
complex in trim

out, taking off all of the top surface to reveal the drain lines, then sanded and reseeded with Rigby Taylor R140 ryegrass mix.”

“We had played our 1st home game on the Saturday against Peterborough, and then on the Sunday SIS arrived with their stitching machines and completed about 85 per cent of the pitch over the next two weeks, two operatives working 24 hours a day in 12 hour shifts. It was fascinating to watch. We had to pull them off site though in order to play our next

home game, but they returned the day after to finish the job.

“The pitch has performed immaculately ever since. No more divots. The improvement has been phenomenal.”

“Post match we just go over it with rotary mowers to gather up whatever loose debris there might be.”

Richard and his two full-time assistants, Jamie Marshall and Archie Murdoch, also look after the club’s training centre at the Brache, a

+




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Above
Left The new hybrid Kenilworth Road pitch provides an immaculate playing surface

Right top
 Richard's number two, Jamie Marshall

Right bottom
 Assistant Archie Murdoch

nearby 17-acre facility. A two-phase makeover of facilities begins there in March with half the pitches 'taking turns' for a full refurbishment, ensuring that there are always sufficient first class grass surfaces available for training.

Access to Kenilworth Road has always been a problem, on match days and for getting equipment in and out. Machinery has to be tractor-towed along adjacent streets, entering the ground through a single access point.

Since 2021, annual renovation at Kenilworth Road has been conducted by contractor White Horse, who back in 2016 Richard had engaged to lay the pitches at the Brache and will also carry

out the first phase of refurbishment there this spring.

"They do a splendid job for us," says Richard.

That new Luton Town stadium is not too far away, so Richard is looking forward to smoother ins and outs for all concerned.

When it comes, the move will be both sad and exciting. Richard says he has many good memories of life at Kenilworth Road from the day when his mum and dad bought him his first season ticket to 'prepping' the first Luton match on its hybrid pitch.

As well as serving the club for nearly 30 years, he truly is a lifelong supporter. His happiest pre-groundsman day was when the Hatters triumphed 3-2 over Arsenal in the 1988 League Cup final, then called the Littlewoods Cup.

The club has had probably more ups and downs literally than pretty well any other in the Football League - too many to list here. It is a yo-yo club par excellence, and one that has bounced back a number of times from enforced hardships that would have sunk many a club, including a record 30-point deduction in 2007. From top division to non-league, and back again, well nearly, Richard has seen it all.

The best of times: the worst of times - a tale of one Town. But the real best for the Hatters may be just around the corner, at the Power Court Stadium.

Article by Neville Johnson.



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From DONCASTER and BACK AGAIN

Pitchcare caught up with the recently awarded **Young Groundsperson of the Year**, Dylan Thompson at Doncaster Rovers F.C. to discuss his career so far.

In his short, but vastly experienced career so far, Dylan has gone from work experience on the weekends to head groundsperson in an impressively short space of time. After his recent achievement at the GMA awards, we wanted to discuss with Dylan his career to date.

He started by highlighting his early days in groundskeeping, saying, "I did my work experience at Doncaster Rovers F.C. about ten years ago and I fell in love with it from the moment I started. I volunteered on match days, a couple of days through the week and summer holidays. I went into full time work at the club for a brief spell, before moving to Sheffield Wednesday F.C." Accompanying his experience, Dylan also highlighted his qualifications: "I've got a level 2 in Horticulture and a level 3 in Sports Turf Management which I did at Askham Bryan College in York."

However, Dylan hasn't always worked within the sporting environment as he discussed a change in his career, saying, "I spent two years at Sheffield Wednesday, then I moved out of the sports sector to a company called Countrywide Grounds Maintenance, where I was a supervisor."

Dylan expressed how working in a different environment allowed him to develop the skills needed to become a head groundsperson, he

said, "We looked after schools, and they often weren't happy about work which had been previously undertaken. I was twenty at the time and kind of thrown into confrontation straight away. It built me up as a character as it helped me get used to the criticism and the other side of groundskeeping".

On his return to a sporting environment, and after a short stint with Sheffield Wednesday, Dylan expanded to the international sporting circuit as he started work with the Football Association Wales (FAW). Dylan highlighted the step up in the role, saying, "When I was at the FAW, we used to send things to the coaches to get in front of any problems that might occur. We had an example where a coach requested some pitch markings to be done with twenty minutes' notice and it just wasn't realistic. After three years, I moved back to Doncaster Rovers F.C."

He expanded on duties he picked up soon after returning to the club as head groundsperson, stating, "Straightaway you're involved in a lot more meetings. It goes away from learning how to do the job and focuses more on when to do the job. It becomes more important to teach and deal with different personalities on a day-to-day basis. Once you get into a management position, the doors



THINGS TO LOVE

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- Working outdoors
- Achievement
- Being recognised
- Seeing staff develop
- Seeing sites improve
- Watching the different seasons come and go
- Different challenges
- Using machinery
- Trying out new things
- Networking



open a lot more as you can work with other departments to try and find solutions.”

Dylan also highlighted the emotions that he gets from working at the club that he had supported as a boy, explaining, “Everyone comes to the stadium and gets excited to see the pitch and it’s nice to know we’ve played a part in that. You do also have a little bit more pride, because all my family and friends are all from Doncaster. I think naturally you feel that extra pressure, but also that sense of achievement.”

Despite winning his award just a few weeks before talking to us, Dylan showed his ambitions as he explained his future objectives: “I think everybody strives to work in the top-end championship and the Premier League. The biggest thing for me is that we’ve got a 16-year-old construction and it would be nice to reconstruct the stadium pitch at some point in the future. That pitch would then feel like mine - if that makes sense.”

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Climate challenge

at Cheltenham Racecourse

The impact of the hot summer on sportsturf was seen long after the clocks went back, and for racing's 'winter game', **stubbornly dry ground** presented ongoing issues.

Watering systems remained in use when they would previously have been packed away for the winter, yet small field sizes and the absence of some of the sport's equine stars from the track continued to cause controversy.

This is just one of the challenges facing the relatively new team at jump racing's headquarters Cheltenham, where technology meets tradition and groundsmanship is very much in the media and public spotlight.

Clerk of the course Jon Pullin had big shoes to fill when replacing Simon Claisse, who retired after twenty years in the role in December 2021. The former racing director at ARC, who was responsible for a team of thirteen clerks of the course already had plenty of experience on the ground, however, having served as clerk at Doncaster, Uttoxeter, Southwell and Wolverhampton.

"Working alongside Simon when I joined Jockey Club Racecourses in the October was enormously helpful and it's a very enjoyable role, with the Festival as the highlight," he says.

That first Festival proved a baptism of fire, with dry conditions in the run-up and an uncertain forecast indicating that watering was needed ahead of the second day. The deluge that followed and the resulting criticism from trainers who believed that their charges' chances had gone shows the complexity of the decisions.

Significant investment in irrigation equipment, with the addition of two 50m Briggs booms, plus another 30m boom on order, may help in future.

"We can use selective irrigation, switching off nozzles to put water on only where it is needed, plus the booms give more even distribution," Jon explains.





“

It's early days, but the signs on reduced faller rates are encouraging

“

Incredible experience in the team

Above:

Top right

The team are trialling a Dennis electric cylinder mower which can also be fitted with the company's turf grooming tools.

Top middle

New Briggs boom

Bottom middle

The carpet for the parade ring hybrid surface installation



“However, we are still to some extent at the mercy of the weather.”

An indication of further irrigation dilemmas to come this year began with annual renovations after Cheltenham's April meeting.

“We scarified the whole track and then came the heatwave. Irrigation water is drawn from two brooks that surround the course and, from June, they were dry so we were reliant on our stores.”

“There were some dry spots and the grass certainly took longer to recover,” recalls head groundsman Alastair King. “For the two days in October, we watered to ‘good’ and then in the run up to the November meeting, we started to see some rain. It was initially good to soft and then we had some dry days so had to irrigate again ahead of each day's racing.”

Cheltenham's unique expanse of turf which allows ‘old’ and ‘new’ courses to run side by side, then sees the ‘old’ course rested until the Festival with the ‘new’ course used for December and January meetings.

In March, action starts on the ‘old’ course before switching to the ‘new’ course for the final two days of action, a feat of planning and groundsmanship that gives the best possible conditions for the sport's most valuable racehorses across the four-day meeting.

Between meetings, a team of sixty ‘treaders’

replace divots and fill with sand and compost and, after the November meeting, the ‘old’ course was overseeded and levelled, with germination sheets added as necessary to encourage recovery.

The new course had not been irrigated as November normally sees the return of what is termed ‘proper winter ground’ by the time it is in use.

Dry conditions have also led to some changes to the popular cross country race programme, with the opening race over the more varied obstacles in the centre of the course postponed from the November to the January meeting.

“We had to prioritise the main track so didn't have the resources to water the cross country as well,” explains Jon. “We've kept the rainguns for this part of the course as the fence layout is too complex to use booms.”

The 2021-22 season was unusual in that the mild conditions avoided the need for time-consuming and costly application of frost covers, and a bonus of higher temperatures of 2022 have seen good recovery of the sward between the October and November meetings.

“We've switched to 4Tetra 100% tetraploid ryegrass which will germinate down to three or four degrees, and within seven days in mild conditions,” comments Alastair. “Granular fertiliser has also been changed to a slow

THE APPLIANCE OF SCIENCE

When we visited Cheltenham on one of the last sunny days in November, the parade ring which had thronged with racegoers just a week earlier was serenely peaceful, despite groundsman Callum Bourke being hard at work with the Dennis pedestrian mower. The lack of noise - apart from the clip of the blades - can be attributed to the battery power source of the Dennis ES-860, an 860mm cut cylinder mower which can also be fitted with a variety of maintenance tools using the company's interchangeable cassette system.

"As a group, we are starting to explore electric power options and we've been very pleased with the Dennis that we have on trial so far," comments Jon.

New technology has also been deployed for the parade ring surface itself which was re-laid this summer with a hybrid turf by Carrick Sports.

"We had 21mm of rain during the 2022 Festival and it became a mudbath - you couldn't walk on it," explains Jon. "We saw the turf in use at a Rugby League club and realised it could work."


The original turf was stripped and extra drainage added before the profile was built up and the artificial carpet laid in strips with 65mm fibres exposed, along with pop up irrigation. Then 50mm of rootzone was added and the surface was seeded.





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Jon Pullin
Clerk of the Course



Alastair King
Head Groundsman



release Sierrablen product from ICL which gives good colour and steady growth; it is applied in the early autumn and we keep an eye on the health of the turf to see if it needs feeding again in early March.”

“We want to present the best possible ground for every fixture, but always have to bear in mind the impact on March,” he says.

Eagle eyed spectators will see that the jumps themselves have a new look this year – research indicated that horses can judge the fences better if the rails in them are white rather than the traditional orange, and after successful trials in 2021-22, this has been rolled out across the industry.

“It’s early days, but the signs on reduced faller rates are encouraging,” comments Jon.

Cheltenham is currently sticking with traditional brush hurdles for the moment however, awaiting more information on the success of padded hurdles. Another track in the Jockey Club Racecourse portfolio, Market Rasen, has just switched to this type of hurdle which should help with the data.

Hurdles – or the lack of them – has become another talking point. Unseasonably sunny afternoons at the November meeting meant protracted discussions about whether hurdles in the home straight should be bypassed to avoid the risk of jockeys being dazzled by low sun when approaching them, potentially causing falls.

“There’s a protocol which means that we have to take direction from the jockeys at the start of the race based on the light conditions at the time,” Jon explains. “This is under review. We’ve already rearranged the programme so that steeplechases are scheduled before the sun starts to drop. It’s something that Simon (Claisse) did a lot of work on but there’s no easy answer.”

Caring for the track includes minimising ground pressure from tractor movements where possible, and to this end, Ransomes batwing mowers are used to cut down to 11cm for racing, with mowing the 27ha of track taking a full day

with the two machines.

Where tractors and other machinery are concerned, Jockey Club Racecourses’ preferred supplier agreement with John Deere gives access to some of the latest equipment including electric Gator utility vehicles trialled at the October meeting.

Jon and Alastair – who is in his first season as head groundsman having joined the Cheltenham team in 2019, and is joined this year by Nathan Williams, previously at Hereford, as assistant head groundsman – pay tribute to the contribution of the ‘incredible experience’ in the eleven-strong grounds team.

“We both benefit from the fact that if an issue arises, someone in the team will probably have experienced it before,” comments Jon. “It’s hard for racegoers to appreciate the incredible team effort that goes into the Festival, especially switching between tracks on the Wednesday evening. We have help from groundsman who come from other Jockey Club tracks for the week and that’s also invaluable.”

It’s an undertaking that would have been even greater had plans mooted to extend the Festival to five days come to pass.

“We would have made it work, but it would have been a serious strain on the team during the week, when you consider that we are either watering in the evenings or dealing with the effects of wet weather,” comments Alastair. “We’re relieved to stay at four – but it will still be all hands on deck!”

Article by Jane Carley.

Top right
Jump racing is constantly reviewing safety standards - a recent move is to paint timber on hurdles and fences white to help the horses judge their jumping efforts better

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How to deal with frost and snow



There are many greenkeepers and apprentices who might want find this **basic explanation of frosty conditions** helpful.

We recently spoke to Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Maesteg Golf Club, James Matthewman. Being in a dipped valley in the South of Wales, James is no stranger to cold climates and he offered an insight into what happens when turf becomes frosty.

He started by explaining the leaf and the importance to understand that size does matter. "When you have a frost, below zero, the green will go white and the leaf blade is not able to bend properly so, when people walk on the leaf blade it snaps, instead of being flexible - like in the summer. Therefore, it can't regenerate properly. This is when you get that brown and yellow colour because the turf is damaged."

He went on to explain the importance of differentiating between greens and fairway turf leaf when walking on frosty ground; "More damage is done to the greens than the fairways and the rough, because the leaf is a lot longer on those areas. Therefore, you are still damaging the leaf when walking on the fairways, but there is more leaf to stand on so you aren't snapping it."

However, James did go on to ease fears of the frost as he explained that; "The good news is that it can repair, as long as the right equipment is being used to reseed and drain."

So, what happens after the frost starts to thaw? James reiterates the awkwardness of the solid ground; "Again, the problem is that the ground is frozen and the rain will not drain - especially if it's heavy. If you can do it, then you could possibly close the course until that frost has thawed out by at least three inches deep."

GMA advice for snowfall

Snow clearance is extremely labour-intensive and heavy snowfalls are very difficult to deal with particularly at a grassroots level.

- Light snow may be cleared by simple methods such as dragging heavy ropes over the surface in a similar way to removing dew. Heavy-duty plastic snow shovels, drag brushes and mats can be used to good effect. Handheld air blowers are also an option. Larger mechanical equipment should be avoided where possible particularly if the ground is thawed below as it may damage the soil and churn up the turf.
- Larger snowfalls require a significant workforce and time to remove and, whilst postponements or cancellations are never desirable, this may be a more viable option.
- It is often a good idea to mark a pitch in a different colour if snow is expected during a fixture.
- If you maintain an artificial surface, please consult the manufacturer's guidance on snow clearance, 3G pitch infills are easily displaced during snow removal and costly to replace or redisperse.

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my mental

I do this job for a reason which most grounds staff will relate to - **I LOVE IT!** I look through the photographs on my phone and see picture after picture of green grass. The images of my children are inbetween the sea of green!

Firstly, I need to explain why I'm speaking out about my struggles with mental health, and how this has been affected by my work.

So, how did I become depressed and full of anxiety? My happy place when I was younger was in nature. I enjoyed being in the garden and, when I left school, I enrolled for a horticultural course at Myerscough College, which I attended full-time and I loved it!

My first real job was at a local golf club, before joining the local council as a gardener where I worked in parks and gardens such as Shibden Hall.

Working for the council gave me a great perspective on life, however, I was eager to work in a professional sports setting. So, my next move was to a privately-owned racecourse as a groundsman. There were so many aspects of working here that I loved and I got a real buzz presenting the course to racegoers, who appreciated our hard work.

I was working long hours and weekends, all whilst trying to raise a family. For example, one Friday evening I got a call from my parents to say my 99-year-old Grandma had suffered a heart attack and we needed to go to be with her. I arranged cover for work with a colleague and headed up to Yorkshire for the weekend - which all seemed to be fine

until Monday morning arrived.

I was called in to see my manager and there seemed to be a complete lack of understanding of my situation. It didn't seem to matter to them that I had arranged cover.

Fortunately, my grandma recovered, but sadly passed away a few months later and I went up to Yorkshire with my family for the funeral. This had no impact on work, but when I returned and mentioned it, a complete lack of empathy was shown about the situation.

Taking me off the job

I went to the office and spoke with the general manager and clerk of the course, where I explained about the strain I felt and broke down in tears. They were very good and listened to everything I said. The following morning, I was called to another meeting with the same managers, where they told me that not only were they taking me off my training course, but they were removing my deputy course foreman role away from me.

I felt crushed and I knew that I needed to leave the racecourse. A vacancy became available at a local independent school, albeit with a pay cut and no accommodation. Nevertheless, my wife Hayley, our two young children and I took the leap.

At this point, my confidence was low and



health

by Ed Ramsden



I became isolated, however, as time went on and with a great team of colleagues, I started to believe in myself. Becoming the head groundsman made me so proud and we produced some fantastic pitches.

My team were very supportive and, something I value greatly, is the importance of a great team who work well together. Despite varying levels of experience, we were all equal and without the diversity of skills within the team, it wouldn't have worked as well as it did.

However, there seemed to be a lack of understanding from the Sports Department. It is quite simple – if you over-use a pitch with high numbers of players, coupled with bad weather, you will lose future use of that pitch. They seemingly didn't understand what my job was.

Chasing the dream

I was full of confidence and looking forward to a new challenge, and again my family and



I wanted to sleep and not wake up, so that my mind would stop





I relocated some distance for me to progress in my career. By this time, Hayley and I had three children and this was a big move for us. At my new place of work, I often had no choice but to sit in meetings with my team being belittled. I spoke to the HR department about this, but nothing seemed to come from it.

This is when I well and truly became broken...

I was in a new job at a new school and I had an exciting future for me and my family ahead... or so I had hoped!

From Day 1, it was made clear that members of the team were not happy that I had been

given the role. Very early on, accusations were made that I didn't know what I was doing as a head groundsman and members of the team were going to my manager making claims. However, the praise I received from the sports department and many other staff, including the Headteacher, were tremendous. Unfortunately, it was clear that things were not healthy for me.

I was feeling quite isolated, but we had the plan to move forward and develop the department, both as a team and individually. What could go wrong?

Covid

This was a tough time. I'd only been in my new job for two months and found myself on-site alone during the first weeks of the pandemic. I tried to keep on top of everything at the main site, whilst the rest of the team had been furloughed. A rota was created to give the team equal time at work and make things fair and, over time, the numbers increased to three team members on a 3-weeks-on and off basis. During this, I didn't take any time off and worked through the school holidays, along with bank holidays and compulsory time off given over the Easter period.

I find it hard to look back, but I did speak a lot about how hard I was finding managing a team that seemingly didn't like me. It was

HELP & ADVICE

The number of men who have suicidal thoughts has doubled to 10% since 2009.

Because of this, suicide is the biggest killer of men and boys aged between 9 and 50 years old, and yet those experiencing suicidal thoughts are left waiting up to four years for treatment.

Here are just a few places you go to get help and advice if you are struggling to cope.

Mind

Advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. We campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.

mind.org.uk

Samaritans

Day or night service, for anyone who's struggling to cope, or who need someone to listen without judgement or pressure.

samaritans.org

CALM

Campaign Against Living Miserably. This charity aims to combat this tragic issue of suicide with advice and support for men aged between 15 to 35.

thecalmzone.net

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“

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Look after your physical health

Do activities that you enjoy

Steer away from harmful substances

Take two minutes to focus on the world around you

Seek professional help

draining - both physically and mentally. I raised my concerns with management, about it affecting my mental health and the school offered to pay for me to have counselling, which did help slightly.

My counsellor pointed out that I was being bullied. This wasn't something I wanted to admit, but it was obviously the case. Although I was listened to, it didn't seem to solve much.

I cannot deny that the school supported me with the major issues, but I was getting the backlash of resentment from team members.

My confidence had been diminished - I felt like I couldn't win and my time was revolving

around the team and the issues they found every day. At this point, I was expected to have an increasing number of meetings with the team. On a weekly basis, I was expected to visit the grounds and gardens teams. It felt like the meetings themselves were becoming a full-time job. Thankfully, the HR team were there for me.

I was trying to do all of this, alongside covering absences in the team. This was also affected by the fact that I was absent from work due to my mental health state. Everything became too much and I ended up breaking down during a couple of meetings, whilst trying to talk about the situation.

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In June 2022, I was feeling particularly low and my medication had increased significantly. Despite the medication, my head wouldn't stop and was constantly on the go.

I decided to go away by myself for a few days because I needed to be away from the school site where we live. I stayed in my parent's caravan, which they'd put on a campsite at a nature reserve. I just wanted to sleep and not wake up, so that my mind would stop. I just wanted to shut down, I was a mess.

I'm not sure how many tablets I took, but I thought it wasn't enough to be life-threatening. Despite this, when I called my wife and she couldn't understand me, she subsequently called 999 and my parents. I do remember speaking to someone on the phone but, at some point, I must have passed out. The next thing I know, I was being woken up by two paramedics. We all agreed I needed to be back at home and not admitted to hospital in a different county to my family.

What was happening to me?

I was in pieces and my brain wasn't functioning. I felt like I had failed at everything and that I was causing pain to everyone around me. I imagined being dead! This wasn't the first time and I am now aware that these are not uncommon feelings or thoughts to have, but I knew I wanted it to become a reality.

I have always been open with Hayley and made her aware of how I felt. She had to adapt her life to look after me. I sat there, more

scared than ever, contemplating my life.

I don't know the reason why I didn't take the tablets that day, but I didn't. I had pain throughout my body and couldn't hold myself together. Hayley arranged for one of my sisters to collect our children, then looked me in the eyes and told me I "had no choice in this - we're going to the hospital."

It was clear how much Hayley loves me and that no matter what, I had something to live for. Whilst at A&E, I was referred to the Crisis Team who provide hospital care at home. They visited me seventeen days straight. They helped me get back on track and arranged for me to see a psychologist and psychiatrist.

The most important person through this has been Hayley. I have put her through so much, but she opened my eyes to what really matters - her and our three children.

Industry recognition

The reason I am sharing my story, is that I now know my struggles are shared with many others in the industry. I want the profession we are in to be recognised as equal to others. An electrician would not be told how to fulfil their job, so why are we?

I am sick of being treated like an underdog, but I am reluctant to have regrets from this part of my life. I am determined to turn this into a positive and help others, as well as myself!



HEALTHY LUNCHES

The start of a new year is a great time for changing up our old routines. You know, breaking away from bad habits or just boring ones and trying something new.

Where better to start than with your lunch box?

After all, we all have to eat lunch every day, but there's no reason it has to be the same lunch every day...

TOP TIPS

- Lots of foods can be used to make a packed lunch varied and tasty
- Try and make healthier choices more often and limit snacks high in sugar, salt or fat
- There is a lot of overlap - for example - including fruit and bread in your lunchbox not only adds fibre but protein too
- Don't feel pressured to include foods from every group in every meal, but aim for a balance across the day or week
- Remember to include something from each of the main food groups; fruits, vegetables, grains, protein and dairy - as well as water, and you'll not only have a meal to look forward to, but a lunchbox packed full of all the right nutrients to fuel your body for the rest of the day

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Fertiliser Change is on the way

The EU Fertilising Products Regulations (2019/1009) are driving significant changes in the supply of **fertiliser, biostimulant and soil conditioner markets** across the EU.



Henry Bechelet
Technical Sales Manager
ICL

What are the main differences between these new regulations compared to the previous ones?

These new regulations are more far-reaching than the previous fertiliser regulations because they now also cover the marketing of organic fertilisers, organo-minerals, growing media, soil conditioners and biostimulants rather than just mineral fertilisers.

What do you think the main aims of these regulations will be?

The aim of the regulations is to increase the number of fertilising products available in the EU, especially from sustainable sources or using organic alternatives, which were not covered in the previous regulations. It's good news for end users because the regulations are demanding higher standards from suppliers.

How will compliance be tracked?

All products that come under the remit of this legislation must comply with environmental and safety requirements to protect the environment and maintain soil quality. There will be a lot of testing and checking carried out by independent notified bodies to ensure compliance.

What changes should people expect?

This is a significant development for our sector and ICL have invested a huge amount of resource to ensure that our products in all categories are fully compliant with the new regulations. We have needed to reassess all of our individual products and their labels and make changes where required to ensure full

compliance. Significant investment in independent trial work has been needed to provide the data to support the claims we are able to make with our biostimulants.

What are the biggest changes/developments coming with the regulation changes?

The most far-reaching development arising from the new regulations is in the area of controlled release (coated) fertilisers and their biodegradability. The new regulations will stipulate biodegradability parameters that will make the existing coatings that are currently used non-compliant when these regulations come into force in 2026.

How is ICL preparing for the changes ahead?

ICL are introducing a revolutionary biodegradable coating technology for its controlled release fertilisers (CRF) in the turf market: eqo.s® technology. The new coating for nitrogen is compliant with the EU Fertilising Products Regulation (2019/1009) and will help turf managers to improve their nutrient use efficiency and will provide a solution for future sustainable turf management programmes.

What makes ICL's coatings different?

With its patented eqo.s® release technology, ICL takes the lead in providing a fully biodegradable coating that breaks down faster than existing coating technologies on the market. This innovation will be introduced in ICL's CRF portfolio for the turf segment, starting with ICL's premium range: Sierrablen and Sierrablen Plus.

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The Walled Garden

We visited **Harlaxton Manor** to talk all things walled garden, as they plan to renovate to achieve change for the future.

Constructed in 1831, Harlaxton Manor is a dramatic and unforgettable country house set within 300 acres of parkland and gardens in rural Lincolnshire, home to the students of the University of Evansville. Ian Welsh, the Walled Garden Project Director, gave us an insight into why Harlaxton Manor's Walled Garden development is happening.

"As we celebrate our 50-year anniversary of the University, we didn't just want to say cheers and that be that, we wanted to do something big for the community." The walled garden is a short walk from the Manor estate and is one of the biggest in Britain. Ian highlighted its uniqueness, explaining, "Loads of walled gardens are rectangle and square in shape, we are lucky to have a difference with an octogen shape and railed walls surrounding the garden, it makes it different. We want to link what our students do to the landscape and allow visitors to view our landscape, as well as introduce our students to the community." Ian highlighted that the original owner of the Manor, Gregory Gregory, had loved to 'show off' his walled garden to guests and this is something which the team want to get back to. Ian hopes, with help from the community and things going to plan, the walled garden can open by 2025.

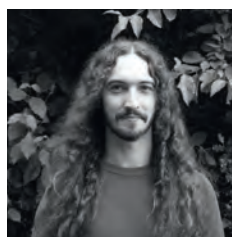


We want to be a significant part of Harlaxton's future





Bob Taylor



Paul C Lambert

A WOODY CONTROVERSY

Trees can **offer so much to golf**, but all too often the positives are overlooked by the negatives.

Tree planting in the wrong place or choosing the wrong trees for each differing situation can lead not only to significant costs to planting and then removal, but to controversy through the membership.

2022 was an interesting year for me (Paul C Lambert) as a practising arboricultural consultant - not least through my partnering with the renowned ecologist Bob Taylor, a golf course ecologist for over thirty years. Together we have worked on a number of golf clubs, including The Renaissance Club and The Berkshire, to compile site specific woodland management plans. Together we have been able to cover all bases; ecological to arboricultural. Moreover, walking through these sites, we have increasingly come across tree related risks of varying concern. Tree risk is of considerable

importance - particularly on the golf course where failure could mean damage to the playing surfaces, or to the players themselves.

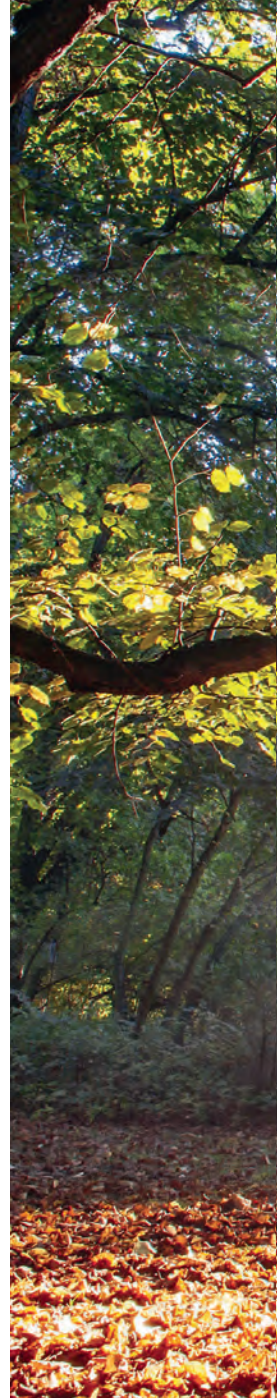
So, an arborist, ecologist and greenkeeper walk into the club house... and the club-manager is hoping the punch line is a solution! Working together, considering all aspects of the trees on site and thereafter, by providing a bespoke compartmentalised plan offering direction for management, we are to provide that solution.

“Is this tree safe?”

A question I hear several times a day, a wide sweeping question that requires more digging to give you a suitable answer.

What is wrong with it?

Defects, disease and dysfunction. The





THINGS TO NOTE

The Environment Act 2021 will be enforced through local planning authorities from November 2023. In brief, one of the key points of this act will enforce any planning application or development to provide a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gains (BNG), else it will be refused. There is opportunity to obtain BNG on the wider site and even wider community on neighbouring sites.

physiological and structural issues a tree may accumulate through its life. This includes but not limited to cracks; splits; snapping; hanging branches/limbs; rootplate failure; included bark and unions (Fig. 1); bulging/contorted/abruptly bent/bulbous wood; open wounds; cavities; decay; small leaf form; leaf abnormalities; dark patches/weeping wood; fungal growth; deadwood; or dieback; a qualified arborist can advise on such. It is recommended in areas of frequent footfall an annual tree risk survey be carried out, up to three years for areas of infrequent footfall and not within falling distance of features such as roads and footpaths, to cover the legal duty of care. In addition, greenkeepers typically carry out daily site walkovers to note any changes in tree stock that may pose a risk.

Friend or foe, 'can we live with it?'

It is worthy of note that trees can live with some defects and disease for decades, if not more, as trees age they accumulate features that from a risk perspective is a negative but from a biodiversity view point can be a positive, such as a niche habitat. This is why location is a significant factor in retention, tree surgery or removal.

A lot of fungi are mycorrhizal, whilst others are parasitic. Identifying those which cause a degradation to a trees structure (Fig. 2) and how far that process is along, is paramount to tree related risk.

What about hollow trees - can we live with them?"

As trees age, they typically hollow, as the significant accumulation of nutrients stored



Above:

Left Fig.1
Included stem union and fibre buckling on a mature oak adjacent to a green

Right Fig.2

Phaeolus schweinitzii at the base of a pine

away in its stem and limb wood, over its life, becomes utilised by various organisms. In a sense, these organisms also unlock the nutrients again for the tree itself, causing aerial and internal rooting, typically seen in veteran trees. It is part of the wonderful life cycle and mutually beneficial interactions these organisms have.

A general rule for hollow trees is '30% sound wood', although species, level of decay and tree form all come into account. If 30% of sound wood is present in the trees stem, evenly distributed, this is the cut off point for failure. This is not to say some individuals aren't capable of surviving with less (Fig. 3), as there are many factors to consider, but the majority of trees struggle with stability with less than a third of their stem wood.

What about below ground?

Roots. To ignore the roots is to ignore a trees lungs so to speak. This is an area of research that, in reflection, is still in its infancy. Root pruning is a costly, invasive and time consuming task, so typically avoided unless absolutely necessary. Some species tend to produce surface roots, which can cause quite the headache for greenkeepers, although generally these are structural roots and pruning would usually be detrimental to a tree's health. The main impacts to tree roots on a golf course tend to be mechanical compaction, the squashing and strangulation of delicate fibrous roots, which are the gateway for nutritional access from the soil, water and mycorrhizal fungi. Using ground protection when working in areas with trees is advised to prevent causing a more costly issue down the line, such as disease.

Root diseases are typically alarming as we may not be able to see the extents of decay. If

the tree is not in a healthy state below ground it may not have the ability to out-grow or compartmentalise the disease. The added dilemma of rapid root decay fungi is they may appear healthy above ground and one day just fall, unexpectedly to those around.

Look where it is!

Location, location, location! First and foremost, a golf course is for golf. The profit the business produces provides opportunity to manage the off-play areas for biodiversity, which can be a huge benefit to surrounding land and the local environment. Trees that are encroaching over other habitats or are in the way of golfing, it is understandable why these trees would be removed, although this can cause additional issues.

The importance of edge trees for screening, storm damage prevention and overall amenity value should not be overlooked. The effectiveness of little and often tree works can keep a tree group or woodland edge to shape to avoid encroachment issues and the destruction of valuable heathland habitat, for example.

Tree stock and features should be maintained for their longevity. When a tree is situated in a woodland that is dead or dying, why spend the money removing such, when they have become a valuable habitat of standing deadwood, then when it does fail, will do so within the confines of the woodland entity, not impacting people or golf. This is not to say your tree stock should stagnate, keeping a healthy diversity of age is paramount to longevity.

How can you tell?

Inspection limiting features. Arborists and ecologists can have quite polarising views on some features, such as ivy or dense vegetation. On one hand, the range of habitats and wildlife



Left Fig.3 An ancient oak (The Capon Tree) surviving hundreds of years with a significant stem cavity

**OTHER
INFO**

In regards to trees, felling licences; tree preservation orders (TPO); conservation areas (CA); ancient woodland (AW / PAWS); sites of special scientific importance (SSSI); local planning policy; national planning policy; and features covered under the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) will have to be considered, when having any tree works carried out.

these elements support is superb, whilst an arborist like myself would be limited to what they can identify with a blanket of ivy hiding any potential dangerous defects.

There is a sensible middle ground, which I have found is not often met. Trees within failure distance of highways, frequently used footpaths and buildings or their facilities are recommended to have their ivy severed and vegetation cleared enough for suitable access to the base of the stem. Of course ivy and vegetation grows back, so being pragmatic to

when to sever ivy is advised, perhaps months prior to a tree survey. Trees that reside away from these locations can be retained for biodiversity, in the understanding their failure may occur but, given their location, is unlikely to impact anything outside of the group or woodland entity.

How can we improve biodiversity?

Ecological value. This is where diversity of habitat, structure, age, species and environment become greatly important. Dead wood lying on the ground or standing can be essential for the continued survival of many of our now grossly declining invertebrates. Some species are very specialist requiring the antler type dead growth often seen within the crown of older oaks. Any deadwood if removed would be best left near to the trees from which it came. This particularly on golf courses cannot always be ensured but opportunities for dead wood retention and conservation are huge on our more wooded golf courses.

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Wildlife is a hoot!

That's right owls, we need you. Head Greenkeeper at East Cork Golf Club, **Alex Newenham** asked just that, as he questioned how we can attract our furry, big-eyed friends to golf courses.

We caught up with Alex to see how his habitats were developing and gain guidance for others.

Alex expressed that he had always wanted to increase wildlife habitats and, now that he is in a position to do so, it has given him the platform and freedom to finally implement change.

It seems that it isn't just all to do with the animals as Alex said, "With all of the restrictions that we are due to face in the coming years, such as the lack of pesticides and pesticides coming off the market as a whole, I have always had this idea that golf courses are for those playing golf. However, I can't see why we can't create nice places to do that. You don't need wall-to-wall brilliance to achieve that," Alex hints at an eco-friendlier approach to sustaining a golf course.

He expands on the sustainable approach saying, "Nothing is stopping us from creating more wild areas, rewilding is becoming a buzzword in several greenkeeper circles, a lot of golf courses are trying to become more sustainable, it's all part of our IPM (integrated pest management)." Perhaps an increase in natural habitats can be an alternative to dealing with pests and diseases, as Alex explains, "If the plant is healthy, then it will fend off disease better; it is like taking an antibiotic, if you have good personal health, then you won't need as many things to fend off disease. If we can improve the plant health

(naturally), we can rely less on fungicides and pesticides."

In regards to the owls, Alex aims to increase the overall population of wildlife at East Cork in order to draw them in through natural selection, he explains, "I want to create East Cork Golf Club as a wildlife habitat; we are surrounded by farmland, which is highly managed, so those creatures need somewhere to go to, therefore I want to increase our no-mow areas."

The development of no-mow areas can create a habitat for field mice which owls may see as a tasty snack, but how will this be sustained? Alex seemingly has the answer, "I want to implement long rough management, so that we get long tall wispy grass, in order to encourage more native grasses. Creating more of these areas, we then encourage wildlife corridors for creatures to thrive. I want to increase the population of small animals so that we can encourage owls, we have the barn owl and the long-eared brown owl. So, by increasing the population of field mice and things like that it creates a habitat for the owls, it will also increase biodiversity encouraging natural pollinators for the wild bees that we have here."

"We do need to manage the wild areas, so we can't just stop cutting the grass, we will have to cut it less often meaning saving on time, diesel and the wear and tear on equipment, as well as allowing the workforce to work on other parts of the golf course."



Rewilding is becoming a buzzword in several greenkeeper circles, a lot of golf courses are trying to become more sustainable

Wildflower for you

Primrose: *Primula vulgaris*

Pale yellow flowers with a darker yellow centre. The flowers are an important source of nectar and pollen for a number of pollinators. It is seen as a sign of spring being upon us. Normally growing in a cool, shaded part of woodland patches. The plants should be allowed to self-seed. Then with mulch annually with manure, the flower should flourish. Normally flowers from March through to May and widely recommended to plant between May to September.



What will you use when the leaves fall

This is the exact question that Golden Hill Sports Ground asked on social media in anticipation for when the leaves start to fall, and the early nights draw in.

Here is a short list of equipment which you might find helpful based on the replies to Golden Hills post. So, when you want that Henry Hoover alternative for leaves this is what we would recommend:

- Amazone Profihopper
- Kubota F3090
- A ride on mower
- Sweeper collector to attach to ride on mower



Controlling **Badger** behaviour

A recent question posed on a Greenkeeping forum asked: "How do people deal with badgers, as we have one damaging our greens."

Advice as follows*:

** The advice given here is the opinion and comments taken from the Greenkeeping (Official) facebook page and not the advice or responsibility of Pitchcare. Always seek professional advice.*

They won't cross Fe apparently. Knock up a tank and circle the area with the drain tap open, a black line isn't as bad a digging I guess. Or you could use a lawn sand type product?

Contact your local badger group. They will have loads of advice on how manage them.

We feed them with cat food and dog biscuits. Try to find their entry points around the course and drop feed there.

Lots of birdhouses (for starlings); they eat the grubs without doing damage. We still have a little bit of badger damage from time to time on fairways and roughs, but it's a lot less then a few years back.

We put dog food near the sets, everyday. We use the dry mix stuff; a big 20kg bags costs about £20. Definitely helps.

Call game commission.



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HANDS-FREE MOWING

Tempted by the convenience of robotic mowing but not sure if it will work for your club or venue? **Jane Carley** gets some advice on what to consider and the solutions that are available.

Above
Left All-wheel drive options allow undulating areas to be tackled

Right Frequent cutting and mulching of clippings can improve turf quality and presentation for fine turf areas

Robotic mowers have gained a strong foothold on the consumer market, offering time savings for those who would rather look at their lawn than mow it, along with a bowling green-like finish that makes them want to look at it.

But, there is also increasing interest from the commercial sector in which there are strong arguments for adopting the technology, suggests Luke Bateman of Husqvarna Automower specialist Autocut.

“Robotics can solve a lot of the issues associated with green space management. These include labour availability, and increasingly, finding weather windows to mow

that also fit in with sporting schedules or other uses of the turf surface. There’s usually no need to halt the mowing cycle for rain, and soil compaction is reduced.”

He adds that the fine mulching action and ‘little and often’ mowing regime can also significantly improve turf quality.

“Once you get used to the idea that a surface cut with a robotic mower will not be striped, you will appreciate the ‘carpet-like’ appearance that is produced. The very fine clippings return nutrients to the sward and promote healthy growth.”

One area where robotic mowing is not yet fully embraced, is in professional sports such as elite football, where clippings not collected on



Left and above Robotic mowers can offer benefits for a range of professional sports surfaces.

Bottom Solar charging is a useful solution for mowers being used on more remote sites

stadium pitches are considered to present an increased risk of disease and poa annua.

“However, trials are being carried out in Europe to assess these perceived negatives, so robotic mowing may gather momentum in the future,” Luke comments.

Applications where the technique has shown potential and considerable growth is expected are educational establishments and hospitality venues, where the ability to work silently and at times when the surface is not in use – even at night – is especially useful.

While the mowers can track across tarmac paths to reach multiple grassed areas, a limitation is the suitability for laying a wire around the perimeter of the area to be mown. This could be for purely practical reasons such as the complexity of the area’s shape or where

the wire may interfere with maintenance tasks such as deep aeration.

However, GPS-controlled mowers can be used in areas that are unsuitable for a perimeter wire, using a reference station for satellite guidance. The operator programmes in a ‘virtual boundary’ within which the mower will work and if necessary, a specified path from the charging point to the area to be mown, using a smartphone app.

“You could consider several smaller mowers with GPS modules in more complex areas. It’s about understanding the capacity of the mower; some layouts will mean that it is only working to 70% of its capacity, but that may be sufficient if the budget for the mower covers the cost of one operator cutting that area.”

“Larger and straightforward areas such as a

SUIT ALL SURFACES

There is a robotic mower to suit all types of surface, including all-wheel drive versions for steep slopes.

Control of the mowers on a day-to-day basis uses a smartphone app to fine tune performance and monitor weather to check it matches up to forecast data used for mowing schedules.



Above
Timing mowing around busy sporting schedules is easier with a machine that can work when the facility is closed, such as at night

sports club are especially suited to high capacity mowers as they can cover multiple pitches through the night, maximising the amount of time that the facility is available for use.”

Accepting that electricity costs have jumped considerably in the past 12 months, he points out that battery-powered mowers are still economical.

“Each mower uses a standard 13amp supply, so for a mid-range model working all year round, the cost would be £80-100/yr.”

Large estates or more remote sites can use a dedicated solar-powered charging point, Luke says.

“This gives flexibility where there is no mains power available. The power source needs to be

reserved just for the mower, which may return to charge four to 10 times a day depending on the growth cycle of the grass, in order to avoid interference.”

Concerns about technical support from a customer base used to performing many ‘fixes’ in-house on traditional machinery should not be a barrier, he suggests.

Routine maintenance such as swapping blades – three to four times a year is suggested as a minimum – and clearing debris from under the deck is easily carried out by the grounds team.

He adds that many grounds staff are keen to engage with the technology. Control of the mowers on a day-to-day basis uses a smartphone app to fine tune performance and monitor weather to check it matches up to forecast data used for mowing schedules.

“You can schedule start/stops to fit in with a sporting programme, use the app to view machine data such as trigger time, remaining runtime for the battery etc and alter the height or cut from the app. Remote viewing of mower operation eliminates the need to physically go and check the mowers, and frees up time for other jobs.”

If the mower is removed, an audible alarm will sound, an alert sent to the operator and GPS tracking activated to follow its location.

“Robotic mowing could provide a solution in many commercial situations,” says Luke, “It’s just a matter of discovering which is the right machine for your individual requirements.”

“

Robotics can solve a lot of the issues with green space management

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Scorched, brown fairways were a scene we were all too familiar with during the summer of 2022 as much of the UK found itself in drought conditions following the driest summer for more than forty years.



ABOVE: Cost and time effective irrigation from Toro Lynx central control system and sprinklers at Cruden Bay



Robert Jackson
Reesink Hydro-Scapes

Many water companies implemented hosepipe bans but golf courses were exempt, and with this came calls for social responsibility in terms of how they irrigated.

And as we head into winter, weather scientists have confirmed that we will see, for the third time, a rare meteorological event in the tropical Pacific with the 'El Nina'. The effects of which could mean a dry, cold winter for Britain and stretch the drought emergency into next summer.

As we all know, a dry winter after a dry summer means water reserves could be in serious trouble, but it's not all doom and gloom.

Companies like Toro have been hard at work investing in technology to ensure responsible irrigation options are available.

Here, Robert Jackson from Reesink Hydro-Scapes, the sole Toro distributor in the UK for irrigation products, considers how a warming climate with extreme weather spells means we find ourselves heading into uncharted territory when it comes to water reserves and usage, and how golf clubs can reclaim control of their water supply and irrigate responsibly.

Changing weather

The Met Office climate projections for the UK indicate significant temperature rises in the decade ahead for both winter and summer, with

Responsible irrigation

PREDICTED CHANGES

to the UK's climate:

- A decrease in total precipitation during spring, winter and autumn
- More extreme heavy rainfall events in summer
- An average temperature increase throughout the year
- Greater and more frequent summer droughts with extreme temperatures
- More frequent winter storms with greater intensity which cause flooding

Source: Met Office

the greatest increases in the already warmer South. We know from experience that clubs in Kent now face weather conditions similar to the South of France and the extreme weather could become more frequent and intense. Not every summer will be hotter than the last, but temperature records are expected to be regularly broken, while heatwaves are likely to be longer and happen more often.

What's the impact?

There are two significant problems with the way golf clubs irrigate for long-term sustainability with the changing climate. The first is excessive dependence on potable (mains) water (the water industry puts this at around 66 percent of UK

clubs) and the second is that so many irrigation systems are old.

Ten years ago, it used to be part of the brief when doing a spec for a new irrigation system – focus on the greens and tees, leave the fairways because the weather will cover it – that isn't the case anymore, the fairways are burning off and dying. Clubs need to irrigate more area and that means they must have a sensible, sustainable irrigation source.

Water companies are having to make tough strategic decisions on how they distribute limited supplies, and if it's perceived that the golf industry is not voluntarily attempting to reduce its reliance on unsustainable sources of water, tougher penalties for not becoming more



Above
Top: Adjusting Toro's B Series with Turf Cup for the most precise coverage is easy

Bottom: Sutton United FC irrigates with an SRC Ranger control system, 16 valve in head Toro Infinity sprinklers

self-sufficient could be applied.

Long-term supply of water

The impacts of climate change, increased user expectations and historically short-term management practices have resulted in golf course water demands generally increasing, without too much planning over the source. This has to change.

There's no need to use high quality potable water for irrigation; a club's heavy dependence on potable water means they don't have control and supply cannot be guaranteed, especially when water companies and the Environment Agency are struggling to access and process sufficient supply for domestic use, but what are the alternatives?

Ideally, you'd have the set-up of winter abstraction and a borehole in the summer*. But, for that you need a licence from the Environmental Agency, and they are coming under greater pressure from users which may result in stricter licence allocations in certain areas. There's also the option of using recycled grey water. This can reduce annual water use by 90 percent simply by setting up rainwater harvesting and the treatment of used water from the clubhouse. This is a practice widely used in European countries such as Spain, but only about three to four clubs in the UK currently adopt this practice.

Futureproofing yourself against climate change and stricter water use legislation means acting now. Failure to do so could place many at serious risk of significant surface quality decline in the next decade.

So how do you do that? It's all down to your irrigation system...

Irrigating

The Environmental Agency is going to want to see you being sensible with your irrigation and know you're doing the right thing with the resource – and understandably so when you consider the loss of water there is through old infrastructure and incorrect practices using the system and the sprinklers. Those being vigilant now, having taken the time to understand their system (whatever its age) deserve recognition – it's this mindset that will set them in good stead for the future and its challenges. For those who are playing catch up, we've got you covered.

The R&A GC2030 Water Security project recently found the vast majority of course irrigation is at least ten years old: 83 percent of main pipelines, 64 percent of storage tanks and the same figure again for the sprinkler heads. While this isn't necessarily a problem, it does need monitoring. The completion of a new system installation is not the end, far from it, it's just the beginning – it's a project, it needs understanding and love to work optimally, and that is even more important with an older system of course.



Water efficiency addresses both climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation



Monitoring should include:

- **Detailed understanding and mapping of site and available water resources**

Monitoring incoming water supply, distribution network, weather data and soil moisture levels. Analyse water usage throughout the year and use finding to highlight areas where water quantity and applications can be improved.

- **Current water usage and source**

Irrigation should be applied according to soil moisture values, ambient weather conditions and forecasts rather than just regular irrigation windows.

- **Detailed information of irrigation system**

It takes detailed work, but existing irrigation systems can be optimised to gain efficiencies. Components can be tweaked to optimise irrigation cycles and each sprinkler head needs checking. The distribution and direction of water are key – quite often non-essential areas such as pathways and roughs are being irrigated simply because of the positioning and radius of the sprinkler head and nozzles.

I recommend golf course managers check out the STRI's interactive online portal that presents the latest climate change predictions from the IPCC (International Panel for Climate

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Above
Irrigating with Toro brings the latest technology to your venue to ensure reliable and efficient water usage

Change) and The Met Office. This can be used to see forecasts for specific areas for every season until 2080. Information is king and with the metrics of maximum and minimum temperature and precipitations to hand, the best - and worst-case scenarios can be identified and help with planning for the future.

Responsible irrigation

Responsible irrigation is an emotive subject. Irrigation technology is constantly evolving and is much more efficient. Upgrades to specific items such as pump sets, controller software and pipework and irrigation heads/nozzles can and should take place throughout the lifespan of a system. However, sometimes a full upgrade of the whole system is needed to realise large scale water savings.

The developments that have impacted golf course professionals the most are:

- **Thermal mapping and detection analytics** to improve turf health with less water, and reduced fertiliser and pesticide use.
- **Central control systems** like Lynx which provides access to real-time course information, precision control options, and convenience through mobile connectivity to better manage turf health and water resources.
- The new **PrecisionSense technology** which measures the variability of key site attributes – including soil moisture, salinity,

compaction and plant performance – to help customers improve water and resource efficiency, and produce healthy, more uniform turf.

- **Toro’s Turf Guard** wireless soil monitoring system to measure and report soil moisture, temperature and salinity. The real-time data helps customers make more informed decisions on when and how much to water, ensuring healthier turf without over or under watering.
- **Sprinkler precision** such as with the Infinity series to allow for maximum distribution uniformity and adjustability to alter coverage seasonally, meet water reduction mandates and for separate irrigating between turf areas. There’s even the option of sprinklers which are perfect for bunker surrounds without wasting water throwing into the bunkers and with rotation to slowly apply water where runoff is a concern.
- **Internal retrofit kits** designed to immediately upgrade and update older and other branded sprinklers to Toro’s most advanced technology for the ultimate precision.

*Boreholes can provide significant quantities of water, however anything more than 20m³ a day requires a specific licence from the Environmental Agency. Licences may have weekly or seasonal limits. Storage is often required to store winter abstraction for summer use.



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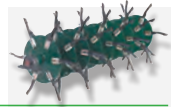
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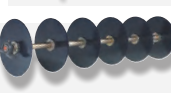
Fine Slitter

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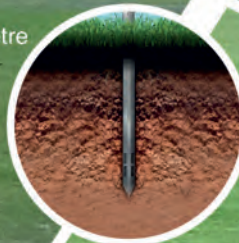
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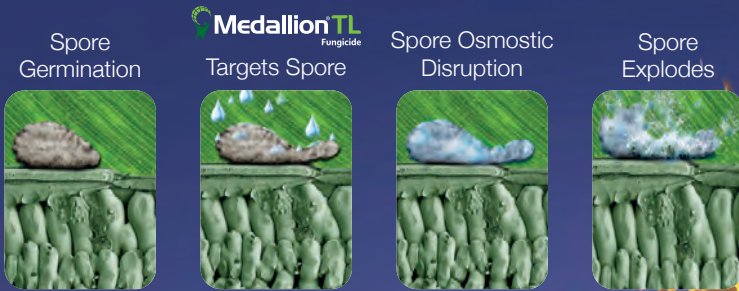
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