

PITCHCARE

The turfcare magazine from pitchcare.com

June/July 2020

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DON'T MISS

The 'new normal'

Equestrian sports were hard hit by Covid-19 as any with major championships cancelled and racing and polo seasons put on hold



COMING FULL CIRCLE

It is quite rare that life goes full circle. Even more rare is a career in Greenkeeping that begins by jumping on a one-way flight to Australia with a plan to continue working as a fireman. But for La Grande Mare's Course Manager, **Rick Hamilton**, that is how it all started. Blair Ferguson reports

Spitfires grounded!

Cricket is our summer game; just not this summer. The frustration is most apparent at county level, where all 18 clubs are without income, yet having to keep ticking over. 2020 is the year Kent Cricket celebrates 150 years, but so far, it's a party with no guests



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2020 vision

The pandemic continues but, very slowly, the economy is starting to get going. Currently, we can visit a showroom to buy a new car, or pop to a shopping centre to buy clothes (surrounded by strangers) and Boris has just announced the 'bubble' plan, which is a big step. However, it perplexes me that small gatherings of friends and family must be outside, pubs will be an interesting one when they open, and schools remain closed!

Sport is opening behind closed doors, but only certain sectors. It amazes me how football - a predominantly contact sport - can proceed (although gender specific), whilst cricket, a mainly socially distanced field sport, remains closed. I know it comes down to money, but it does not make sense! My point; in a year that should have been very clear (2020 vision), it's all blurring into something we will never forget.

Regardless of what sector you are in, maintenance has obviously continued over the past few months with positivity and pride for the surfaces you manage, in challenging conditions. So far, it has been remarkably dry for pretty much the duration of lockdown, which has no doubt impacted surfaces and maintenance and there appears to be a nationwide battle with poa.

Renovations will be at an all-time low but, given there has been no play, there will obviously be less damage. No two venues are the same and I'm sure everyone has had their own battles - I just hope that, as sport returns for each sector, so too do staffing levels and 'normal' working practices.

As we approach the summer months - typically a time for demos and meeting people - many businesses have found new ways of working and new methods of promoting their products/services to potential customers. Social distancing will remain in place for quite some time but,

certainly from our perspective, we are once again conducting one on one interviews. Much like many companies and reps alike, it's great to be getting out and about.

I would like to say a huge thank you to our contributors for their sterling work throughout lockdown. Despite restrictions, they have continued to conduct telephone interviews and provide interesting, informative content which has greatly helped maintain our usual level of quality articles.

Looking further into the future, Saltex has been postponed until March 2021. It does make me wonder whether, given the reduced level of sales manufacturers will have undoubtedly suffered throughout the year, a show so close to BTME is right for them (if, in fact, BTME is allowed to go ahead of course). The requirement for coming together as an industry will always be there, so it will be interesting to see how plans are managed and how things pan out.

As always, it's important to keep talking to each other and reach out if you're struggling with personal or work issues. Leicester City groundsman Graeme Farmer gives an honest account about his struggle with mental health issues on page 74.

Keep safe.

Kerry Haywood
Editor



SAY THAT AGAIN!

"I'm not bothered if people like me or not, Pitchcare has helped more people in this industry, for free, than anything else, both here in the UK and abroad"

Dave Saltman, Pitchcare founder

"On one visit I was very surprised to see drain tracks being dug by hand and the soil being removed in baskets without any mechanical machinery at all"

Alan Ferguson, FIFA

"Probably, the biggest thing for me was contemplating suicide and the realisation that it was a normal everyday thought - like putting the bins out"

Graeme Farmer, Leicester City

"I was a million miles away from being ready, but I will always be grateful to Mickelover for taking a punt on a young lad"

Mark Crossley, Prestbury Golf Club

"A key factor to all of this is groundsmen understanding the business needs and the business understanding the groundsmen and agronomical needs"

Andy Jackson, Stoke City

"Across society, we all have a duty to adjust to the 'new normal' including in our industry, and if the 'new normal' for us is to deliver a facility which allows our service users to exercise, socialise, and safely social distance, then we have a responsibility to deliver those experiences"

John Lawrence,
Edgbaston Priory

The Pitchcare team



KERRY HAYWOOD
Editor

t: 07973 394 037
e: kerry@pitchcare.com



JOHN RICHARDS
Sub-editor

t: 01902 440 256
e: john@pitchcare.com



LEE WILLIAMS
Editorial

t: 07375 419 442
e: lee.williams@pitchcare.com



PETER BRITTON
Advertising & Production

t: 01952 898 516
e: peter@pitchcare.com

Our contributors



JANE CARLEY



BLAIR FERGUSON



NEVILLE JOHNSON



CHRIS McCULLOUGH



DAVE MEARS



GREG RHODES

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Pitchcare.com Allscott Park, Allscott, Telford Shropshire TF6 5DY

Tel: 01952 897 910

Email: editor@pitchcare.com

www.pitchcare.com



Issue 91 June/July 2020

Rick Hamilton, La Grande Mare Golf Club

COVER STORY: Coming full circle

It is quite rare that life goes full circle. Even more rare is a career in Greenkeeping that begins by jumping on a one-way flight to Australia with a plan to continue working as a fireman. But for La Grande Mare's Course Manager, Rick Hamilton, that is how it all started. Blair Ferguson reports. **P34**

GOLF

The world's best

Pitchcare were keen to get an insight into 'The World's Best Golf Club'; an accolade Sentosa Golf Club won at the World Golf Awards last year. Kerry Haywood conducted a Q&A with General Manager and Director of Agronomy, Andy Johnston, to find out why they are considered the best. **P22**

Mark's elevated position

Prestbury Golf Club is located in beautiful Cheshire countryside and is one of the select few golf courses in the British Isles to bear the architectural stamp of Harry Colt. Whilst being told to all stay at home and stay safe, Lee Williams spoke to Course Manager Mark Crossley, over Zoom, to find out the challenges an elevated position presents on the hilly terrain. **P42**

WINTER SPORTS

Football lockdown!

Almost every league in the world has been shut down, major tournaments have been postponed, and sporting governing bodies are desperately working to find a solution. FIFA's Pitch Management Manager, Alan Ferguson, discusses the huge logistical challenges international football faces in the coming months ... and years! **P52**

Dan's the man

Regarded as one of the finest amateur sporting venues in the country, Stanningley Sports and Amateur Rugby League Club is located in the district of Pudsey - midway between Leeds and Bradford. Lee Williams spoke to Dan Connor at the Arthur Miller Stadium. **P60**

Same but different!

In the worlds of turf maintenance and sport, some things are different, and others are the same. The ultimate aim is to produce the best surface possible and win games, but the methods of achieving both can vary. Blair Ferguson talks to Stoke City's Andy Jackson about working methods outside the UK. **P68**

KEYNOTE INTERVIEW

Dave.com

With the sale of Maxwell Amenity to Agrovista UK Ltd, the company's former Managing Director, Dave Saltman, has now handed over the reins.

Friend and colleague Peter Britton talks to him about his career, the struggles he had launching Pitchcare and the legacy he has left. **P12**



MENTAL HEALTH

The monster on my back

"You cannot put 30kg of fertiliser in a 20kg bag. Sooner or later it is going to spill out. I just did not know how much of a mess it was going to make." I have read these words time and time again, and they resonate something very honest and relative to our industry and the people within it dealing with mental health issues. Kerry Haywood spoke to Graeme Farmer. **P74**

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Passing down the skills

It's had a long innings and moved a few times over the years but Holywood Cricket Club sure excels in the sport. Chris McCullough speaks to main groundsman Philip McCormick who is following in his father's footsteps. **P84**

Coronavirus: the impact

The journey Grounds Manager David Lawrence and Assistant Grounds Manager John Lawrence at The Edgbaston Priory Club have had to navigate the last few months has seen the team having to overcome massive challenges, alter their methods to fit a changing picture and, ultimately, allowed them the chance to attain some of the highest job satisfaction they've ever known. **P90**

ARTIFICIAL SURFACES

Maintenance is essential

GKB's Tom Shinkins discusses the importance of maintaining 3G artificial football pitches to comply with exacting standards and to ensure the full-life of the surface. **P102**

EQUESTRIAN

Adapting to the 'new normal'

Equestrian sports have been as hard hit as any with major championships cancelled and racing and polo seasons put on hold. But turfcare regimes have continued and are now stepping up a pace to ensure perfect footing when resumption is allowed. Managing groundstaff, participants and would-be spectators - who may be excluded for much of the year - is another challenge. **P108**



Andy Jackson, Stoke City FC

CONSERVATION

Dead wood is dead good

There's a saying amongst ecologists and entomologists that 'dead wood is dead good', which refers to the importance to wildlife placed on seemingly decaying and redundant areas of woodlands. Peter Britton looks at that 'ugly' bunch of insects that provide an important role in local habitats far beyond their size. **P116**

TECHNICAL

The facts of science

Nearly two years ago, back when the world still felt relatively normal, new Assistant Technical Manager at Agrovista Amenity, Abigail Graceson, decided to leave the world of academia and research and step into commerce. To use a term that has now become part of everyday language, her learning curve was exponential as she found that the commercial world works at a far quicker pace than anything she had experienced in academia. **P120**

Grounds maintenance inputs

In this article, Daniel Ratling, BSc Hons. PCert TSC, Head Groundsman at Whitgift School in London, considers plant-soil interactions and how we turf managers might improve this vital region of the turfgrass ecosystem. **P124**

Batteries: The basics

Vince Brauns, European Product Manager at cordless outdoor power equipment specialist EGO Power Plus, explains the evolution of battery technology, the technology's basic principles and why there is no better time than the present to adopt battery power. **P130**

It costs less than you think

In this article, Reesink Turfcare's Service Manager Lee Rowbotham says that total cost of ownership (TCO) is a vital part of the decision-making process when looking to invest in a new machinery fleet, but certainly never before has the concept had such weight **P136**

TRAINING

Are You Putting People Off?

Grounds Training Instructor and Conference Speaker Frank Newberry looks at how our interpersonal skills, or lack of, might be putting people off. Our off-putting behaviour might be limiting the potential of key working relationships, i.e. with colleagues, peers and bosses. **P140**



Andrew Johnston, Sentosa Golf Club



Graeme Farmer, Leicester City FC



Dan Connor, Stanningley RFC



Adrian Llong, Kent CCC

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SALTEX postponed

SALTEX to reschedule to March 2021 due to COVID-19 crisis

In light of continued restrictions surrounding mass gatherings, combined with the unprecedented impact on all of us from Covid-19, the Grounds Management Association's (GMA) Board of Directors has taken the unanimous decision to move SALTEX to early Spring 2021. This outcome has been guided by discussions with key industry bodies, as well as exhibitors.

Like everyone else, the GMA has continued to follow Government guidance, and the science involved, to guide its business during this unprecedented time. Despite early optimism, a decision has been made to move the exhibition to March 2021 - taking into account the best interests of all parties involved.

By acting now, it gives the sector an opportunity to re-group and recover ahead of the next trade show. SALTEX will be now held on 3 and 4 March 2021, and the GMA is also realigning the following year so that SALTEX runs in Spring 2022.

The GMA's decision is based on ensuring the safety of everyone connected with such an event. The association believes this is the most responsible course of action - given current circumstances.

Speaking about the announcement David Carpenter, Independent Chair of the GMA stated: "We would like to reassure our community that personal wellbeing remains our top priority. It is a case of mixed concerns at the moment, but I am hugely optimistic because I believe that the rescheduling of SALTEX from November 2020 will result in a much stronger



show in Spring 2021. The new date will enable even more people to visit and celebrate the innovation, technology and the passion that the grounds industry represents - including excellent networking opportunities, as well as focusing on new business needs."

Geoff Webb, CEO at the GMA said: "This has been a difficult decision to make, and I hope all our exhibitors join forces with us to mark a return to more ordinary working conditions in the not too distant future. Professional and personal lives have been placed on hold, and that in turn will have a knock-on effect. We want to help ease that load at the moment."

"We've seen the grounds community come together and adapt during this challenging period, and we hope that exhibitors help us host something beyond a trade show - a celebration of what our industry can overcome when working together."

The GMA also believes that holding the 75th SALTEX on 3 and 4 March 2021 will help all companies get the respite required to readjust to changing professional and personal

circumstances. The organisation understands the impact of Covid-19 for many businesses and individuals within the grounds management industry.

Geoff Webb continues: "Next year, the event will provide a huge opportunity for our sector to regroup, reunite and celebrate. After this difficult period, the show will help to rekindle the economic activity of the industry. Until then, all our thoughts and support are with those facing the challenges posed by the spread of Coronavirus."

GMA is pleased to be able to honour all existing bookings and has also secured the same halls at the NEC to minimise disruption for exhibitors. It is also in the process of contacting exhibitors with new payment terms, with later dates, and it is also working with companies that may require further assistance during this challenging period.

The GMA and its SALTEX partners are working closely together to assist businesses with the transition. The GMA can be contacted for further support via SALTEX@thegma.org.uk

£7m support package for struggling golf clubs

R&A sets up £7 million COVID-19 Support Fund to help struggling clubs

The R&A has launched a £7 million funding package, The R&A Covid-19 Support Fund, to help golf deal with the impact of the pandemic.

The fund to help golf clubs and facilities facing financial difficulties during the crisis will be largely aimed at national associations and other affiliated bodies in Great Britain and Ireland.

R&A chief executive Martin Slumbers said: "The pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on golf and many clubs are facing dire financial situations through no fault of their own."

"Golf is in our DNA and we want to see the sport continue to thrive from grassroots right

through to the top level on the professional tours. We have a responsibility to do what we can to help in such a crisis."

"The R&A Covid-19 Support Fund will enable national associations and other key bodies to provide support to some of their members."

"We know that many challenges lie ahead, but club golf is the bedrock of our sport and hopefully this fund will help to begin the process of recovery."

A statement said the R&A is working with its national associations and other selected organisations on communications, with each body being responsible for controlling and allocating its share.



The R&A reinvests the proceeds from the success of The Open in growing and supporting golf and has launched the new fund despite this year's event having been cancelled.

The St Andrews-based governing body already provides financial support to a wide range of organisations in addition to national associations, including the European Tour, the LET, the PGA of Great Britain and Ireland and the Golf Foundation.

£2m extra for Active Together initiative

Sport England partners with Crowdfunder for £2m COVID-19 emergency fund

Sports clubs and community activity groups hit by the COVID-19 lockdown will be able to benefit from emergency funding up to £20,000, thanks to a match-funding initiative by Sport England.

The grassroots body has teamed up with online platform Crowdfunder and has pledged to match crowdfunds of up to £10,000, raised by clubs and organisations in England hit by the coronavirus crisis.

In total, Sport England has earmarked £1m for the Active Together scheme, which is in addition to the £210m coronavirus support package announced earlier this year.

"The partnership with Crowdfunder is one of several ways we're helping organisations survive during the pandemic and start to plan for the future," said Charles Johnston, Sport England's executive director of property.



"We're supporting projects new to crowdfunding, so they can develop successful fundraising campaigns by engaging their local communities."

The Crowdfunder platform is scrapping all fees for the Active Together programme and is covering transaction charges to ensure all the money raised will be received by the clubs.

To help clubs further, Crowdfunder is also providing a series of monthly webinars offering advice and examples of successful previous Crowdfunder projects involving sport.

Clubs and organisations can sign up via the Crowdfunder website, where a bespoke page

has been set up for the Active Together programme.

They'll then need to set their crowdfunding target and put in place incentives and rewards.

Once 25 percent of the crowdfunding is met, Sport England will confirm the match funding - up to £10,000 - and can distribute the money within seven days of being raised.



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PROUDLY
BRITISH

USGA are ready for action!

USGA joins United Nations Sports for Climate Action Initiative

As part of its mission to champion and advance the game of golf and to actively engage in the sustainability effort across the sports landscape, the USGA has joined more than 100 organisations in becoming a signatory of the United Nations Sports for Climate Action Initiative.

Sports for Climate Action was created in 2018 as a platform for sports organisations to support climate action in a highly collaborative forum. Signatories of the initiative commit to five key principles:

- undertaking systematic efforts to promote greater environmental responsibility
- reducing overall climate impact
- educating for climate action
- promoting sustainable and responsible consumption
- advocating for climate action through communication

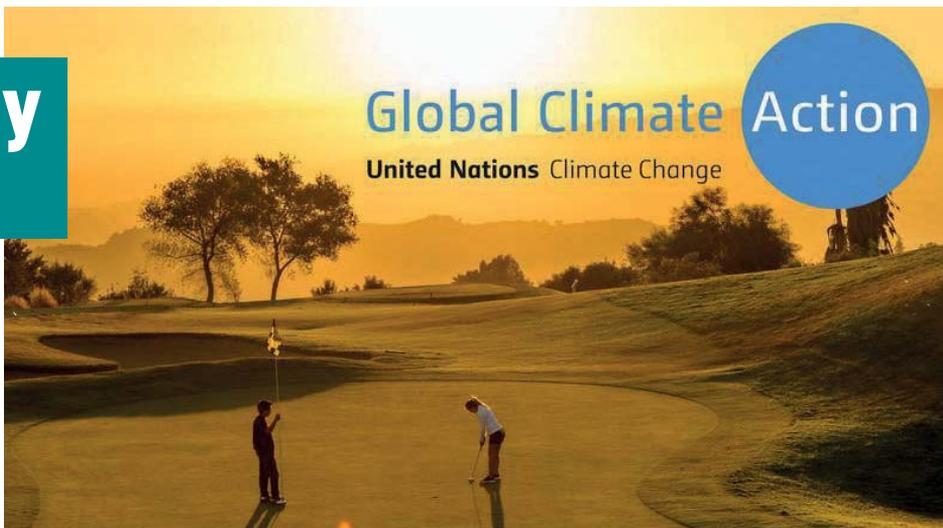
"Golf is an outdoor game that connects millions of players to their environment and their community," said Mike Davis, CEO of the USGA. "Its uniqueness in sports, with an arena in which the architectural design and landscape

plays an active role in its universal appeal and enjoyment, provides us with countless opportunities to engage and positively impact the future of these green spaces. We look forward to learning from our colleagues and sharing golf perspectives in this very important and unifying effort."

The announcement comes as the association celebrates the 100th anniversary of the USGA Green Section, its golf course consulting and environmental innovation team of agronomic experts, scientists and engineers. Through the Green Section, the USGA has invested more than \$40 million in turfgrass and environmental research, which has led to the development of grasses that require fewer nutrients, use less water and are more resilient to changing climate patterns. Many data-driven, scientific advancements and best practices have been widely shared and adopted to benefit the game as well as sports playing fields worldwide.

Global Climate Action

United Nations Climate Change



As part of a forward-facing approach, the USGA issued a challenge to the golf industry to improve golfer satisfaction by 20 percent whilst reducing golf's use of critical resources, such as water, by 25 percent by the year 2025. The effort includes a continued investment in education and outreach through a variety of vehicles, including a bi-annual Innovation Symposium, as well as a commitment to sustainable practices in the conduct of its annual competitions.

Current signatories to the initiative include sports organisations and individual teams from around the world, including the International Golf Federation, NBA, FIFA, Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) and the New York Yankees.

To learn more about Sports for Climate Action, visit the United Nations website.

Acelepryn reapproved for 2020 season

2020 Emergency Authorisation for Syngenta's Acelepryn

The Emergency Authorisation for the use of the Syngenta insecticide, Acelepryn, for the control of chafer grubs has been reapproved for the 2020 season.

This season, the initial chafer grub specific authorisation permits use of Acelepryn on affected greens, tees and fairways, along with horse race courses and airfields. The treatment period is up until 30 August 2020.

An Emergency Authorisation has also been submitted for the treatment of leatherjacket infestations, which would enable application through to the end of October.

This extended dual authorisation approach would enable turf managers and agronomists to more effectively cover the wider window for key chafer grub and leatherjacket treatment timings - which coincide with the pests' egg hatch and initial larval activity.

Chafer grubs and leatherjackets cause damage to turf through extensive feeding on roots, which can be severe in localised patches. Surface stability, where grubs have chewed through turf roots, is of hugely significant concern for racecourses.

Furthermore, extreme damage can occur in all

turf surfaces when badgers, birds and other foragers root through turf in search of the grubs.

The Emergency Authorisation permits Acelepryn use in situations where there is an acknowledged instance of economic damage, or risk of bird strike on airfields, and where the product has been recommended by a BASIS qualified agronomist.

This season, for the first time, Acelepryn users will be able to submit online stewardship records of areas treated, via the ICL website: <https://bit.ly/AceleprynStewardshipForm2020>

The authorised label permits application at the rate of 0.6 litres per hectare, applied in 500-1000 l/ha water.

An online turf pest ID guide, to aid the identification of adult stages of key target soil pests and target application timing, is now available on the Syngenta GreenCast website. The allied Pest Tracker on-line reporting system is also building a picture of pest activity across the UK and Ireland, to anticipate issues and aid application timing.

For further information on best use guidelines, where chafer grubs and leatherjackets have



caused economically damaging effects, speak to one of Pitchcare's Technical Managers or BASIS agronomists.

STRI launch Project Pathfinder

New initiative is available to all sports or green space facilities affected by Covid-19

STRI has announced the launch of 'Project Pathfinder' which forms part of the UK Government's emergency Covid-19 innovation strategy.

The project will provide sports facilities, clubs and green spaces affected by the Covid-19 crisis with stage one consultation advice for free between June and August 2020. If required, STRI will also deliver roadmaps to give facilities business plans to assist with their longer-term financial stability.

This initiative is available to any sports or green space facility that is currently experiencing issues directly or indirectly due to the Covid-19 crisis. This may involve advice on turfgrass maintenance practices with reduced staff, planning applications, potential cost savings, or longer-term options to put facilities on a stronger financial footing such as redevelopment or land sales.

By funding this project, the Government has recognised the huge health and mental



Free advice clinic for sports facilities and green spaces

PROJECT PATHFINDER

wellbeing benefits sports facilities provide to the UK. However, many of these sports facilities are especially vulnerable since the Covid-19 outbreak, which has impacted revenue and long-term business survival. STRI aims to assist as many sports facilities as possible to help them on the road to recovery.

STRI consultant Kelly-Marie Clack, said: "Project Pathfinder will provide a lifeline to sports facilities who are impacted by the Covid-19

pandemic. Our services will fill the gap in knowledge for facility managers who need to rapidly adapt to new financial and practical pressures. This is truly a unique opportunity to reach out and offer advice to all sections of our industry, regardless of budget or location."

To take part in Project Pathfinder, please complete this short and simple survey at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/stripathfinder



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Clubs to benefit from funding

Nearly 3,000 clubs across the country benefit from Pitch Preparation Fund

Football pitches across the country are set to be enhanced thanks to a £7 million scheme from the Premier League, The FA and Government's Football Foundation.

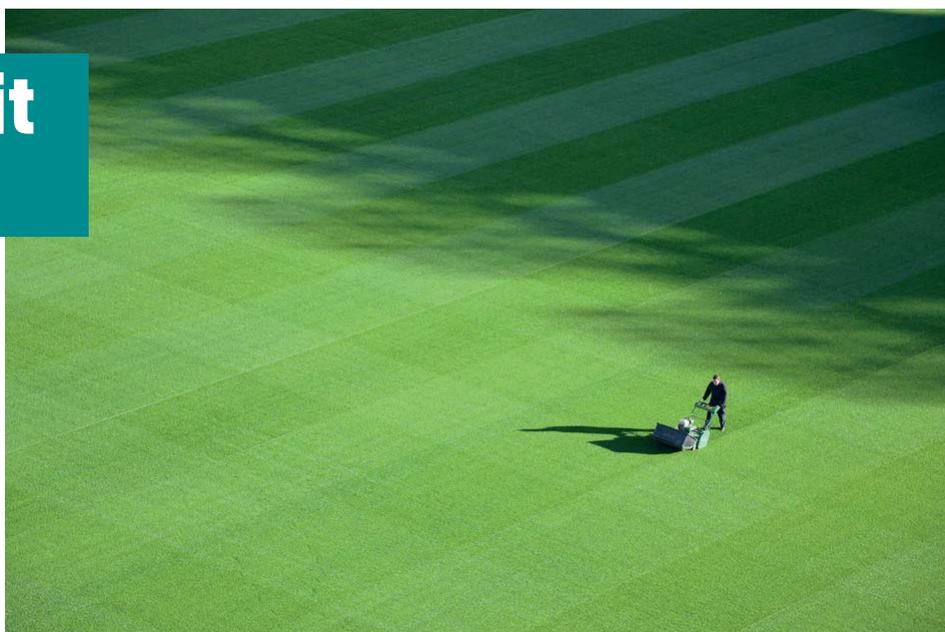
The Pitch Preparation Fund was set up in support of the game, which is currently facing unprecedented challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is providing grants to clubs that have lost out on normal revenue streams during this difficult period and helping them to get their pitches ready for when it is safe to play football again, following Government advice.

The response to the Fund has been positive, with around 3,000 applications received in the two-and-a-half weeks the application window was open during May.

As a result, £7m of investment has been awarded to 2,902 clubs and organisations. This will allow 9,588 football pitches to be made match-fit, benefiting 33,153 football teams in the grassroots, non-league and women's game, as well as every club in the Welsh Cymru Premier League.

The Pitch Preparation Fund's impact in numbers:

- A total of 2,902 grants awarded
- £7m of investment
- 9,588 football pitches improved



- 33,153 football teams benefiting
- 2,196 grassroots clubs awarded grants
- 706 clubs in the National League System awarded grants
- 1,138 grants will support women and girls' football
- All 12 Welsh Cymru Premier League clubs awarded grants

As a result of the exposure of the Pitch Preparation Fund, the Football Foundation also received an increase of 176% in its regular facility grant applications during May 2020, compared with May 2019.

This means even more football sites will be improved, over and above those receiving Pitch Preparation Fund grants.

In addition to grassroots clubs benefitting from the scheme, 673 non-league, Women's Super

League and Welsh Cymru Premier League clubs have been supported via the Premier League's Football Stadia Improvement Fund.

Clubs and other organisations are also being given access to the Football Foundation Groundskeeping Community.

This is a free online resource the Foundation developed with The FA and the Grounds Management Association, containing advice and guidance.

Anyone can sign up at <https://thefa.hivelearning.com/groundskeeping>.

Football Foundation

The Amenity Forum has announced that its 2020 Conference will go ahead on October 15th at the Kettering Conference Centre. The conference will also be made available online to registered delegates.

The Forum will be using specialist conferencing software for those unable to attend in person. Having liaised with the venue and all concerned, it is felt possible to run the event at the conference centre and all measures will be taken in terms of social distancing and related matters.

The Forum did consider delaying the event but believe that there are so many important issues

facing the sector currently, not least the ongoing review of the National Action Plan by the UK and national governments. Delegates can be assured that all precautions will be taken, plus the offer of online access is a positive step as some delegates may still have reservations on attending in person.

The title of the conference is 'Amenity Management - Planning for the Future' and a range of high-quality speakers has been secured to address the issues. Indeed, the first speaker from DEFRA will bring up to the minute policy statements and will be followed by other speakers covering current issues.

Rates for Attending at Venue

£85 + VAT for Members

£95 + VAT for Non-Members

An early bird discount of £10 for full conference delegates applies for bookings made before September 1st

Online Attendance

£45 + VAT for Members

£50 + VAT for Non-Members

For further information on the programme, please contact admin@amenityforum.net

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

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Roger Mant RIP

Fontwell Park have announced the death of Roger Mant - the man who kept the racecourse in fine condition for more than forty years.

Roger was head groundsman from 1959 until 2003, when he passed the reins over to son Paul, who still does the job now.

A Fontwell spokesman said: "With great sadness, we report the passing of Roger Mant, Head Groundsman for over forty years at Fontwell."

"Roger, 82, retired in 2003. He was regarded as the second most important person in the history of the course after the track's creator Alfred Day. Our thoughts are with his family."

Roger was one of the VIPs selected to open the new grandstand a decade ago and he and his family are well-known by all who go to Fontwell regularly, be they race-goers, jockeys, trainers or owners.

A tribute to Roger's work is sure to be put in place once racing returns at Fontwell Park later in the year.

Phil Bell, who was the boss at Fontwell from 2002 to 2012, said: "Roger retired shortly after I started at Fontwell Park but stayed working with us part-time for many years."

"It was clear when you spoke to everyone who knew him, including the country's leading trainers and jockeys, that he was held in the very highest regard."

"He was Mr Fontwell for decades and always presented the track, fences, hurdles and racecourse grounds in perfect condition. His commitment and dedication to his work was exceptional - a great man."

Former Toro CEO dies at 79



Kendrick "Ken" B. Melrose, former chairman and chief executive officer of The Toro Company, passed away Sunday May 3rd 2020 at the age of 79.

"Ken was a great man, and the epitome of an exceptional leader," said Rick Olson, current chairman and chief executive officer of The Toro Company.

"The culture he instilled continues as a positive influence and will guide The Toro Company long into the future. Ken was passionate about supporting the industries we serve and helping our customers succeed. The impact of his generous philanthropic initiatives will continue to positively affect many in our industry and our communities."

Ken joined The Toro Company in 1970 and, over the course of the following decade, served in a number of leadership roles with increasing responsibility. In 1981, as the company faced extremely challenging times, Ken was named president. Toro say that Ken's belief in and ability to connect with people, his fortitude while making tough decisions, and his commitment to quality and innovation, all

helped lead the organisation through financial difficulty to record results at the time.

Ken outlined his business philosophy in his book published in 1995, *Making the Grass Greener on Your Side: A CEO's Journey to Leading by Serving*. As Ken wrote, "Everyone has the potential to contribute to achieving the goals of the company. If you unleash that potential, market leadership and financial success will be natural by-products."

After leading the company for twenty-four years, Ken retired as CEO in March of 2005. During his tenure, Ken oversaw a number of acquisitions, including Wheel Horse, Exmark, Lawn-Boy and Hayter, and company sales grew from \$247 million to \$1.7 billion.

"We owe much to Ken's principled leadership, and his legacy cannot be overstated," added Rick Olson. "He was a rare transformational leader who saw the best in people and knew how to inspire them to work together and exceed their own expectations in order to achieve great things."

Jeff retires from Reesink

Jeff Anguige takes early retirement from industry after 46 years

Reesink Turfcare has announced the retirement of its national sales manager Jeff Anguige after 21 years working with the Toro UK distributor and its predecessor Lely UK, and a total of 46 years serving the turfcare industry.

Jeff, 63, began working in the industry straight after leaving college, learning the business working at golf and grounds dealerships and turf machinery manufacturers such as Ransomes. In 1999, he joined the then Toro UK distributor Lely UK, with headquarters at St Neots, Cambs., as national Toro sales manager, responsible for spearheading sales of its golf course and sports turf maintenance machinery.

At Lely, and latterly Reesink, he has played a leading role in helping develop the Toro name

and reputation for quality products that today sees it as the market-leading brand it has become.

It is, he says, his biggest career achievement: "Toro has been the constant in my working life at Lely and Reesink," says Jeff. "For over two decades I've worked with a brilliant team to help it grow to where it is today - in my view, holding the number one spot for quality with its reputation preceding it."

Jeff has seen many big changes throughout his time in the industry. Among the biggest, he says, is the way in which clubs now buy their machinery. He says: "When I started, people tended to get their cheque book out and buy one piece of equipment at a time, outright. Now, the majority of customers invest in fleet



deals on finance. It gives the option to have more machines straightaway for the same level of investment, as well as the latest technology to maintain playing surfaces. The upscale is huge, as is the improvement in quality of playing surfaces. It's certainly a very different market to when I started, and very much for the better."



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Keynote interview

Dave.com

With the sale of Maxwell Amenity to Agrovista UK Ltd, the company's former Managing Director, **Dave Saltman**, has now handed over the reins. Friend and colleague Peter Britton talks to him about his career, the struggles he had launching Pitchcare and the legacy he has left



I was intrigued by his question, but it got me wondering if, indeed, the internet could be used as a vehicle to bring our fragmented industry together, to provide a knowledge base and to allow individuals to talk to each other across the ether



The late Sir Jack Hayward presents Dave Saltman with the 1996 Groundsman of the Year award. His right hand man Terry Carver is on the left, now sadly deceased too

Dave Saltman qualified as a Landscape Gardener and Designer at Merrist Wood College in Guildford at the age of twenty-one. During his time there, he built two Chelsea Flower Show gardens, which won silver and silver gilt medals.

In his sandwich year in 1987, he set up a landscaping business with a friend, Jason Wood, called Garden Innovations; it specialised in concept design and build.

Garden Innovations was invited, by another company, to do some turfing, which turned out to be replacing the old Astro pitch at Queens Park Rangers' Loftus Road stadium. It was a cell system pitch from southern Europe. Once completed, Dave was asked by the contractor if he'd like to maintain the QPR pitch.

The company was also maintaining other sports venues, as well as building tennis courts, football pitches and other sports surfaces. Dave had to 'learn on the hoof' as he calls it, but found there were only a handful of industry books available to learn from. The industry magazines at the time didn't offer anything, perhaps one feature article, which was often just advertorial. Exhibitions, events and talking to peers seemed to be the only way he was going to

improve his knowledge base.

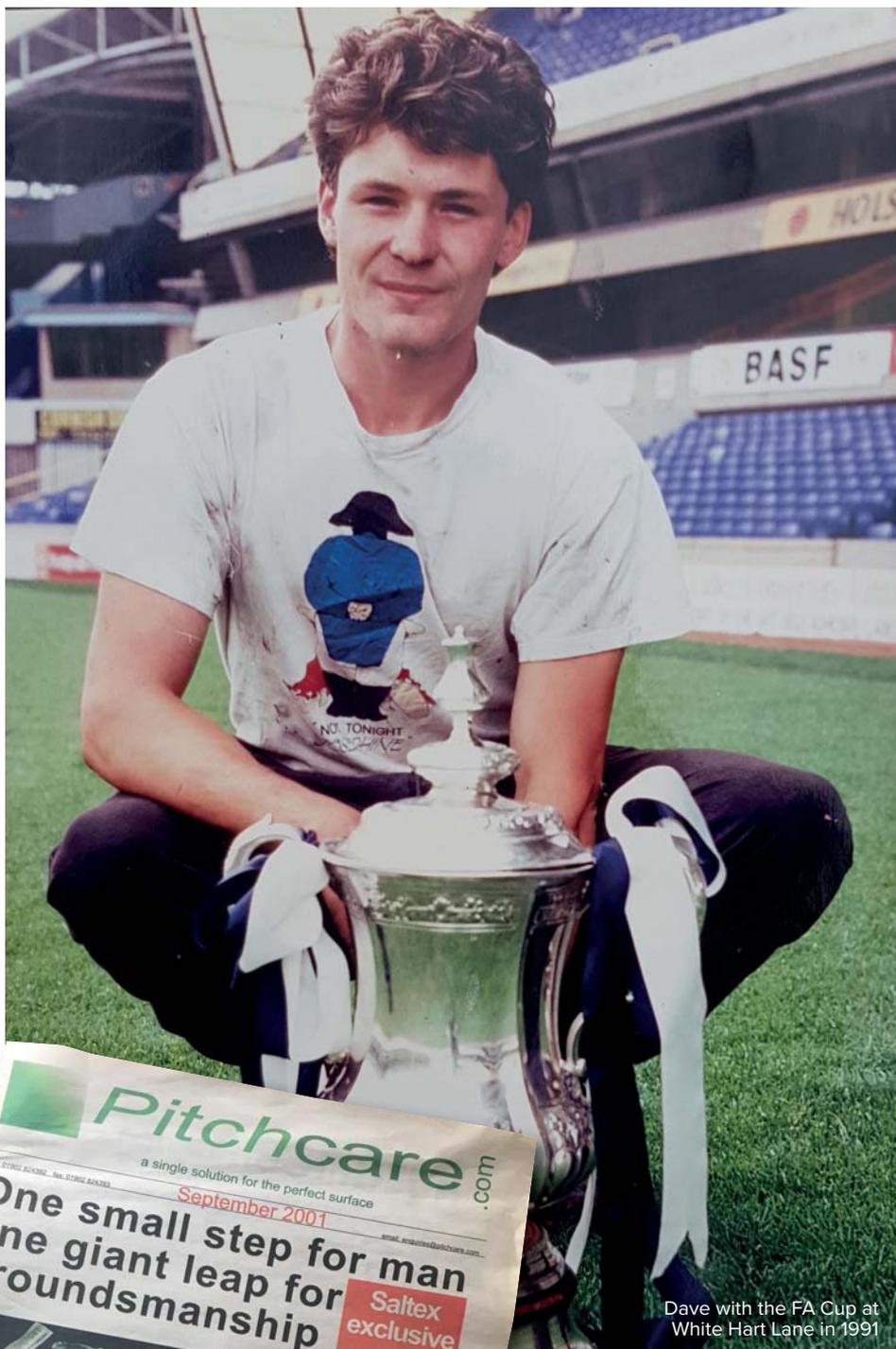
When the recession hit in 1990, landscaping and building died a death. Every builder turned their hand to patios and fencing (badly, he notes) but sports ground work was non-stop, so Dave dissolved the landscaping business and went to work for the sportsground contractor.

Dave comments: "By 1991, we had picked up Tottenham Hotspur, Millwall and West Ham and then had to address Barnet FC's slope to comply with their new Football League status."

"In 1994, the new Sixfields Stadium at Northampton was added to the portfolio and, within six weeks, we had also added Wolverhampton Wanderers' Molineux and Derby County's infamous Baseball Ground - one half of the pitch was home to seagulls it was that wet!"

"I remember the then CEO telling me they had a friendly against PSV Eindhoven the following week and I had to explain to him that there was no chance of that with the pitch in its current state. However, with some serious commitment and a Pattison Spiker, I was able to get the pitch into some sort of reasonable condition and saw real improvements towards the end of that season."

So, Dave was now maintaining



Dave with the FA Cup at White Hart Lane in 1991

Northampton Town, Derby County and Wolverhampton Wanderers - what he calls the 'Midlands triangle'. "I was living out of a hotel at the time, getting up early to be at Sixfields by 7.00am, finishing there and heading up to the Baseball Ground and then over to Molineux late afternoon, early evening!"

"At the time, I was also lecturing for the FA on winter sports maintenance. I'd have fifteen to twenty guys at each session who, during coffee breaks and lunch, would be queuing up to ask me questions such as their thirst for information. So much so that I often had to forgo coffee and lunch myself!"

"The association and industry magazines were still not really providing any meaningful content and it was clear to me

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At the time, I was also lecturing for the FA on winter sports maintenance. I'd have fifteen to twenty guys at each session who, during coffee breaks and lunch, would be queuing up to ask me questions such as their thirst for information

that something had to change."

So, is that when the idea for Pitchcare hatched? "In June 2000, I was sat in the stands at Molineux, looking out over the pitch we were mowing following its renovation, when a young work placement lad who had just completed his sports science degree, Simon Britton, turned to me and asked; 'how do you make money out of the internet?'"

This was at a time when fledgling companies such as Amazon and eBay were struggling with dial-up internet connection and Google was taking its first tentative steps towards world domination. Wikipedia and Facebook were still some way off, and 'tweeting' was something the birds did in the trees!

"I was intrigued by his question, but it got me wondering if, indeed, the internet could be used as a vehicle to bring our fragmented industry together, to provide a knowledge base and to allow individuals to talk to each other across the ether."

"I had a good friend who ran his own internet backbone provider IT company and he'd set me up with a dial-up connection and hand-me-down computers, upgrading me from 386s to 486s to Pentiums every time he upgraded his staff's equipment. So, I was already using a fledgling internet and could see its potential immediately."

"By the time I had finished talking to Simon, I had the idea for Pitchcare running around in my head. So I went to see the Wolves Club Secretary Richard Skirrow to bounce the idea off him. 'What are you going to write about after the first year?' was his reply and, for the next year, he continued to play devil's advocate, whilst I continued to maintain the Midlands pitches and training grounds."

"But, all the while, I was formulating a business plan, with help from the local Chamber of Commerce, whilst Richard continued to offer his advice."

"I was allowed to make a presentation to the club and some of the players even invested in my idea. I'd valued the concept

The Pitchcare paper announcing the company's launch at Windsor in September 2001



Award winning garden at the Chelsea Flower Show

at £1 million pounds and was offering shares at 1%.”

At this point, I detect a chuckle in Dave’s voice and it is clear that not even he was convinced of his valuation for a start-up business.

“I was doing all this immediately after the Dot.com crash when most observers were

saying that the internet had no future. The majority of companies in our industry didn’t even have a website. I’d speak to them at shows and demo days and they’d just say ‘our business is fine thanks, we don’t need the internet!’”

“But I ploughed on. I travelled all over the country meeting up with my peers and the

majority of them agreed to become shareholders. They all wanted a knowledge base that they could tap into and get involved in. I won’t mention names, but they were some of the top groundsman and greenkeepers in the field of football, rugby, cricket, golf, racing and tennis. You will know who they are and I was very humbled by their commitment.”

“This was all in the first year, and I now had some finance behind me; around £100,000. I used £25k of that to have a West Midlands IT company build a website - they charged what they wanted back then - and that was the best of five quotes!”

“At the same time, I had approached the IOG to see if they would like to become partners in the project, but they saw it as a threat to their organisation. In fact, I’d go as far to say that they actively campaigned to stop me. I’ll say no more!”

“I’d secured managed office space at Wolverhampton Science Park, but I really needed help as I was spending evenings and weekends writing articles, sourcing a rudimentary range of products and generally trying to keep on top of everything, including my day jobs!”

“It was Richard Skirrow who suggested I speak to John Richards, who had retired as the managing director of Wolves about six months previously. According to Richard, he was ‘just writing a few column inches for the local rag, opening hospital wards and



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THE PITCH BATTLE

STEPHEN FORD/NEWS TEAM



The stance against artificial pitches is being led by Dave Saltman, the FA Cup Final groundsmen

CAMPAIGN FOR REAL GRASS IS GROWING

THE MONEY GAME

BIG NAMES REFLECTING GLORY ON CARLING CUP



THE marketing men at Coors are licking their lips at the prospect of the juicy draw that has been lined up between Manchester United and Chelsea in the semi-final of the Carling Cup.

The presence of three of the top five clubs in the last four of the competition underlines the fact that the League Cup is reliving halcyon days, albeit as a showcase for the rising talent in the Premier League.

Nearly 70,000 people turned out at Old Trafford last week to watch what was effectively a reserves game between Arsenal and Chelsea.

be for lack of advisers. The supporter group, which accounts for 1.5 per cent of United shares, now has Inner Circle Sports on side as well as Weil Gotshal & Manges, the US lawyers.

The corporate finance group has been involved in the buying and selling of US sports franchises including the Boston Celtics, the New York Mets, and the New York Nets, and has arranged financing for the NBA, NFL and MLB.

SU's interests could not be in more experienced hands given the (fading but ever present) threat from the American predator. Inner Circle's founder is Robert Tilliss, formerly head of global sports investment banking at JP Morgan, the bank that until recently had intimate knowledge of Glazer's takeover plan.

THE naming rights sector received a shot in the arm from a reserves game between Arsenal and Chelsea.

playing golf'. So I put my idea to John over a cup of tea and a biscuit in his back garden and he came on board the following day. Pitchcare was launched in July 2001, roughly one year after the idea had come into my head, and was officially launched to the industry at that year's Windsor show."

The 2001 Windsor show was the first time I met Dave and his enthusiasm for his project was clear for all to see. Always in the background was John with his 'sensible' head on. It is a partnership that has endured, even though the two of them didn't always see eye to eye.

"It was the same at Wolves," says Dave. "John would occasionally insist that a game went ahead when I clearly thought the opposite! But that was our strength as a partnership."

"John and I were on a peppercorn salary and, whilst we were haemorrhaging money, I was determined to win. We were getting great feedback from the members, with the message board being particularly popular. For the first time, groundsmen and greenkeepers had somewhere they were able to talk to each other."

"Some detractors even labelled us 'Bitchcare' because of the various and occasionally heated discussions that were taking place on the message board. Needless to say, the comments and discussions back then were nothing like the vitriol that now exists on social media, but I

guess public criticism stings!"

"Whilst we had an online shop, we were only selling a mixed bag of around seven or eight products. Yet, slowly but surely, we were gaining in popularity as more members joined us and word started to spread. We started to attract a few advertisers and, with the aid of a £50,000 loan from the Department for Trade and Industry (through NatWest), and £20,000 from the Black Country Chamber of Commerce, we were able to keep going. And I'd maxed all of my eight credit cards into the bargain, all of which had £15-20k limits."

"It took us three years to realise a paper profit, but we were still paying off loans and credit cards. It would be another five years - around the time of the financial crisis of 2008 - that we entered the black; enough to buy John and I a pint, at least! Back then, it was a real financial rollercoaster, but I was



From left to right: The first issue of the Pitchcare magazine in June 2005, Dave in 2007, Dave in 2009 and demonstrating the effectiveness of Helly Hansen workwear with Laurence Gale



Some of the Maxwell team celebrate the purchase of the Allscott site in 2014 - any excuse for a drink!

driven to succeed for the industry. The members loved the website.”

“We celebrated every milestone - 500 members, 1,000 members, 5,000 members - but now we needed to offer them more.”

“By this time, we had employed a web developer, Alastair Battrock (in 2002), who set about redesigning the website functionality to make it more user friendly for all concerned, followed by an accountant, Sharon Taylor, and then Julie Robinson in an admin role.”

“With membership now close to 10,000, it was clear that we needed more hands to the pump. The ‘irrepressible’ Laurence Gale was brought in as editor and he went about gathering content in his now infamous

scattergun manner. In 2005, we took on Dan Hughes, fresh out of university, to get a grip of our shop and the marketing, and also Peter Britton to up the advertising revenue. With his background in graphic design, it was he who suggested the hard copy magazine you are reading today. In truth, John and I weren’t so keen on the idea at first, but it has become a valuable resource for the industry, whilst also giving Pitchcare the feel of being a ‘real’ company. The internet was still regarded, in some quarters, with suspicion.”

“All of a sudden, we had advertising content for both the website and the magazine and could now offer a total package of marketing for manufacturers and

suppliers. Something we are still able to do.”

“And our decision not to carry PR or advertorial was seen by readers and, to be fair, by most manufacturers, as a breath of fresh air. The feedback we got after publishing the first issue was phenomenal. ‘At last the industry has a proper magazine’ was the general reaction.”

“Alongside this, Dan, and what was now a small but growing team, were building our product offering.”

By 2008, Pitchcare were agents to around 150 companies of varying sizes and Dave and John realised that having no control over stock or distribution was a big drain on the company’s still limited resources.

“And we had a big problem with a few



The Pitchcare/ALS team in June 2012 at the company’s open day

Getting Personal

Dave Saltman - do not accept an invitation to one of his dinner parties!

Who are you? Dave Saltman, at least I was last time I looked in the mirror.

Family status? Married with three children - but that may have changed before we come out of the Coronavirus Lockdown!

Who's your hero and why? None as such. I hold all pioneers in high esteem, but have always held myself as directly accountable for my actions, there's no one else to blame.

What's been the highlight of your career so far? There have been numerous milestones and highlights, both socially and through work, but being responsible for the team of people that grew Pitchcare from an idea to a vibrant mid-sized company of around eighty full time staff was no mean feat. Particularly when it meant finding a quarter of a million pounds every month to pay all the running costs before a blade of grass got cut.

If your younger self saw you now, what would they think? What a fat slob. Seriously, I have always been driven by success and to realise so many of my dreams; I would say that all that hard work and determination has paid off and got me where I always desired to be ... a fat slob!

Which famous people wind you up? There's quite a few I suppose, but currently Greta 'bloody' Thunberg.

What job would you love, other than your own? How could anything come close to a life of landscaping and groundsmanship, outdoor vocations of physical fun. If not, I did really enjoy the banter when being a fruit and veg seller at Kingston Market for a few weeks in my teens.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? I don't get embarrassed easily, so probably meeting the parents of a girlfriend I was seeing when I was fifteen!

What is your favourite film? Blimey, depends on genre, any from the following: Gladiator, 28 Days Later, 12 Angry Men, The Blues Brothers, Predator.

What scares you? Still spiders, even at 53, I can't get happily comfortable with them!

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? A pain in the grass ... Patrick Swayze would have been my first choice

What is your favourite sport? None now, after a life full of mostly football (playing, watching and working within it), if I never saw another sporting event, it would be absolutely fine by me.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit?

The second world war has fascinated me more than anything else in history, but specifically I would visit the concentration camps such as



Auschwitz, if there was any opportunity to have stopped what went on.

What would you cast into Room 101? Time wasters.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? As some will tell you, it has always been global domination 😊

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot and Idi Amin. I would like to have some conversational mischief with them, before announcing I'd poisoned their meals.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? The two that I follow are; 'If you don't succeed, try and try again' and Norman Tebbit's famous misquote, of 'get on your bike and find work'.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? I really try not to remember trivia, because that's exactly what it is.

What's your favourite smell? As corny as it is, the first cut grass of the season, but I miss Creosote!

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? The Wall - Pink Floyd, The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway - Genesis, Requiem - Mozart.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? Will the mower cut shorter if I let the air out of the tyres (fairway mower).

What's your favourite piece of kit? A broom - without one, everywhere would look a disaster and make me look like one too!

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Confident, humorous, committed.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsperson or greenkeeper? Get yourself on Pitchcare and start understanding what the profession is all about; everything you need to learn is on there somewhere.

What talent would you like to have? I would love to be able to sing like Freddie Mercury, what an amazing voice he had.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? The re-introduction of two years military service for all school leavers. Give them a real sense of respect for authority, discipline, health improvement and working ethic.



companies 'after-marketing' to our customers. They were basically letting us find the customers and then stealing them from us, so we had limited repeat business."

The two companies that supplied the West Midlands at that time were Breakwells and ALS but, with the former's owner Len Breakwell retiring, the company closed leaving a big gap in supply.

Dave and John approached the board of ALS with an offer to buy them out on a cash and shares scheme basis but, as the financial crisis was gathering pace, no banks were prepared to support the venture, even though both companies were profitable and the business plan was sound.

"We had been sat on the buyout for twelve months, all the while worrying whether another company might come in for ALS or set themselves up in Birmingham, when we learned that the Co-op Bank were changing their business model and were looking to invest in blue chip companies. So, in 2009, we bought ALS, which immediately gave us stock, warehousing and distribution."

"But it wasn't without its teething problems, not least trying to merge a vibrant young business with the more traditional methods of ALS. And we acquired their contracts division and reps as well!"

"Yet, just two years later, we had doubled the turnover from four to eight million pounds and also increased the size of the workforce to around seventy."

"Wrekin Farmers were our landlords, who had been selling off their assets in a tax efficient manner. Their final asset was the twelve acre site we rented at Allscott just outside Telford. So, when it was offered to us for £1.5 million in 2014, we knew it was exactly what we needed. But we needed to have 40% equity to get a mortgage - around £600,000 - and we simply weren't that cash rich, so I emailed all the staff and asked if they'd like to get involved. The response was fantastic, to the point we were oversubscribed! In the end, we had twenty-three staff members involved via a pension scheme that



Picture montage: Pitchcare celebrated its tenth anniversary at its Allscott headquarters in June 2012 with an open day of training, seminars and fun activities

purchased the whole site.”

“So we were now owners of seven huge warehouses along with modern offices; a far cry from the small office in Wolverhampton Science Park thirteen years previously.”

As the business continued to grow, a holding company, Maxwell Amenity, was created to oversee the two brands - Pitchcare and ALS - with own brand Maxwell products introduced to market.

“I remain eternally grateful to the excellent team I had working for me. Whilst there were the inevitable casualties, the turnover of staff has been extremely low. I guess they like our business methods.”

“Our industry is very much feast and famine - it’s weather and season dependent - so we expanded the business with other lines, such as salt, grit and planting products to help see us through the winter, whilst our contracts division would be out gritting and snow ploughing as well.”

“Any profits we made were always put back into the business to help it to grow and our turnover and success was an obvious attraction to other companies. A few came sniffing about, but it was Agrovista UK that finally put forward a strong and attractive proposal. They already had Sherriff Amenity as one of their divisions - a similar sized

outfit to ours. By merging Sherriff and Maxwell into Agrovista Amenity, we immediately became one of the largest amenity suppliers in the industry, and that is where we are at now.”

Was Dave sad to see his company taken over? “No, not at all,” was his immediate response. “Sherriff’s modus operandi was very similar to Maxwell’s, built on ethical trading. It was a good fit.”

During his ‘Pitchcare days’ Dave continued working as a groundsman; Aston Villa in 2001 at the invitation of Graham Taylor, followed by two years at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff - initially at the



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Left: The “impossible to grow” natural turf pitch at FC Gabala in Azerbaijan. Right: Training has always played an important role in Dave’s career; here at a local school. Grounds Training was launched in 2006



invitation of Inturf - whilst the new Wembley Stadium was being built.

“The moveable pitch at the Millennium was a steep learning curve, especially as the previous grounds team had been dismissed, so I had no experience to call on. During my time there, we hosted three FA Cup finals, WRU Six Nations matches, concerts, speedway; all manner of events. It was never ending, but I absolutely loved the experience.”

Dave returned to Wolves as a consultant groundsman between 2005-11 whilst, in 2009, he was invited out to FC Gabala in Azerbaijan to discuss their poor natural turf pitches, which Turkish agronomists had always suggested would never be good in the country’s climate. Dave was convinced that, as the country was on the same latitude as Madrid, it would not be a problem, and so it proved. World class natural pitches are now more commonplace in the country and Dave is rightly proud of that legacy. He also undertook training and education for the local groundsmen on behalf of the Azerbaijan FA.

In recent years, Dave and the ALS

Contracts team have been involved at Wigan Athletic, Oldham Athletic and Shrewsbury Town.

I have one final question - and observation - for Dave: “Over the years, you have involved yourself in various ‘industry campaigns’. How do you reflect on those and do you think this is why you are sometimes considered the industry’s ‘Marmite’?”

“Knowledgeable people understood that here was a voice that challenged the establishment. Someone who had a public opinion on the concerns for the wider industry.”

“My run-ins with the IOG are well known but, over the years, it was always them that blocked any discussions and developments. It was me who asked them to get involved with the online business from the outset. It was me who asked them to get involved with our Lantra accredited training courses. It was me who suggested a coming together of BIGGA and the IOG for the sake of the industry. It was me who suggested the ‘One

Show’ at the NEC. And what have they done? Ploughed their own furrow for a line of finance as a commercial enterprise. I even suggested, back in 2001, that they should consider changing their name to the Grounds Managers Association and get rid of the ‘blazers’ and ‘old farts’. It was all completely rubbished, but look where we are now.”

“I’ve highlighted the illegal use of agricultural products in our industry, championed natural turf over artificial and railed against the commercialisation of various institutions. And I don’t regret any of it.”

“Pitchcare has come a long way without any support from any of the sports governing bodies - ever. Whilst it possibly would have been financially beneficial to be involved, it allowed me to take them to task if I felt they were stepping out of line - without the fear of losing any support that might have been offered.”

“I’m not bothered if people like me or not, Pitchcare has helped more people in this industry, for free, than anything else, both here in the UK and abroad. There isn’t a bigger industry resource on the planet and I’m mighty proud of that, as I’m proud of everybody who has been part of it.”



I’m not bothered if people like me or not, Pitchcare has helped more people in this industry, for free, than anything else, both here in the UK and abroad



Left to right: Dave Saltman and John Richards with Agrovista’s Duncan Brown and Chris Clayton

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Sentosa Golf Club

The world's best

Pitchcare were keen to get an insight into 'The World's Best Golf Club'; an accolade Sentosa Golf Club won at the World Golf Awards last year. Kerry Haywood conducted a Q&A with General Manager and Director of Agronomy, **Andy Johnston**, to find out why they are considered the best



Home to two of the region's most exclusive and challenging golf courses; The Serapong and The New Tanjong, Sentosa Golf Club is enjoyed by more than 1,500 members from prominent and influential circles. Since 2005, international star players and world-class golf professionals from Asia, Europe and the USA have descended on its championship greens to putt for the Barclays Singapore Open and HSBC Women's Champions.

Pitchcare: How long have you worked here?

Andrew (Andy) Johnston: I have worked at Sentosa Golf Club for ten years full time, firstly, joining as Director of Agronomy in 2010. The club offered the General Manager's role on top of the DOA responsibilities in 2013. Prior to joining

Sentosa Golf Club in a full-time role, I also took on the assignment for an additional five years as a golf course design consultant when I was the Vice President of the Bates Golf Design Group.

How did you get into the industry and where did you work prior to your current position?

I have been in the golf industry my entire life. My first job (at fourteen) was at Tanoan Country Club in Albuquerque, New Mexico, cleaning clubs and washing golf carts. Golf was in our family from the day I was born. My father was an avid and accomplished golfer, and a member at the Boardmoor Golf Club in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he won many amateur championships in his youth and adult life. Additionally, my well decorated Italian grandfather was the Head Chef at the Boardmoor Golf Club for many years. I think you could say the influence of

golf and club was something I was born with.

What training and education did you undertake?

My education includes an architectural degree from Phoenix Institute of Technology followed by a degree in turfgrass management from Michigan State University, and of course the school of hard knocks. In terms of my training, I have spent my entire career working hands on in the field of construction, as well as delivering grow-ins for new golf courses. I have also been lucky enough to have gained many insights, guidance and coaching into our profession, that many people may not know about, from some of the world's most decorated professional golfers, architects and superintendants. The advantage of this allows me to be perhaps one of the most well-rounded industry professionals; whether practising as a golf course architect, or an



Serapong iconic hole 5



The iconic 5th hole on the Serapong Course

agronomic expert and of course running SGC as the general manager.

Was there one person who inspired you?

How do you pick one? So many people in my life have provided me with so many meaningful inspirations. If I had to choose one, it would be Arnold Palmer, as he shaped many things that still drive me today during the years that I spent under his umbrella. Of course, my father also who had long lasting driving influence on my character and career.

Are you responsible for budgets or do you report to someone else?

Yes, I am responsible for budgets and

everything the sun touches. I also have a few direct reports as well. Sentosa Golf Club is owned by Sentosa Development Corporation and I report to the CFO of the Sentosa Development Corporation. As well as this, we have a Club President and a Club Captain who also have input in our operations and I work very closely with.

About your club?

The courses are semi-tropical parkland. The Serapong is a monstrous golf course, whilst The New Tanjong is a great course with more of a sand belt feel to it. The Serapong is Par 72 6794 metres (180 acres) and The New Tanjong is Par 72 6479 metres (130 acres).

What additional staff do you have?

I work closely with Superintendent Rodney Mckeown and, under him, there are seventy-five men and women in the agronomy team that he leads (including five workshop technicians to carry out in-house servicing).

How would you describe the soil profile generally?

The original soil profile is heavy clay; however, we have imported a 1-metre sand cap that helps with the massive amount of rain that we get.

How were the greens and tees constructed?

The greens and tees are all 100% USGA construction method with drainage. The greens are all equipped with SubAir.

Do they require any special maintenance techniques?

Yes. We run our greens on a daily basis at an average of 10.5 in the high humidity conditions that we face. Therefore, we have to implement many special techniques to make sure this can happen on a consistent basis. We also maintain the tees at the same



Andrew Johnston, GM and Director of Agronomy



This allows me to be perhaps one of the most well-rounded industry professionals; whether practising as a golf course architect, or an agronomic expert and of course running SGC as the general manager



Clubhouse overlooking The New Tanjong 18th



I think the state of our industry is in a bit of a flatline, if not a downhill slide. I would say as an industry we maybe need to help each other survive

HOC as the greens.

Do you have any additional equipment/systems at your disposal?

We have an equipment fleet that would rival some of the world's best. We have SubAir in our greens, as well as perhaps the most sophisticated fertigation system in Asia. We have a single head control irrigation system and five weather stations that use modern task tracking software called Turf Keeper.

Recently, we have invested in six ProCores and use them on a monthly basis. We also invested in six GPS spray rigs and have over sixty walking greens mowers - just a small taste of our equipment and systems that we use.

Does the course suffer from any regular natural occurrences?

We are in a semi sub-tropical environment, so therefore, we see large quantities of

rain in monsoonal storms from time to time. With the humid conditions, we normally experience daily thunderstorms, but for the most part the weather is very predictable. The sun rises at 7.00am and sets at 7.00pm, with the temperature ranging from 25 in the evening to 33 in the day. As with all environments, we adapt, we plan, we track and then we adjust on a day to day basis. We have found some products that we use are more effective when applied in lower

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Andy briefs the greenkeeping team



Tanjong clubhouse



The new GPS spray rigs have made an enormous difference to our program. No matter how good our technicians and operators are, there are always man-made mistakes when using spray rigs

What's in the shed

Walking greens mowers x 61
 Turf rollers x 9
 Sand pros x 15
 Fairway units x 8
 Rough units x 12
 Utility vehicles x 56
 TriPlex mowers x 16
 Toro ProCore x 6
 Tractors x 5
 Adam spreader
 Vicon spreaders x 2
 Transformers x 4
 ProCore fairway units x 2
 SubAir units x 40
 Turf breeze fans x 18
 Bernhard grinders x 8
 GPS spray rigs x 6
 Fairway spray rigs x 2
 Landscape rollers x 9
 Boom truck

temperatures, so there are times that we use applications at 2.00am to get the maximum out of the product.

Are there any issues with shade and air flow?

We do have some isolated corners of the property where both shade and airflow are a factor. We have also invested in turf breeze fans and I believe we have somewhere around eighteen of them on the property for the thirty-six holes, but using our intuitive skills we manage these things well.

Do you have a driving range?

We have a driving range facility that is double ended T at the top and bottom. We have a short game practice facility that is widely used, and we run many clinics on it, as well as it being used at times as a training center by the R&A for the Men's Asian Amateur Championships. We also have three high tech academies at our practice facilities.

Maintenance regimes

Our weekly and monthly maintenance regimes are pretty predictable. We do the

same thing week in week out and month in month out, unless we're preparing for a major championship.

In our normal day-to-day club life, we verticut and top dress our greens in two directions every Monday, before making fertiliser and Primo applications every Wednesday. As well as this, we core our greens with pencil tines once a month.

For the past three years, we have been using some new carbon-based programmes that have allowed us to reduce our fertiliser inputs to our greens by more than 50%. These products are developed by amp agronomy, and the products have become so important. They have also allowed us to reduce our nematicides applications by up to 95%, including a reduction in fungicide applications.

We maintain the greens and tees at 3mm on a daily basis. We have a fleet of fairway and rough mowers that also helps keep the balance of the property under control and we have invested in fairway rollers, as well as having four transformer fairway rollers that, at times, we use on our putting services.





Left: Henrik Stenson learns more about sustainability from Andrew Johnston



Golf and large green spaces are needed in big urban concrete jungles as they have a cooling effect on the surface and can provide a way of reducing global warming that is on the rise

Do you have specific tasks for specific staff or is it an 'all hands to the pump' approach?

We do have specific staff for specific tasks such as our irrigation technicians who are spray technicians, but we do believe in cross training everybody, so that our entire team can be a valuable tool. We also believe that our people are the most important piece of equipment. Therefore, we spend a lot of time making sure that we are healthy, mentally strong and all prepared to support each

other to give 100% every day.

What end of season and ongoing renovations do you undertake?

There is no end of season, so we take on renovations when we can and do the best to get them done as fast as possible.

Are renovations affected by budgets?

When we do recognise that we need to reinvest in the asset and spend money

renovating the golf course, we plan for it in advance and budget the appropriate capex funding needed. We then present the concepts to our owners for approval and, once approved, we then close the course and make the relevant upgrades.

How have changing weather patterns affected what you do?

We're seeing more drought seasons than we have seen in the past and they continue



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Fairway renovations begin on the Serapong Course

to stretch longer and longer. This is a particular problem for us as our golf course is the collection basin for the rainwater that fills our lake system, which is what we use for irrigation. We have no other means of recharging our lake system other than using Mother Nature and rain. Therefore, as the drought seasons become more prevalent and stretch longer, we have become vulnerable to low water conditions from time to time.

Do you take regular soil samples to ascertain what work is required?

We take soil samples on a regular basis, usually about every six to eight weeks and have done this process for nearly ten years. It's amazing to see how we have continued

to use this data and information to build healthier soils. You know they say, you're a soil manager before you're a turf manager, and if you manage great soils, you'll have healthy turf.

How do you interact with your club members?

First, I try to make myself available to club members and, on the floor, to discuss, share and talk about any of their questions, needs and desires. I believe being hands-on is the key to great communications. I also believe social media, email correspondence and other media mechanisms are critical to keeping the general membership educated and up to speed.

Are you working on any special projects at the moment?

We currently have closed the Serapong Course for six months, in which we are removing the grass and replacing it with a fresh clean layer of zoysia mitrella.

We are re-lasering and leveling all the tee boxes to reinstate a tabletop, flat finish, and updating the grass so that we can continue to maintain them at their super low mowing height of 3mm. We pride ourselves on having some of the very best teeing areas in golf - flat, true and pure.

We are also pointing them back at the landing zones, widening them to their maximum width and re-sprigging them with platinum paspalum grass.

We have invested in several drill and fill machines and, with the help of some friends in South Florida, we have engineered a new carbon profile sand mix that we will incorporate into our putting surface in three directions. The process involves machines injecting a customized pre-made sand solution comprising ceramics, carbons, light acids and a USGA particle sizing specification compatible sand and structure to complement the current root zone structure, so as to upgrade the soil profile of our greens. This will enhance the water



Andy Johnston catches up with a greenkeeper



In our normal day-to-day club life, we verticut and top dress our greens in two directions every Monday, before we making fertiliser and Primo applications every Wednesday



Our environmental policy in place is largely created by our in-house team, our goal is to be carbon neutral at some point in the near future

to air ratio, reduce the rising PH, remove organic build-up and strengthen the Cation Exchange Capacity of the soils so that they will be compatible and competitive for the next ten years or more.

We are also removing all the sand from our bunkers and replacing it with fresh clean sand. Each bunker will be given fresh liners and new white sand to reinstate consistency, texture and tournament ready compaction for improved playability. We will be adding a few new tees, a few strategic bunkers, and will be putting the golf course back into championship condition by October.

The New Tanjong Course will also be seeing a new green on the 3rd hole. This will add about 50 yards to the hole and will develop a new strategic green with a daunting McKenzie style bunker lying underneath it.

What projects have been undertaken in recent years?

A few years ago, we rebuilt The New Tanjong course as it had aged and had become a bit obsolete. This was a massive project in which we moved over 750,000 cubic yards of dirt, re-engineered the lake

system to create the new irrigation system, introduced a new cart pass system, built new greens and tees, with a new SubAir system, all in eight months.

Are you and your staff compliant with current legislation?

We continue to keep ourselves up to date with the current legislation and continue to educate our staff and see what is needed to be on the forefront of modern-day life. Singapore is a very progressive community and city which forces you to be on the front of things.

Do you offer ongoing training to your staff?

We do as much training in-house as possible and offer training to our staff. We also are the home of the Asia Pacific R&A office and are lucky that they are in our clubhouse and we can get a lot of firsthand training, as well as firsthand topics from our relationship with them.

Are you considering employing or do you currently employ apprentices?

Every year we take on new interns from a local Singapore Polytechnic college. It is a

pleasure to see some of our young bright faces at work.

Do you employ a health and safety officer?

The Corporation does have a health and safety officer. Additionally, we have some internal club health and safety regulations and training that is implemented on a daily basis. We also have made sure that 75% of us are CPR certified.

How do you purchase machinery?

Currently, we purchase machinery through local dealers, but moving forward we plan to engage and prepare to implement a leasing program. We are not loyal to any manufacturer; we are state owned and when we run a tender for new equipment it usually goes to the low bid.

Are there any new pieces of kit that have significantly helped to improve your playing surfaces?

The new GPS spray rigs have made an enormous difference to our program. No matter how good our technicians and operators are, there are always man-made mistakes when using spray rigs. The new



Andrew Johnston



Plans to increase its bee colonies to forty



Asian Tour players, Quincy Quek and Naoki Sekito, pay a visit to Sentosa Golf Club's bee sanctuary

equipment has helped us reduce over 30% application waste, but more importantly it has 100% eliminated overlapping, which has helped to produce more consistent and healthier turf. With every application where there is an overlap, the problems caused on our surfaces have been created unintentionally but by over application of the product.

How do you undertake pest and weed control?

We use a rotation of products on a preventative basis to help us drive through disease pressure, but more importantly the new carbon products that we have been using have reduced our disease pressure so significantly that we are hoping we can become fungicide free in the near future.

Does your course suffer from specific

disease outbreaks?

Our disease pressure is very predictable. It is dollar spot, curvularia, pythium root dysfunction, Brown Patch, and sometimes mechanical stress.

Are rabbits, badgers, foxes, geese, chafer grubs, worms etc. a problem?

We see our fair share of worms, moles, crickets and insect infestation from time to time, but we do not have a wildlife issue.

How important do you consider the local flora and fauna?

It's a part of our culture and we find it very important to adapt to the local flora and fauna and make it part of our facility.

Do you have an environmental policy in place?

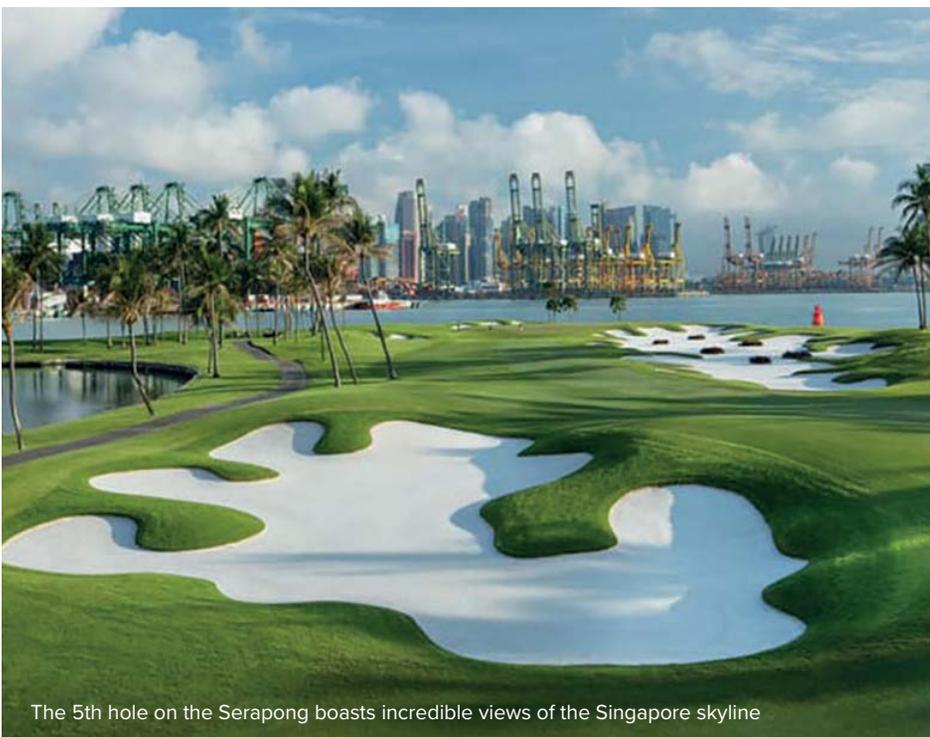
Our environmental policy in place is largely created by our in-house team, our goal is to be carbon neutral at some point in the near future.

Are there any special projects you are undertaking or considering?

One of the many special projects that we are currently undertaking is to create our own bee colonies. We have developed five new bee colonies and plan to grow it to forty within the next twelve months. Bees around the world have reduced in population by up to 70% and both us and science feel that, if the bee population were to become extinct, this could be the beginning of the end of the world. This is how important bees are to our survival and society. All golf courses have usable corners and it is in these corners that we are developing our bee colonies to help do our part in bringing them back to a healthy population base.

What would you consider to be the state of our industry and are we undervalued?

I think the state of our industry is in a bit of a flatline, if not a downhill slide. I wouldn't say we at Sentosa Golf Club are undervalued,



The 5th hole on the Serapong boasts incredible views of the Singapore skyline



We have found some products that we use are more effective when applied in lower temperatures, so there are times that we use applications at 2.00am to get the maximum out of the product



We also are the home of the Asia Pacific R&A office and are lucky that they are in our clubhouse and we can get a lot of firsthand training

but I would say as an industry we maybe need to help each other survive.

How would you raise our profile?

I believe one of the ways golf can help the world and raise our profile is to continue to embrace our environmental climate change capabilities. The use of the carbon products and bio char products that we have incorporated have strengthened our plant material around our property to the point where they are becoming larger carbon sequestration devices and stretching beyond the imagination, due to the fact that one of the most important things needed to remove carbon from the atmosphere is photosynthesis.

Additionally, removing plastics, finding ways to use clean energy, upgrading your equipment to lithium battery powered

golf carts and maintenance equipment, developing bee colonies, and developing herb gardens can be an effective way of creating a sustainable environment and be one of the leading movements in climate change, if we all bond together and push environmental excellence.

Golf and large green spaces are needed in big urban concrete jungles as they have a cooling effect on the surface and can provide a way of reducing global warming that is on the rise. We couldn't be in a more critical time for the world's existence and, beyond the great game of golf, our properties can become one of the largest collective tools to help fight the problem.

These are all measures that Sentosa Golf Club have implemented through the club's #KeptGreen campaign to help create an environmentally sustainable



Water saving initiatives are high on the agenda at Sentosa Golf Club and the tournament



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The Serapong

The Serapong course is well-known as the battlefield for the prestigious Singapore Open (2005 - 2019). Opened in 1982, the course initially was the creation of world-renowned golf course designer Ronald Fream. In 2006, it underwent a S\$12 million revamp helmed by the Bates Golf Design Group which incorporated modern technology with the addition of SubAir, PermOPore an enhanced irrigation system, and more. The re-design creatively produced enormous greens and tees with classic contouring, the new enhanced bunkering and playing strategy now defines the Serapong in its World-Class Tournament foundation. The overall results propelled the Serapong in its world rankings. The course now reveals fast and more challenging greens, trademark mounds and contours, mammoth lakes with stone-lined walls all complementing the breathtaking scenery of the Singapore skyline making for an exquisite game like no other.

The New Tanjong

The New Tanjong Course is uniquely set against the Singapore Straits with views of metropolitan Singapore all round. Inspired by iconic sandbelt golfing experiences, the New Tanjong Course asserts a unique personality with large bunkers rarely seen in Asia, offering players the challenge of playing on a course inspired by the style of renowned golf course architect Alister MacKenzie. With two standout areas at the Clubhouse and historic 'Pyramid' halfway house, the New Tanjong Course will surely evoke fond memories, long after the rounds are played.



Gavin Green launches the #KeepItGreen campaign at 2018 SMBC Singapore Open

environment, both on and off the course. The implementation of measures like these will be central to the club's new environmental campaign, GAME ON, which was launched at the 2020 SMBC Singapore Open, and will act as Sentosa's answer to climate change.

It aims to unite the game's key stakeholders with the wider golfing community to implement new modern processes to the betterment of the environment. The campaign aims to encourage golf clubs worldwide to accept the GAME ON agronomic and operational model and introduce new environmental measures to help reverse climate change.

The club's programme and efforts will be looked at in depth, via a free downloadable toolkit, to help other clubs to make an impact on the world's biggest issue and reduce their own carbon footprint and become environmentally sustainable. The toolkit will support, and point clubs to, The R&A's agenda and its Golf Course 2030 initiative, which will also unite industry stakeholders to agree a roadmap that secures optimal golf

course conditions and playability for current and future generations by addressing climate change concerns.

Do you and your staff attend industry shows, seminars, demo days, road shows?

We have staff who attend seminars, as well as myself; and I normally speak at somewhere around ten industry shows annually to help share how Sentosa Golf Club drive tournament conditioning, how we continue to invest in climate change, but also do not sacrifice anything in our desire to be in tournament condition 365 days a year.



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SINGAPORE



We believe that our people are the most important piece of equipment. Therefore, we spend a lot of time making sure that we are healthy, mentally strong and all prepared to support each other to give 100% every day



The club unveils its GAME ON campaign at the 2020 SMBC Singapore Open

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La Grande Mare Golf Club

Coming full circle

It is quite rare that life goes full circle. Even more rare is a career in Greenkeeping that begins by jumping on a one-way flight to Australia with a plan to continue working as a fireman. But for La Grande Mare's Course Manager, **Rick Hamilton**, that is how it all started. Blair Ferguson reports



I did the normal backpacking and tourist thing of driving around the country and had an amazing time windsurfing, fishing and camping and doing all those things, before I settled back in Perth in Western Australia



For Rick Hamilton, five years in Australia were followed by twenty-four years in Hong Kong, where he travelled extensively as a consultant for his own company and the PGA Tour. After almost three decades away from the island where he grew up, Rick returned to Guernsey in 2018.

For this interview, he sits on the other end of a phone at his hometown club with the sun beating down on the 18-hole beachside course which, unlike many, already has golfers back on it. Guernsey has been no exception to the COVID-19 pandemic except that, as we speak on 6th May 2020, the course has been opened for four days as two nine holes to comply with the designated two hours of outdoor exercise.

Throughout their lockdown, which came into place before mainland UK, working hours were reduced to twelve a week. A complete four-day shutdown was forced due to complaints before essential worker status meant they could return. From 27th April, they were able to work unrestricted again before a slightly impromptu return to golf was announced with one day of notice.

Rick's journey back to La Grande Mare has been different to usual career timelines. For many, their home town club might be their first job rather than their last, but coming from a small island with a sense of

adventure means things don't quite work that way. As previously mentioned, he had planned to be a fireman in Australia, but a City & Guilds qualification in Engineering meant things were able to go in a different direction.

"When I was in my late teens a lot of my friends got apprenticeships and, back then, it was a big thing to go backpacking and Australia and New Zealand were the main destinations, especially Australia," Rick explained. "Growing up on a small island is lovely, but you'd hear stories about these people going around the world, and it was something I thought would be nice to do one day, I thought it sounded amazing."

"When the right time came, there were about thirty of us that went backpacking over two years. A lot of my friends had City & Guilds apprenticeships and, back in those days, Australia was screaming out for tradespeople whether it was a mechanic, a chef or nursing and hairdressing. It was easy to get in so, after we'd travelled around and finished our tourist visas, we applied for residency and went back and settled there."

"I did the normal backpacking and tourist thing of driving around the country and had an amazing time windsurfing, fishing and camping and doing all those things, before I settled back in Perth in Western Australia. When I was driving up and down the coast,



Royal Perth Golf Club



I was part of the team who were there to raise the standards of the course and the workshop. That's where I really got the greenkeeping bug; from then on I loved it, I thought it was an amazing job

there were some beautiful golf courses, and I always thought to myself, especially when I went down south to a place called Margaret River, that's quite an interesting job. One day, I was in a pub having a few beers and bumped into a few guys from Royal Perth Golf Club, and they were advertising for a workshop mechanic, so I went for an interview and they offered me the job."

"So, instead of joining the fire brigade, I thought I'd see what this job is about. I started in 1991 with a new superintendent, so I was part of the team who were there to raise the standards of the course and the workshop. That's where I really got the greenkeeping bug; from then on I loved it, I thought it was an amazing job."

"From there, I moved to Lake Karrinyup Country Club which was one of the top courses in Australia and, in 1995, I got asked to go and work in Hong Kong to help build a golf course on an island for the Jockey Club which was a Gary Player course. So I moved to Asia as a workshop manager and made my way up through the ranks to an assistant,

and I ended up being the Superintendent of the golf course that I helped build and I was there for ten years."

"After that, I set up my own company, Asia Turf Solutions, and I was consulting, building golf courses, planning maintenance, and then ended up doing agronomy on new projects for Jack Nicklaus. Then I worked for the World Golf Championship renovating and rebuilding courses, and I was the Head Agronomist for the PGA Tour in China which involved helping to set up the PGA China Tour seven years ago. I went out and audited golf courses and found the venues for them and then prepared those courses for the tournaments."

Whilst the beginning of Rick's career had a sense of good timing and a bit of luck about it, the years that followed required dedication and a set of goals he wanted to achieve. His greenkeeping knowledge was built from the ground up, starting at Royal Perth and then more formally at Murdoch University studying Turf Management. That was built upon during his time in Hong Kong



Lake Karrinyup Country Club



Jockey Club Kau Sai Chau Golf Club

with a Turf Management Certificate from the University of Georgia and supplemented by attending events in Australia and America to learn from those around him.

However, one aspect of life in Asia that can't be taught in a classroom is the culture. When Rick first moved to Hong Kong, the Asian golf market, driven by real estate construction, was booming. Wealth was being demonstrated by building vast

properties at the side of signature courses, and for those there at the start of the boom, there was an opportunity to be part of the growth.

"The Hong Kong job was supposed to be a two-year contract to go and build the golf course, set it up and come back but, like a lot of things, you go over there for two years and twenty-four years later you're still there," Rick explained.



The Hong Kong job was supposed to be a two-year contract to go and build the golf course, set it up and come back but, like a lot of things, you go over there for two years and twenty-four years later you're still there

"I had travelled quite a bit and, when I went there, I'd already travelled around Asia and experienced other cultures, and that's the big thing. You have to go in there and be respectful and understand their culture, and how they do things, otherwise you won't survive."

"The opportunities in Asia at that time were rapid, and the learning curve was massive. This was in the mid-nineties early

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A lot of owners wanted these golf courses, but they didn't realise how much they cost to run and manage, turf management is big money. They couldn't believe that they could buy a BMW 3 Series for the same price as a fairway mower



Aerial view of the stunning beachside location

two thousands when golf course construction and development in Asia was a big thing, and it only slowed down a few years ago. If you were really keen and passionate about what you did and worked hard, you could make your own luck and opportunities would come up. Having a good network of friends and getting on with different people like architects, machinery suppliers and fertiliser suppliers was good. It was quite a tight-knit community with a lot of expats, and everybody in South East Asia knew each other, and you'd meet up at golf shows."

"So, when we went in there, we built the courses, did all the specifications for the turfgrass types and irrigation - that would either be Toro or Rainbird - and put machinery packages together. Back in those days, there was a lot of money around so we'd make a list of what we wanted and the owners would pretty much buy it all, so it was a bit of a dream job. In my first job in Hong Kong on the island, there was no

expense spared at all, the owners wanted it to be world-class standard, so we were there to advise, and it was all done properly and professionally. If we said, we needed X amount of greens mowers and X amounts of aeration equipment we got it."

"Over the years, as things moved on, you had to open up and operate the golf course, and that is when things tightened up a bit. A lot of owners wanted these golf courses, but they didn't realise how much they cost to run and manage, turf management is big money. They couldn't believe that they could buy a BMW 3 Series for the same price as a fairway mower."

"Because golf was quite new to a lot of people at a detailed level, they knew very little about maintaining courses. One of the interesting things I found working in Asia for so long was that, at my first course, we had to train all the staff. And they would all be fishermen and fisherwomen, and they lived in a little village, and they'd never seen mowers or a golf course. They didn't know

anything about it. But, as it turned out, the best operators in terms of operating the machines and looking after them were women. Ninety percent of my operators were ladies, and they were the best. The men couldn't operate the machines to the same standard, and they didn't take care of them either. When you go around Hong Kong and China you'll notice, even today, that a lot of the operators are women."

"Later on, the course had to be operating, and you had to rely on your green fees and things did tightened up. When you were doing machinery replacement programmes, you had to be a bit more careful about what you picked and make sure it was the right machine for the course. Not being too extravagant and making sure the machine was going to serve the purpose of that specific site and job."

"That's why the specialist machines, like the Air2G2, are good because you can use it on any area or soil type and there's no disruption to play. In the old days, golfers



Ninety percent of my operators were ladies, and they were the best. The men couldn't operate the machines to the same standard, and they didn't take care of them either. When you go around Hong Kong and China, you'll notice, even today, that a lot of the operators are women



Rick with a new Foley grinder, part of the workshop improvement plan



La Grande Mare - not a links course!

hated when you went out with a 16mm tine and had holes and topdressing everywhere, and the course was a mess for a couple of weeks. But, these days, with the amount of equipment and accessories we have with machines like the ProCore 648 and Air2G2, it's a clean process unless you need to remove a lot of thatch or organic matter."

While the domestic appetite for the game was growing quickly, the professional interest from outside the country was moving at a slower pace. On his arrival in 1995, the Asian Tour and European Tour

events, such as the Hong Kong Open, were taking place with little PGA involvement. By 2012, the fourth of four WGC-HSBC Championship events was brought to the Olazabal Course at Mission Hills Golf Club in Shenzhen, China with Ian Poulter winning the tournament.

At the time, Rick knew the PGA Tour was looking to expand into China and, given his extensive background of working in the country, he began consulting for the Tour as their agronomist. Although he had been operating his own company since 2004, by

2017, he was working on fourteen tournaments as well as consulting on course constructions and maintenance elsewhere.

The wide variety of the job is what kept him hooked for so long. One day he could be in Southern Hong Kong in the tropical heat and ninety percent humidity with disease and heavy rainfall, and the next day growing a course in a completely different climate or prepping for a tournament. Whilst variety was key to Rick's enjoyment of the job, there were particular aspects that stood out for him.

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“Going into some courses that were quite run down and getting them ready for a tournament was always a buzz,” he said. “Especially going in with a local team who had never experienced it. I would go in weekly or monthly and put programmes together and work with them and train them, so that was very satisfying. At the end of the tournament, the local greenkeepers felt amazing, so that was a really nice journey to go on with them.”

“One of the most satisfying jobs was construction. You go to a site and have a look at it for a potential golf course and you’ve got this open pallet, and you work with the designers and build the course. Seeing it from day one to the end result, when golfers are going out and playing, is the most rewarding part of the job; being involved through the whole process and being part of a team who create a legacy that thousands of people will come and enjoy. When I look back today at the courses

I’ve worked on, it’s an amazing feeling.”

Being able to experience a career of such variety abroad for so long comes at a price. The countless flights and long hours are part of the job but, eventually, the time spent away from his wife, children and grandchildren, coupled with regulation changes regarding golf course construction in China, brought Rick’s time away from home to a natural end.

As a dual citizen, he had the option to return to Australia, but ultimately the draw of home won. This decision, like the one that initially saw him leave, had an element of fortunate timing about it. There were no solid plans for work on his return to the island, just considerations of farming or consulting. However, not long after he was home, La Grande Mare came calling and, for the two years that have followed, he has strived to make it the best course in the Channel Islands.

“I’ve gone full circle, from working at the

highest level to being very hands-on at a course back home. I was lucky to come back and have a project like this on my doorstep. I live six minutes away whereas before I could spend sixteen hours travelling to projects.”

“I came in and started working, and then we got a new owner last year, and we’re looking at doing a lot of development work. We’ve had a good budget to go and buy new machinery for the course, and I’ve been able to do a machinery replacement programme and get the guys here trained up on the new equipment.”

“The course is twenty-five to thirty years old, and it’s quite short. It’s a beautiful site on the beach; it’s not a links but a parkland course built on marshland. It needs upgrading, like a lot of courses that get to a certain time in their life. It needs to be rejuvenated, so we’re looking into that aspect of things going forward.”

“The soil type is clay and silt so, in the summer, it hardpans and it’s like rock. Even



I’ve gone full circle, from working at the highest level to being very hands-on at a course back home. I was lucky to come back and have a project like this on my doorstep



Air2G2, a favourite machine of Rick’s



Golfers enjoying the course



I want this course to be the best in the Channel Islands. I want to consistently produce the best quality surfaces and greens. I really want the golfers to come out and enjoy the course and have it in the best condition it can be, because that's what I strive for

when we try to change the holes, the hole cutter almost breaks or when you're trying to knock hazard steaks in the ground sometime the wood almost splits. Then, in the winter, it holds a lot of moisture so the native soil here is a challenge and being below sea level doesn't help with that."

"We get big spring tides, and we're right on the beach so these ten-metre tides crash over the sea wall, and with the rain, there is a period of time where the water can't escape out, so there's a lot of open ditches and things like that to try and channel it away, but there isn't enough drainage with the old push-up greens. Because of the soil type and the lack of subsurface drainage, the moisture is retained for a long time and, in the summer, it's hard to get the aeration and the water in there. One of the reasons why I got the Air2G2 was to make the greens more forgiving, so I could control how they play. With USGA greens in a tournament, you can control the firmness,

moisture and speed but here, when I arrived, there was no control over how the course played."

"It's a constant programme to keep the greens aerated and open. I have been going out with the Air2G2 with the 300mm probes on quite a close spacing to relieve the hard panning and opening them up, and then we come in with the Verti-Drain with different tine configurations to try and keep it on the top as well. We do that quite regularly to keep them moving, and then we follow up with a wetting agent and watering to try and help."

"We've been doing a lot of work with topdressing using higher quality sand so they putt better, as well as amending some of the programmes to try and get the rootzone a bit healthier and stronger because some of the greens have problems with nutrition. I looked at all the soils and used profile porous ceramic to help improve the condition of the soil rootzone. When we

get the tides come in, we get a lot of salt on the course, so running gypsum programmes and other amendment programmes means we can pretty much control the greens now. We've already had positive feedback from our members and players during competitions we've had, so we know we're going in the right direction."

"I want this course to be the best in the Channel Islands. I want to consistently produce the best quality surfaces and greens. I really want the golfers to come out and enjoy the course and have it in the best condition it can be, because that's what I strive for."



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Prestbury Golf Club

Mark's elevated position

Prestbury Golf Club is located in beautiful Cheshire countryside and is one of the select few golf courses in the British Isles to bear the architectural stamp of Harry Colt. Whilst being told to all stay at home and stay safe, Lee Williams spoke to Course Manager **Mark Crossley**, over Zoom, to find out the challenges an elevated position presents on the hilly terrain



Mark Crossley and his trusted friend - Bailey the Golden Retriever

Mark first got a taste of working in the sports turf industry after undertaking two-weeks work experience at Skipton Golf Club, working with now Agrovista Amenity specialist Gary Potter. However, being a greenkeeper was not the career he had in mind at fifteen years old. "My first thoughts were that I wanted to go into the Royal Navy so, when the time came at seventeen, I went to Preston to carry out my physical and interview whilst I already had my bursary in place to do a Sports Science degree at Cranfield University. The navy wanted me to sign up for seven years and, at such a young age, I just wasn't prepared to give up that many years of my life."

"So, I was back to square one - what else did I want to do? I enjoyed working outside and was used to the physical aspect as I had worked with my dad a lot who was a paving and landscape contractor. Coupled with my experience on the golf course with Gary, I decided to embark on a career in

greenkeeping and I attended Myerscough College to do a HND in sports turf. I failed my first year, as I was too busy partying - as you do at that age! I knuckled down in my second year and, in the third, I did a twelve-month work placement at Amarilla Golf and Country Club in Tenerife, which was fantastic. When I came back, I took a job as first Assistant Greenkeeper at Nelson Golf Club and completed my HND part-time. I then progressed onto Stockport Golf Club as First Assistant for a few years - first working for Warren Bevan, then under Mike Goodhind."

At the young age of twenty-four years old, Mark took on his first Head Greenkeeper position in Derby at Mickleover Golf Club, but he openly admits it was probably a bit too soon. "I was a million miles away from being ready, but I will always be grateful to Mickleover for taking a punt on a young lad. As soon as my name was over that door, I learnt an awful lot - not just in terms of the job, but the management of people. Trying to manage a team, not only older than me,



I think it's good that we are now starting to talk about mental health issues more openly, however it is still too easy for clubs to turn a blind eye



but also more experienced was difficult and I had no previous management experience. Still, I got through it with the help of the Club-Pro Tim Coxon and the Secretary Graham Finney. Five years later, I ended up at Chesterfield Golf Club, which was a much more management-based role. Instead of having a Greens Chairman, I had a place on the board and ran the Green Committee meetings and took the minutes. It was a steep learning curve dealing with people who have been in business all their lives and you can't fail to learn from people like that. I spent five years there before moving to Prestbury, where I have been for the last five years."

The course is very much a parkland course in nature, but with heathland characteristics and is built on a sandy sub-soil, which helps it drain well. "Over the last few years, we have been working on reducing the organic matter throughout the course. This will help it drain better

and, at the same time, it will enable firmer and faster play. We also have a couple of holes with heather which we are trying to regenerate and reproduce more widely across the golf course."

The construction of the greens is indigenous. "I can't say they are clay push-ups because they are not clay! They have little or no drainage but, for one-hundred-year-old greens, they work well. It is quite a special course; they are a great club to work for and financially secure (touch wood) - I just hope this pandemic doesn't affect us too much."

Mark is fortunate to have a good team to rely on, aided by an apprenticeship scheme through Myerscough and Oldham College. "This helps us keep salary costs down whilst, at the same time, offering young people a way into the industry."

The team includes Callum Goodhind - Deputy Course Manager, NVQ Level 3 Sports turf (4 years' service); Mike



You go out to the States and the course managers out there have a Masters degree and/or a PhD and are seen as professionals. I do not feel we are seen that way - at least, not as much as we should be



Bunker project



We have a lot of worthwhile initiatives going on at the golf club at the minute; like not using plastic cups, cutlery and straws in the dining room and clubhouse

Goodhind - 1st Assistant Greenkeeper, HNC Sportsturf (2 years); Brandon "Pickle" Hayward - Mechanic/Greenkeeper, NVQ Level 2 in Sportsturf and NVQ Level 2 in Landbased Engineering (3 years); Steve Millar - Greenkeeper, NVQ Level 3 Sportsturf (9 years); Callum "Jnr" Atkinson - Greenkeeper, working towards NVQ Level 3 Sportsturf (3 years); Ollie Tovee and Sam Jackson - Apprentices, both working towards NVQ Level 2 Sportsturf (1 year).

The irrigation system is old and needs updating, which is something Mark hopes can take place in the near future. "We have Toro pop-ups on tees and greens, controlled by a Bailoy computer system. A few years ago, we did some remedial work around the eighth green, redoing the bunkers and run-offs. So, we took the opportunity to extend the system to the approaches and install valve-in head sprinklers - which I would

like to do all around the course. I would also like to extend the system out to all the approaches."

"We have an extraction licence that enables us to feed the irrigation system through Spencer Brook, which is a tributary to the River Bollin. We extract from the lowest point, which is by the twelfth hole, to the feeder tank which holds 90,000 litres of water."

Mark talks me through the annual

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Getting Personal

Mark Crossley - a classic daftest question and he doesn't like snakes

Who are you? Mark Crossley - Course Manager at Prestbury Golf Club - age 39. Born and raised in Burnley, 9 GCSEs at Gawthorpe High School, 3 A Levels at St Theodoros R.C Sixth Form, HND Turf Science and Golf Course Management at Myerscough College.

Family status. Long-term girlfriend Lindsay, and Bailey the Golden Retriever.

Who's your hero and why? Stevie Gerrard as captain.

What's been the highlight of your greenkeeping career so far? Achieving my goals by the age of thirty-five. Now they've been reassessed and we go again. I'm proud of the increase in standards at the course, culminating in Top 100 status. I have five lads, who have previously worked with me, who are now Course Managers/Head Greenkeepers which is rewarding for me.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? I think he would be quite proud of me, especially from a career perspective.

Which famous people wind you up? The Beckhams.

What job would you love, other than your own? A professional footballer or a fighter pilot.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Too many to state.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Jesus, Alexander the Great and Marilyn Monroe (for the glamour).

What is your favourite film? Gladiator.

What scares you? Snakes.

What's your favourite smell? Freshly cut grass, although it's terrible for my hayfever.

What is your favourite sport? Football.



What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? I did it my way - Jason Statham.

What would you cast into Room 101? Poverty.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? Ancient Rome.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To be happy and healthy.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? You've had enough to drink, although I never listen.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Be Here Now, Oasis. 1, The Beatles and Thriller, Michael Jackson.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? Where's the left-handed screwdriver?

What's your favourite piece of kit? Toro Flex 21.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Grumpy, tired and hungry.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundskeeper/greenkeeper? Listen.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? I would like to see a Government supported wage scale. I feel this would better support the younger element and potentially make the industry more attractive to school/college leavers.



The club recently invested in a Bernhard Grinder

maintenance of the greens. "We will hand cut five or six days a week, with Toro Flex 21 mowers at a height of 3.5-5mm throughout the year. If we are lacking a bit of speed, or we are prepping for a competition, we will take them down as low as we need to. We are looking for an average of ten on the stimpmeter.

"We don't do a lot of scarifying, as a lot of what we are trying to do is encourage the bent grasses. We will try not to do anything too intrusive, we might tickle the surface with the verti-cut units as and when two to three times a year to try and stand up any lateral

growth and potentially any seed heads. Something we are learning is to try not to put the Poa under too much stress when it is seeding because that exaggerates the problem. On the Toro Flex 21s we have brushes so the greens are getting brushed everyday which reduces the need to scarify and verti-cut often. The organic matter we have in the top 20-25mm is lower than three percent, and we are pleased with that. It's all about keeping the plant ticking over at sensible heights of cut to allow us to provide the speed and quality we require."

I asked Mark if he believes





I decided to embark on a career in greenkeeping and I attended Myerscough College to do a HND in sports turf. I failed my first year, as I was too busy partying - as you do at that age!

there is an advantage with hand mowing greens, over using a ride-on greens machine. "Personally, I do. Not only in terms of aesthetic value, but our hand machines only weigh around 120kg which means all the weight is on the roller - unlike a ride-on where all the weight is on the wheels. In terms of quality of cut, I don't think there is any great difference, especially with the machines available to us now. If we plan to double cut, we use the Toro Greenmaster 3250s and follow up with the hand mowers, which are also used at the weekends."

Mark likes to overseed the greens at least three times a year and has been trialling various cultivars of bent grass seed. "We mainly overseed with Johnsons J All Bent; a brown top bent mixture. We have also been trialling creeping bent grass seed mixtures (with three different cultivars) on the putting green, to see how that will establish over the coming years. What we found, in 2018,

was that bent grasses loved the drier weather we experienced, and the stress the Poa was under allowed the bent grass to flourish. Unlike in 2019, where everywhere was drowned out; we overseeded in August and October and saw very little germination. However, we have not overseeded since and, in the last few weeks, there is seed coming through, which is interesting."

Over the winter period, Mark has an aeration programme to help keep the profile of the greens open as much as possible. "We will aerate every two to three weeks, conditions permitting, using the Toro ProCore 648 - with 10mm tines at a depth of between 3-4 inches. Every month, throughout the year, we will verti-drain and get as deep as possible. We also like to bring in a contractor with the Air2G2."

Topdressing is carried out throughout the season, with Mark aiming to apply around 200 tonnes of sand per year. "We will





I was a million miles away from being ready, but I will always be grateful to Micklover for taking a punt on a young lad

attempt to apply 80-100 tonnes before the start of May. Then, we generally have a renovation week in the first or second week in August (depending on fixtures), where we will apply another 50-60 tonnes. The remaining tonnage will be applied little and often, generally on a Monday, throughout the playing season. I think it is so much easier now to get high quantities of topdressing into your greens without too much disruption to your membership. We use the Dakota topdresser and the sweep and fill brush.”

In April 2016, the club invested in a new

Toro fleet of machinery to help improve the course. Each machine (in the £300,000 deal) was chosen by Mark, with a particular purpose and anticipated result in mind. For example, the two Reelmaster Sidewinder 3100-D mowers were selected to increase productivity, which they have done by halving the time taken to do the same job of the previous machines. “We have just paid our final payment, so all the machinery is now ours. Machinery, such as the tractors and Verti-Drain, we bought outright. We have also purchased a couple of second-hand pieces of kit this year from GGM; an Amazone Profihopper and a Toro Workman from Cheshire Turf Machinery. Also, a great piece of kit (which we invested in last year) is the Bernhard Grinder which is being used far more often than I anticipated. It’s all about what fits in with the business model of the club and the finances available for that year - the club has been pretty flexible as well.”

Ecology in and around the course is important to the club. The members have created an ecology committee whose first



Bailey keeping watch



What's in the shed

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- Toro Multi Pro 5800-D sprayer
- Toro ProCore 648
- Toro Workman MDX x 2
- Toro Workman MDE
- Toro Workman with Dakota topdresser
- Toro Greens Pro 1260
- Tornado Blower
- New Holland TN75 tractor
- New Holland TC45 tractor
- New Holland Boomer tractor
- Ford 1520 tractor
- Amazone Profihopper
- JCB excavator 3 tonne
- SISIS brushes x 2
- John Deere rotary mower
- Trailers x 5

task was to look at reducing the Himalayan balsam across the course. "They have done a great job with that; the group is made up of a few long-standing members who have a passion for such things. They have also undertaken a lot of work clearing out the scrub and woodland, so now you see the bluebells coming through more. We have recently introduced compost bays, where we are looking to regenerate our own material for construction and topdressing

purposes. A reed bed is going in, to replace the existing wash down facility, at the back end of this year. We have a lot of worthwhile initiatives going on at the golf club at the minute; even including such things like not using plastic cups, cutlery and straws in the dining room and clubhouse, as well as reducing the amount of paper we use in the office."

Mark gave me his thoughts on the issue of attracting more young people to



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History

Harry Colt was the original architect, and Hawtree and Son had a hand in the development after the Second World War. More recently, the club has employed the services of leading course architects Mackenzie and Ebert. Founded in 1920, the nature of the site coupled with the sandy subsoil means that the course drains exceptionally well and, unlike many others in the area, hardly ever closes due to heavy rainfall.

Colt's partner (along with Charles Alison) was Dr Alister MacKenzie whose course designs span four continents. He is a member of the World Golf Hall of Fame. He designed more than fifty golf courses including three that are in the Top 100 golf courses in the world; Augusta National Golf Club and Cypress Point Club in the USA, and Royal Melbourne Golf Club (West Course) in Australia.

The layout at Prestbury is outstanding, especially when considering the comparatively small scale of the site. The back nine is routed around the front nine in a horse shoe like fashion with the 6th green and holes 7 and 8 being the open ended part of the shoe. Interestingly, the back nine covers the highest part of the property at the 10th tee and lowest part at the 12th green with an ease few architects could match. Whilst the walk back up to the clubhouse involves some gentle climbing it never requires a long green to tee walk. In 1934, Colt said of Prestbury: "Owing to the natural formation of the ground, the golf is, in my opinion, very interesting and the variety provided is excellent as every hole presents some distinct feature and impressive character."

The club has hosted many county and national competitions, including the English Seniors Championship and Open Championship Regional Qualifying.



I can't say they are clay push-ups because they are not clay! They have little or no drainage but, for one-hundred-year-old greens, they work well



embark on a career in sports turf. "Through Myerscough and Oldham College, we have taken apprentices for the last four years. This has worked really well; however, I think sometimes sixteen to eighteen-year-olds are not looking at greenkeeping or groundsmanship as a career, and it's more a case of completing the NVQ Level 2 qualification and then seeing what they think of it. I believe recruiting good staff is becoming harder and harder - whether that's me being an old taskmaster, or our location, I am not sure."

"From a PR point of view, I think greenkeeping still has a long way to go - in terms of how we are viewed throughout the wider society. You go out to the States and the course managers out there have a Masters degree and/or a PhD and are seen as professionals.

I do not feel we are seen that way - at least, not as much as we should be. There are some great greenkeepers in the UK who are passionate and would give their right arm for the industry. But, that is lost within golf club politics, committees, and membership and that's where our governing bodies need to be doing more. The education at BTME has improved year on year, however it is the likes of those speakers who need to be educating the members, board members and committee members on what it

takes to produce a golf course we are all proud of. My final issue, is that of the mental strain placed on people in our industry. I think it's good that we are now starting to talk about mental health issues more openly. However, it is still too easy for clubs to turn a blind eye."





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VYBK Stadium in Kolkata is due to host seven games in the Women's U-17 World Cup



FIFA Update

Football lockdown!

The impact of COVID-19 on sport across the world has been unprecedented. Almost every league in the world has been shut down, major tournaments have been postponed, and sporting governing bodies are desperately working to find a solution. FIFA's Pitch Management Manager, **Alan Ferguson**, discusses the huge logistical challenges international football faces in the coming months ... and years! Blair Ferguson reports



Germany led the recovery back into competitive football with the reintroduction of the Bundesliga on 15th May 2020, with the English Premier League also aiming to finish the season (at the time of writing). In other areas of Europe, countries such as Holland and France have decided not to resume.

Whilst trying to work on a country by country basis is difficult enough, at FIFA, they are trying to reschedule four tournaments on three different continents, each in their own phase of the pandemic with various restrictions in place.

As has been established in previous articles, planning these tournaments takes a

lot of visiting, checking and double-checking to ensure pitches will be ready for a World Cup at any age group. Ordinarily, interviews for these articles would take place on the phone during a spare hour in an airport between these visits, but today - as has been the case for eight weeks at the time of writing - the base of operations for Senior Pitch Management Manager, Alan Ferguson, is the Suffolk countryside.

For Alan, the initial conversations over Microsoft Teams and Zoom were to discuss how preparation for four tournaments, plus the men's 2022 World Cup in Qatar, could go ahead on the original dates before the age group tournaments were all rightly postponed and moved back a year.

The new dates for these tournaments now mean that the Women's U-20 World Cup in Panama and Costa Rica will take place in January and February 2021, the Women's U-17 World Cup in India in February and March 2021, the Men's U-20 World Cup in Indonesia in May and June 2021, along with the Men's U-17 tournament in Autumn 2021. As well as these competitions, the Olympic Football Tournament in Tokyo will also be under FIFA's guidance, meaning the pitch team will deliver six tournaments back to back for the first time.

"Like everyone else in the world I, or FIFA, had no idea about what was going to happen and how it was going to affect everything," Alan began. "A week before



The other obvious issue with age group tournaments is the age of the players. We can only delay them for so long before it has a massive knock-on effect on the football calendar



Kalinga Stadium Bhubaneswar - India WU17 Group Games



In lockdown - Alan Ferguson, FIFA's Pitch Management Manager

China announced they had a pandemic, we were on a visit to Wuhan - where the outbreak started - and everything seemed normal when we were there. There were no signs of what was going to unfold.”

“We’re now eight weeks into lockdown in the UK and plans are well underway on how we are going to rearrange the tournaments. Initially, it was difficult because there was a lot of hypothesising about potential dates, but this has become much clearer due to the formation of a FIFA led task force which has been challenged with aligning all the tournaments into the international football calendar. With those confirmed dates, a significant revision of plans and budgets has been carried out in conjunction with the project leads and host countries and is almost complete.”

“Rescheduling the dates for the final tournaments has been relatively easy compared to the issue of completing the qualifying phases. This obviously involves

much more travelling for each nation and, logistically, will take more consideration, but without it, we can’t have the finals. The other obvious issue with age group tournaments is the age of the players. We can only delay them for so long before it has a massive knock-on effect on the football calendar. The age eligibility has been extended into 2021, despite the tournament titles staying the same because, ultimately, FIFA wants every player in every age group to have the opportunity to play at a World Cup.”

Usually, the FIFA pitch team would only have three tournaments in a year, whereas the six finals in twelve calendar months will bring about many different challenges.

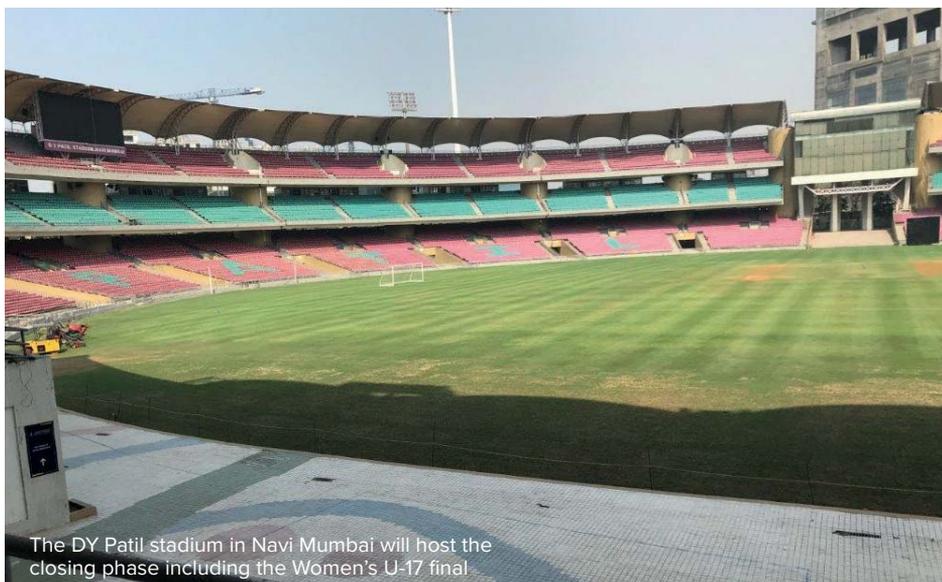
The Women’s U-17 World Cup was due to be hosted in five cities in India in November 2020 and, for Alan and his team, the postponement has brought some welcome additional time for planning and executing work. The tournament will open in Kolkata, with the closing phase, including the final, in



Usually, the FIFA pitch team would only have three tournaments in a year, whereas the six finals in twelve calendar months will bring about many different challenges



One of the more unusual challenges facing the team in India



The DY Patil stadium in Navi Mumbai will host the closing phase including the Women's U-17 final.



Under the original tournament timeline, the Local Organising Committee, who are FIFA's local representatives, were due to take control of the pitches on the 21st August 2020

Navi Mumbai. Other group games will be hosted in Guwahati, Ahmedabad and Bhubaneswar.

Alan and FIFA pitch consultants Labosport already faced stiff challenges around the 2020 Monsoon season, as well as several new pitch builds in Ahmedabad and Bhubaneswar. With global travel stopped, Matthew Leon from Labosport, who is based in New Delhi, was able to get a visit to all the pitches in just before the full domestic lockdown came into force. It had been

hoped that the pitches being built from scratch could be completed ahead of the Monsoon season which traditionally begins in June and ends in early September. With the lockdown across India still in place, this important timeline will be missed.

"Under the original tournament timeline, the Local Organising Committee (LOC) who are FIFA's local representatives were due to take control of the pitches on the 21st August 2020. We had hoped that, from here on, the FIFA pitch team could step up the

maintenance and meet the standards required ahead of the November start. I'm hopeful negotiations that are still ongoing will see this happen, and the additional time will take works clear of the Monsoon season and allow the pitches to be fully prepared. This will impact on the tournament budget but should result in better pitches being delivered in what I think is one of my most challenging deliveries to date."

"Although these challenges come in many shapes and sizes, in India, they have been

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On one visit I was very surprised to see drain tracks being dug by hand and the soil being removed in baskets without any mechanical machinery at all



Local contractors dig drains out by hand



Training site in Navi Mumbai

taken to a new level. The pitch team will have to get used to dealing with stray animals, such as cows which are sacred in India. On one visit I was very surprised to see drain tracks being dug by hand and the soil being removed in baskets without any mechanical machinery at all. One of the objectives is to help local labour by encouraging contractors to provide them with up-to-date equipment.”

In similar circumstances to the finals in India, the tournament in Panama and Costa Rica will also benefit from having extra preparation time. Since qualifying for the 2018 World Cup in Russia, there has been a great desire in Panama to use that success as a catalyst to improve their football infrastructure. This has included major works at training grounds and stadiums which, despite the initial delay, will give them more time to complete building projects. The tournament will be played in two cities, San Jose in Costa Rica and Panama City in Panama. Three stadiums and ten training sites across the two countries will host the

thirty-two-game programme, with key staff from both host country Football Associations already seconded to the LOC and plans at an advanced stage.

With the new dates, the U-20 finals and U-17 finals will be played back to back, but Alan is confident the pitch team has the adequate experience and resources to facilitate them in such a short space of time.

He explained: “The COVID-19 outbreak affects different countries in different ways. Whilst Panama is under virtual lockdown, things in Costa Rica are a bit more relaxed. Contractors can still work under guidelines and, with the help of modern technology, myself and Andy Cole from iTurf can maintain regular dialogue with the grounds teams. The GrasPro data collection system has really come into its own during the current restrictions because grounds teams working on the respective tournaments can load the operational data to the site, which enables myself and the iTurf team to track the progress of the pitches. So, even though we can't be there in person for a prolonged



The COVID-19 outbreak affects different countries in different ways. Whilst Panama is under virtual lockdown, things in Costa Rica are a bit more relaxed. Contractors can still work under guidelines



Morerra Soto stadium in San Jose Costa Rica - WU20 Group Games



Rommel Fernandez stadium in Panama City - U-20 finals venue



On the whole, modern technology has really helped us during this time. My IT skills weren't the sharpest, but I've had to improve, so if I take one new skill away from all of this, then it'll be that!

period of time, we still have a detailed idea of what's going on."

"On the whole, modern technology has really helped us during this time. My IT skills weren't the sharpest, but I've had to improve, so if I take one new skill away from all of this, then it'll be that!"

Away from the FIFA events is the Olympic Football Tournament. Arguably, this has been the most significant sporting casualty of the pandemic and one that dictated the

rescheduling of other activities. All the facilities that were set to host the twenty-eight disciplines were built and undergoing the final tests when the announcement that the games would be postponed, for only the second time in the modern era, was made - the other coming as a result of the second world war.

The rescheduling of the games was an important point for other supports. There are many sporting authorities, officials and

organisations involved, including television companies who had multiple contracts outside of the Olympics. Money from television deals is paramount to many sports, so ensuring events didn't clash was of the utmost importance.

Alan and his team had already made two inspections to Tokyo and the pitch operations were at an advanced stage. With the pitch at the Sapporo Dome set to host eight games in ten days, trials had been

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Pitch construction in the final stages in Japan



Stitching trial at the Sapporo Dome in Japan



Whilst the turf is more than capable of taking a stitch, the tray system used to move the pitch has a weight limit of four tonnes, making the weight of the machine the main issue, so it was vital the Japanese Football Association were satisfied with the stitching test

carried out to see if their sliding pitch could be stitched. Because the stadium is used to play football and baseball, a retractable pitch system was installed with a synthetic baseball field and natural turf football pitch. It has a rich history of hosting international events counting three games in the 2002 World Cup - including England's 1-0 win against Argentina - and two Rugby World Cup 2019 matches.

Whilst the turf is more than capable of taking a stitch, the tray system used to move the pitch has a weight limit of four tonnes, making the weight of the machine the main issue. After the Olympics, the stadium will have to complete a full J.League football season for Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo, so it was vital the Japanese Football Association were satisfied with a stitching test. A successful trial was carried out in November 2019 with the conclusion being to use two small machines, each weighing slightly less than four tonnes, rather than the usual single machine.

Everything that Alan has outlined so far remains theory. The implementation of his, and FIFA's, plans remain in flux and are likely to stay that way for some time. As events move forward, considerations for tournaments taking place in 2022/23 will come to the fore and may see what has so far been a successful way of operating adapted. For now, the priority is making sure that, when international football does return, it does so smoothly with no avoidable delays.



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Stanningley SARLC

Dan's the man

Regarded as one of the finest amateur sporting venues in the country, Stanningley Sports and Amateur Rugby League Club is located in the district of Pudsey - midway between Leeds and Bradford. Lee Williams spoke to **Dan Connor**, the club's groundsman at the Arthur Miller Stadium, over Zoom at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic



//

I wouldn't have thought of going into groundsmanship as it wasn't represented on open days. It was my grandad's influence and getting me involved in growing veg that got me interested



Dan Connor is the sole groundsman at Stanningley; in charge of the club's main pitch and contracted to eight to ten hours per week. He's supported by a band of volunteers who work as a team to keep the facilities in tip-top condition. He explains "We have a great team; Brian Sowden carries out all the odd jobs around the place, Ken Smith maintains all the grass banking and training areas, as well as doing the kit for the teams and looking after the changing rooms. There are also many volunteers who help out day to day."

Dan has been working part-time for Stanningley for over eight years, whilst focusing on his full-time job as joint Assistant Head Groundsman at Leeds Rhinos. He recalls how he first ended up tending to Stanningley's main pitch. "Jason Booth sent me down here whilst I was doing my apprenticeship at Headingley. If I'm totally honest, I wasn't doing very well and had the outlook and approach of a typical young

teenager. He told me they wanted someone down here to maintain the pitch, and it's a good opportunity for you to learn and have some responsibility."

We're all aware of the on-going struggle to attract new people into our industry, so I found it quite interesting that Dan recognised he wasn't applying himself to the full. This led me to ask why the industry had first appealed to him. "For me, it started in my early teens when I used to go to my grandad's house at the weekend. He got me interested in helping him grow vegetables in the back garden and I loved being outdoors amongst nature. When it came to leaving school and going to college, I had no idea what to do and I remembered what my grandad always used to say - 'do something you enjoy'. So, I got into Askham Bryan College where I studied a National Diploma in Horticulture."

"We would often have trips out to various places to get some work experience. One day, we went to Headingley, and it just so

happened there was about six inches of snow on the pitch. To help get the game on, we chipped in and spent all day shovelling the snow."

That was Dan's introduction to a stadium environment and, as part of the diploma, he had to find himself a work experience placement. With a growing interest in sports turf he applied to work at Headingley. "It's local to me and I was very grateful to be given the opportunity to carry out my work experience at the club. I still had a year left on my diploma course so, with it being three days on four days off, I would go into Headingley and volunteer on my days off. I would even go in at nine o'clock at night and help take frost sheets on and off."

Once Dan had completed his Diploma there was only one thing he wanted to do; and that was work full-time for Leeds Rhinos. "Lucky for me, one of the lads had just left the club, which opened up the opportunity for me to accept a full-time apprenticeship at nineteen years old. In this time, I gained my NVQ Level 3 in sports turf management."

"We used to have a grounds team of six, until Kiel Barrett moved to Elland Road and Jason Booth left for the IOG (now GMA).



Leeds Rhinos Emerald Headingley Stadium

//

I've been lucky enough to be looked after, but obviously, that's not the case everywhere. I'm sure there are places out there where you are not treated as well



The whole club gets involved when the covers need to go on, from volunteers to coaching staff and players. Once, we even had the players from Leeds Rhinos come and help

Now, we just have three; myself, Head Groundsman Ryan Golding and our other Assistant Head Groundsman Leon Pearson.”

In his time so far in the industry, Dan feels he has been fortunate to learn from some of the best groundsman in the sports turf industry and is grateful for their help and guidance.

In 2018, Stanningley invested and installed a fully automatic Hunter irrigation system into the stadium pitch. “We have eighteen

G-885 heads around the perimeter and twelve I-40 heads in the middle. The site suffers from high winds, so this has enabled us to get more head to head coverage. This is controlled through the Hunter ACC2 controller, which is very simple to use. The system is fed by a dedicated mains water pipe into a tank with a submersible pump. Connected into the main irrigation ring we have a tap near to the training pitches so we can attach a tri-flex hose with a travelling

sprinkler to water the training area.”

To help fund this project, the club spent nearly two years holding fundraising events and raised the subs. They also have a buy-a-brick scheme (which costs fifty pounds a brick) - proceeds went towards funding the installation of the irrigation system and other projects.

The club trusts Dan with the annual budget for the pitch and he pretty much gets what is required (within reason).

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Getting Personal

Daniel Connor - I think we all wish hangovers would get put into Room 101

Who are you? Daniel Connor - Assistant Head Groundsman at Leeds Rhinos and Groundsman at Stanningley SARLFC.

Family status. Single.

Who's your hero and why? My grandad - he took me under his wing and put me on the path to groundsmanship.

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

To work for almost ten years in the industry and be a part of a grounds team that won an IOG Award.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think?

Proud to be privileged enough to work for a great employer, with great people.

Which famous people wind you up?

There's always a bit of banter between the players but I would also say Piers Morgan winds me up too.

What job would you love, other than your own?

I would be a fireman (not that I'd be any good at it).

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life?

Falling over at the Playhouse in front of a load of people.

What is your favourite film?

Jaws and Indiana Jones.

What scares you?

Heights really get me.

What is your favourite sport?

Rugby League. I have some great memories of away days and success over the years.

What would you cast into Room 101?

Hangovers.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit?

Chernobyl.

Do you have a lifetime ambition?

I've always wanted to run a marathon.



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

Peter Kay, Blake Lively and Alan Shearer.

What's the best advice you have ever been given?

The grass isn't always greener on the other side (pardon the pun).

What's your favourite smell?

A BBQ on a summer's day.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island?

Oasis, Calvin Harris and Skepta.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked?

You only have to cut grass don't you?

What's your favourite piece of kit?

Cub Cadet Infinicut - the quality of cut and finish is above anything else.

What three words would you use to describe yourself?

Trustworthy, thoughtful and passionate.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsman/greenkeeper?

Don't let things outside work have an affect on you in the workplace.

What talent would you like to have?

Professional sportsman.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced?

People to abide by keep off the pitch signs.



"I will try and save money wherever I can, e.g. if possible, I will try and make our annual renovation stretch over two years instead of one. I also have Ryan supporting me so we can discuss things together and make decisions, so the club trust in what we say needs to be done."

The stadium pitch is made up of a 70/30 rootzone on top of a gravel bed, which means the pitch drains really well. "Even after a heavy downpour, within an hour it just goes straight through it. This is the reason we had to install the irrigation system - we were getting to the end of May and it was just turning into a dust bowl."

The club has a full set of frost covers to enable first-team games to go-ahead. The whole club gets involved when the covers need to go

on, from volunteers to coaching staff and players. "Once, we even had the players from Leeds Rhinos come and help as they coach the first team, which was good."

Dan talks me through general maintenance of the Arthur Miller Stadium pitch. "I have a John Deere 2653A triple mower set at a height of 35mm and a Kubota B2410 with a rotary deck set at 38mm. In summer, I prefer to use the triple - cutting the pitch at least three to four times a week. However, if we have a big game coming up, I will cut every day and also double-cut on the day of the game. In winter, I will cut using the Kubota and rotary deck with the GreenTek 8' drag brush attached. I also use this in summer to disperse some of the debris caused by the triple. In between cutting, I will go





The club has just had to spend £20,000 on a new boiler, combine that with not being sure when play will resume due to Covid-19, means we will just have to monitor the finances for 2020

over the pitch with a one-tonne roller to help keep the levels however, this is not advisable in some conditions.”

“We don’t tend to undertake any scarifying, or overseeding during the season as the pitch is not full of desirable grasses - it’s mainly Poa. It’s all about working with what we have and the money available to maintain it.”

Dan’s aeration programme includes slitting regularly and verti-draining when possible. “We will sometimes bring the tractor and Verti-Drain across from Headingley, but that is mainly when we hold the Rhinos and bigger games. So, we will typically just use the Charterhouse Slitter to aerate every three to four weeks, just to get some air into it. When we have a game

coming, if the forecast is for heavy rain we will bring in a contractor to verti-drain and keep the games on.”

With a limited budget, the fertiliser programme is kept to a minimum to keep the pitch healthy. “I will use conventional fertilisers, usually a 12:0:9, or sometimes I will apply a slow-release product. If we have a big game, for instance last year we had

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What's in the shed

- Kubota diesel B2410 tractor with a rotary cutting deck
- John Deere 2653A diesel ride-on cylinder mower (sharpened annually)
- Toro Proline commercial rotary mower
- Hayter Harrier 48 rotary mower
- GreenTek 8' tractor-mounted drag brush
- Charterhouse Slitter
- Chain harrows
- Agri-Fab trailer
- STIHL brushcutters
- Ryobi brushcutters
- Billy Goat for collecting debris



A Verti-Drain is on Dan's wish list



our 130th anniversary game, I will spray the pitch with iron to just green it up a bit.”

In light of the current situation, renovations will be put on hold this year. “The club has just had to spend £20,000 on a new boiler, combine that with not being sure when play will resume due to Covid-19, means we will just have to monitor the finances for 2020. Last year, we applied thirty tonnes of sand, verti-drained and overseeded with Limagrain MM60 grass seed. There has not been much play so far this year and the pitch is looking great, so we should be okay.”

All the machinery at the club has been bought outright or purchased through pitch improvement schemes when available and is serviced annually by a local mechanic. Dan would like the funds to invest in their own Verti-Drain, but that would mean investing in a new tractor at the same time to power it.

Dan feels we need to be more forward-thinking when trying to attract a new generation of groundsmen and greenkeepers into sports turf. “I’ve been lucky enough to be looked after, but obviously, that’s not the case everywhere.

I’m sure there are places out there where you are not treated as well. I don’t really have the answers on how we attract younger people. Still, before I left school, I wouldn’t have thought of going into groundsmanship as it wasn’t represented on open days. It was my grandad’s influence and getting me involved in growing veg that got me interested. I think many people who are in the industry today fell into it in the same way. The GMA has now started a campaign to keep our profession thriving and to attract new people, so hopefully this can be successful.”



I will try and make our annual renovation stretch over two years instead of one. I also have Ryan supporting me so we can discuss things together and make decisions



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Stoke City

Same but different!

In the worlds of turf maintenance and sport, some things are different, and others are the same. The ultimate aim is to produce the best surface possible and win games, but the methods of achieving both can vary. Blair Ferguson talks to Stoke City's **Andy Jackson** about working methods outside the UK



Whether it is preparing the gridiron at the 81,441 capacity Lambeau Field for the Green Bay Packers or readying the pitch for another cold and windy night at Stoke City Football Club's bet365 Stadium, the aim always remains the same - produce the best surface possible.

Working to those aims at Stoke City is Head Groundsman, Andy Jackson. He started his career at the English Championship football club twenty-five years ago and has seen the landscape of

turf technology change dramatically over that time. To keep himself up to date with the latest developments, he often attends conferences and exhibitions, including the STMA Conference. Whilst in America, he gets the opportunity to speak to fellow professionals about the different methods they use and how they compare to his own maintenance regime.

Before a word is spoken, it is known the most significant variants between the United Kingdom and America is the sports themselves in terms of the pressure on the pitch and the length of seasons. Typically,

the pre-match pageantry and stress on the turf during an NFL match far outweighs that of a football or rugby game. In recent times in the UK, NFL games held at Wembley have demonstrated the damage that can be done if the weather and other circumstances aren't on your side.

But, for Andy, clubs in the UK have only got to a point of hosting multiple sports in a season because of the leap forward in the machines they use for renovations, and the other maintenance apparatus that has been developed within Europe.

Andy explained: "I think some of the





Andy Jackson conducting centre circle marking training for FIFA



Dennis Pro 34 in use at Stoke City



The field grow lighting systems in Europe have also helped to take pitches to a new level and, alongside artificial carpets and stitching, have been a very significant development

renovation techniques in the UK have come a long way in the last decade. For instance, when a field was renovated ten years ago, it was done using a Koro Fieldtopmaker and the difference in quality from a standard renovation was massive, but there was still the issue of the field being out of action for seven to eight weeks which, for most stadiums or practice pitches, wouldn't be acceptable due to the revenue income and pre-season training schedules we now have."

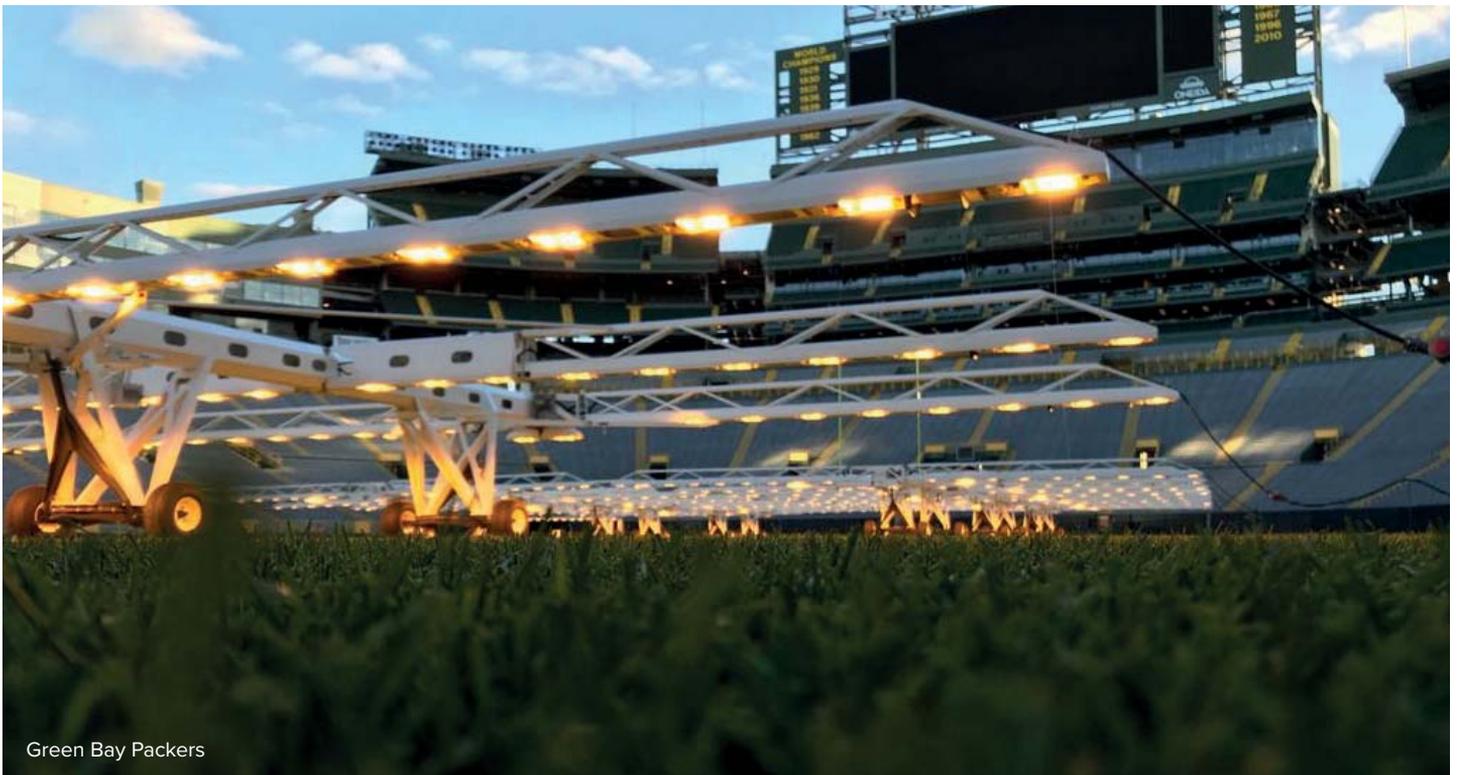
"But now, I feel we can achieve this with the new technologies at our disposal. The fields are renovated more precisely, and quicker using the Koro Universe Rotor or Terraplane Rotor, which have both been developed by Campey Turf Care Systems as part of their renovation method. Because the Universe Rotor can be used on hybrid pitches, this method of renovation is implemented on most pitches in the UK and

many within Europe."

"The seed has also developed further, and soil amendments have played a key part in the process, with the core of the products coming from the US market. I'd estimate around 30% of the products I use come from North America."

"The field grow lighting systems in Europe have also helped to take pitches to a new level and, alongside artificial carpets and stitching, have been a very significant development. We have all the technology to produce a natural pitch instead of artificial because - for those with the budgets - shade and a general lack of natural light is no longer an issue in a stadium environment."

"Because of differences in the length of playing seasons between Europe and the US, many of the successful accepted European maintenance practices and products are difficult to adapt into North America. This is because there isn't a



Green Bay Packers



Koro Fieldtopmaker in action



There isn't a suitable period available to the field manager to implement these often disruptive renovation and maintenance practices in the growing season due to the game schedules

suitable period available to the field manager to implement these often disruptive renovation and maintenance practices in the growing season due to the game schedules."

"Another issue is the many regional and geographical challenges that can severely restrict the suitability of successful European practices. The distance between the furthest apart English Premier League clubs is approximately three-hundred and fifty miles, and, in that short distance, we notice a regional climatic difference. In Major League

Soccer (MLS), the distance is closer to three-thousand five-hundred miles, so often only the games played in the same stadium is a comparison from one venue to another. Because of that, I think sharing practices with other groundsmen from similar climates would result in better maintenance methods going forward."

Despite using renovation practices developed by Campey and Imants BV, Andy's organic maintenance, as he briefly mentioned, is done using products almost entirely from the US market. His view is they

are among the best researched available and this opinion is mirrored by his belief that the education of turf professionals in America is ahead of what is offered in Europe. There are numerous established Universities, such as Tennessee and Ohio State, that have dedicated programmes focusing on the science of turfgrass, whereas a European equivalent is harder to come by. Outside of the classroom, Andy believes learning from others in the industry is essential.

It is through sharing information at events,







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A key factor to all of this is groundsmen understanding the business needs and the business understanding the groundsmen and agronomical needs



Baltimore Ravens

such as the STMA Conference and BTME, that ideas can be shared and learned from. One area this is especially important is in multi-use stadium where European groundsmen have used hybrid pitches and grow lights to help facilitate renovations. Recently, this was done by Karl Stanley at Wembley to have the pitch in prime condition for cup finals and concerts, and it is getting increasingly rare to see a picture of a top European venue pre or post-match without grow lights in place. Hybrid pitches and lights have become more prevalent in America, and multi-use venues have taken another step forward with Tottenham Hotspur's £1billion stadium that features two pitches - one for football and the other for NFL. Whilst progressing venues in this way is helpful for the groundsmen, it usually comes with an increased schedule, and this is where Andy thinks combining all of the technologies is vital.

"The grounds teams that work in these

multi-use stadia do a terrific job in maintaining the pitches, but most of them now have hybrid pitches and grow lights. Stadium grow lights give the manager the security to undertake a full renovation each season because, if mother nature is not helpful, the lighting technology can assist and help ensure a successful renovation. These two technologies have helped venues like Wembley Stadium complete winter renovations because that's the only time free in their schedule."

"Within the US, some of the sports - like American football - can be brutal to the surface and even more so to the grass plant. Away from the hybrid pitches and grow lights, clubs, like Tottenham Hotspur, have taken greater steps by developing a stadium with two pitches. This means when they host NFL games, their hybrid pitch slides underneath the stand and an artificial one slides into the stadium. This development has taken multi-use to another level in

England, and I'm aware of a club in Europe that is aiming to take it even further."

"I think this is the way forward for big city stadia as revenue is required and often the driving factor for the business model. But a key factor to all of this is groundsmen understanding the business needs and the business understanding the groundsmen and agronomical needs. The groundsmen also need the tools to carry out the job and provide the desired pitch quality. It's a very fine line between under usage and over usage. So, working relationships between event coordinators and the grounds team are key to successful pitch and event management planning."

Everything Andy has spoken about has been learned through twenty-five years of industry experience and learning from his peers across the world. While he has covered the aspects that differ from the US and UK, some areas are no different, including work-life balance, common



LA Galaxy stadium



Stoke City post renovations

challenges, and always wanting to achieve the best.

"I think it's the same for all grounds managers across the world, because we want to achieve the best, but I can only speak for myself when I say I think you have to live and breathe the job. You need passion and the plans A, B and C in your head at all times because, at the end of the day, we are dealing with hundreds of players beating our grass up daily in sometimes very challenging circumstances."

"The biggest challenge I have is not

knowing the weather in one month's time. In all honesty, every day brings a different challenge, be it weather, training schedules, staff allocation or disease pressure. This is what makes us enjoy the job."

"I'm very lucky in having a fantastic team behind me who work incredibly hard. I also have the back up of key companies in the industry who will always be at the end of the phone to help me with a solution to a problem. A big assist for me is the friends and fellow turf managers who share their knowledge and come up with new ideas

over a beer or two. I don't think we'd be where we are now without that."

"I'd say be brave, don't be afraid to try new ways of improving your pitch. Then believe in your decisions and share practices with fellow sportsturf managers. Sharing knowledge is the key to our industry. If I hadn't spoken to sports turf managers around the world, I wouldn't have the hybrid system, grow lights or the renovation and maintenance techniques."



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Dealing with mental health

The monster on my back



A lot of people are still scared to speak out about having any form of mental health. I know why; Stigma. Being talked about like you are a ‘nutter’, fear over future employment prospects by speaking out ... the list goes on

“You cannot put 30kg of fertiliser in a 20kg bag. Sooner or later it is going to spill out. I just did not know how much of a mess it was going to make.” I have read these words time and time again, and they resonate something very honest and relative to our industry and the people within it dealing with mental health issues. Kerry Haywood spoke to **Graeme Farmer**

I could not say even I know what triggered it off, but I now know (after therapy sessions) that ‘it’ had been brewing for a while and I was literally hanging on by my fingertips. Telltale signs were sleeping a lot, getting emotional about random things; like at the end of Die Hard when John McClane meets Sgt Al Powell for the first time. Also, being very irritated about the stupidest of things, being stubborn and not delegating, just trying to do everything myself and not listening to suggestions and advice. I was so wrapped up in my job and that constant feeling of self-loathing; it made me try and take even more on to justify my place in society, when it clearly was not warranted.

Probably, the biggest thing for me was contemplating suicide and the realisation that it was a normal everyday thought - like putting the bins out. That thought alone should have scared the hell out of me, but it didn’t, and I was just closing myself off. ‘I’m fine’ I would say when asked or ‘nothing’ when asked what the matter was. I just didn’t feel I had any right to say that I wasn’t okay, mainly because I thought people would not be interested or care... which astonishingly, in some quarters, proved correct.

I had worked at my previous job for just over seventeen years. Starting out as an assistant groundsman and finishing off as a grounds manager. I could go in-depth about my time there, both good and bad, but I will say only this ... when you know someone is passionate about their job and does



Graeme Farmer



I could not have asked for any more from Leicester and all the grounds team. They have helped me find my confidence again and given me opportunities to explore

everything they feel is in the best interest of the club, when they are sat in front of you crying, you'd think something isn't quite right. Then, A: think they are not just moaning and B: their emotional distress does not warrant just being ignored. I knew then that my time was up, so I had set off for pastures new. I know now that I was hoping that the change would make 'it' go away. If anything, that was the catalyst for my breakdown.

I have referred a couple of times to 'it'. For me, it is anxiety and depression. Anxiety being more prevalent than the depression in my case. A lot of people are still scared to speak out about having any form of mental health. I know why; Stigma. Being talked about like you are a 'nutter', fear over future employment prospects by speaking out ...

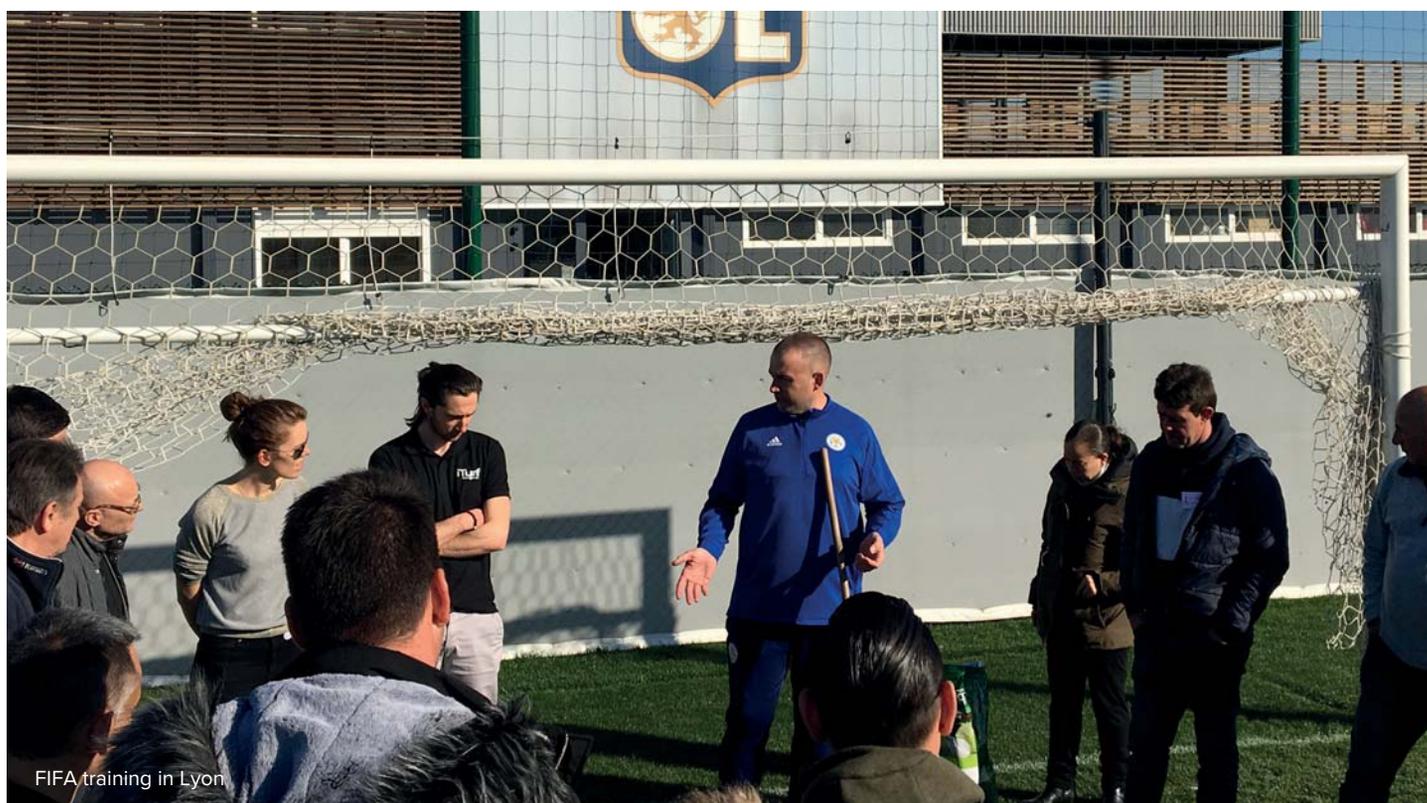
the list goes on. And, I also felt like I had to apologise for having a mental health condition. You don't apologise for having diabetes or having cancer, so why should you apologise for this?

So, what is a breakdown like? For me, I found myself unable to eat or sleep, and an overwhelming fear of being alone. Not for fear of self-harm, least not in my case, but just needing people around me for comfort. A constant pinched forehead feeling - which even now I think will never go away - or, worst case, it was like my head was a tumble dryer with a pair of trainers in; bang, bang, bang ... and that monster on my shoulder waiting to swallow me up again at any moment, if I made any progress towards recovery.

I think therapy can also be viewed as

weakness. I have found the two forms I have taken part in very rewarding and, well, therapeutic. CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), more of an investigation and unpicking of your thoughts and how they affect you. Talking therapy, which I still do, is just that; talking. Once you get going, it's surprising how much stuff just comes out.

Though my wellbeing was improving week on week, when I started at Leicester City in 2018, I was still struggling in certain areas. At that time, a completely unexpected discovery was that my breakdown had robbed me of all my confidence. For someone who had been around groundsmanship from birth, it was like starting all over again. I'd known John Ledwidge from our time previously working



FIFA training in Lyon



Belvoir Drive training complex



Probably, the biggest thing for me was contemplating suicide and the realisation that it was a normal everyday thought - like putting the bins out

together, but it was not a given I would get the job. Like everyone else, I still had to be interviewed and I was nervous as hell with shaking hands and sweaty palms. But, get the job I did!

I could not have asked for any more from Leicester and all the grounds team. They have helped me find my confidence again and given me opportunities to explore. For instance, like working with FIFA which, bizarrely before this happened to me, I

would never have dreamed of doing. I now embrace every opportunity and they continue to support, not just me, but all their staff throughout the club ... this has become even more apparent in these unprecedented times we find ourselves in.

We have a great industry and, since I've been speaking out about mental health, I am surprised (and a little shocked) how prevalent an issue it is in our industry. Even people I have known for many years have

recently spoken to me about their issues, and I had no idea at all that they too were struggling. However, I feel as though there is still a very long way to go in how the industry tackles mental health issues.

So, today, I find I am still a work in progress. But, isn't everyone? As mentioned, I'm still having talking therapy and I now have the support to be able to say, 'you know, I am not okay and that is okay' - because it's okay not to be okay!

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Kent County Cricket Club

Spitfires grounded

Cricket is our summer game; just not this summer. The frustration is most apparent at county level, where all 18 clubs are without income, yet having to keep ticking over. 2020 is the year Kent Cricket celebrates 150 years, but so far, it's a party with no guests. Neville Johnson, spoke to its head groundsman **Adrian Long** to see how things were at pitch level



There may well be areas of difficulty ahead if things stay as they are, notably use of covers which will require additional hands, but we'll cross that bridge when the time comes

The Spitfire Ground, St Lawrence at Canterbury is one of a handful of county cricket venues that have an aura about them, steeped in the game's history, and where you want to be, either playing or watching the game. Adrian Llong has been on the ground staff there for six years, with a spell in charge of Kent's outground, The County Ground, Beckenham. This will be his second season as head groundsman at Canterbury. He was good enough to break off from duties out in the middle for a phone chat about life in lockdown.

This year it is 150 years since the formation of Kent County Cricket Club. It is a special year for the club, one of celebration. How have things changed since February when everyone must have been brimming with optimism and readiness? There was

then a definite buzz about the coming months, Adrian recalls.

"The whole grounds team here was in full flow. After really testing weather, we had been really pleased with how our preparation work had gone."

"Pre-season had been a challenge to us, that's for sure. There were some parts of the ground that lay wet throughout the winter and spring, despite our excellent drainage system."

"The wet conditions meant we had a constant battle with leatherjackets on the outfield too. They decimated the grass in certain patches."

"We'd had to use the flat sheet covers in February, far earlier than usual, in order to have pitches ready to use for pre-season, but surfaces were looking really good. Then someone 'switched the lights out' and life,

let alone cricket, was put on hold," he says.

Kent County Cricket Club had initially furloughed the majority of its non-playing staff and this was followed on April 9th with the furloughing of all its playing staff, with the exception of captain Sam Billings, who has been helping with the club's community work, and Joe Denly, who has a central contract with England.

These decisions followed extensive discussions between first class counties, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and the Professional Cricketers' Association (PCA). The situation has been reviewed since then but, as things stand, there is to be no cricket of any kind until July 1st at the earliest.

In an official statement in early April, Director of Cricket Paul Downton said: "Cricket is, of course, of secondary



Cloudy skies and lights, but play and a good crowd at Canterbury for a Division One County Championship game last season



I miss my other colleagues, but I used to work on my own before I came to Kent and find I can cope with this enforced near solitude by literally fixing my mind on the list of tasks I need to complete each day



Head Groundsman Adrian Long



Assistant Groundsman Riley Nicholson ...

importance during these unprecedented times. The priority of everyone at the Club is the safety and security of the entire Kent Cricket family.”

There would normally be nine full-time groundstaff working at Kent’s two main venues and at Tunbridge Wells Week throughout the season but, from early April, lockdown furlough had reduced this to just three.

At Canterbury, Adrian and his assistant Riley Nicholson are operating quite comfortably under social distance regulations, each with a specific set of machinery. Essentially, Adrian is looking after the square, and Riley the outfield. It’s a division of labour that is working well.

They also take separate break times, so communication is either by phone, or often as not, by speaking loudly when appropriate space and machine noise allows.

“We’ve stuck to Government safety guidelines from the word go, and find things

quite manageable,” says Adrian.

“The Venue Operations Manager, Anna Spencer, has advised us on risk assessment matters and, in all honesty, we’re both getting used to working this way whilst lockdown remains in force.”

Martin Gall is the Grounds Maintenance Manager and he does what he has to do to keep things in good shape beyond the boundary. Communications with him sometimes means a bit of shouting.

The absence of camaraderie and banter that comes with grounds teamwork must be strange, I suggest.

“It is, and I miss my other colleagues, but I used to work on my own before I came to Kent and find I can cope with this enforced near solitude by literally fixing my mind on the list of tasks I need to complete each day. That’s what works for me. That and a bit of long range chat with Riley of course.”

“Having a decent routine is everything - lockdown or no lockdown. It’s just like the

game of cricket. Get the basics right and you’re in business.”

“There may well be areas of difficulty ahead if things stay as they are, notably use of covers which will require additional hands, but we’ll cross that bridge when the time comes.”

A daily routine imposed on the St Lawrence duo in lockdown is the twice-daily spray disinfecting of equipment, notably handles. The shed has never smelt sweeter, jokes Adrian.

Half way through May, ironically the weather couldn’t have been better for guaranteeing uninterrupted play up and down the country pretty much since the season should have opened. Adrian says The Spitfire Ground looks a picture, but there’s no one here to enjoy it. His tone doesn’t disguise his frustration.

“I’m making sure the square is always near ready for play should I get a call from Paul Downton saying he wants the players



Cricket is, of course, of secondary importance during these unprecedented times. The priority of everyone at the Club is the safety and security of the entire Kent Cricket family



Kent Captain Sam Billings



... social distance mowing!

//
Pre-season preparation started three months ago and we had strips ready for play then. There has, of course, been none, but we have to keep on top of things so that cricket can be played here at short notice when the time comes

doing pitch training in a matter of days,” he says.

“Pre-season preparation started three months ago and we had strips ready for play then. There has, of course, been none, but we have to keep on top of things so that cricket can be played here at short notice when the time comes. It’s just that this year we have the longest ever pre-season.”

Are there any jobs you’re having to do

more of?

“Once or twice a week we’re doing a lot of verti-cutting, on the square and in the outfield, especially the practice areas,” says Adrian.

“It’s essential that we keep on top of lateral growth and prevent thatch build-up. Verti-cutting helps keep on top of it. I’m certain that other county groundsmen will be doing much the same.”

“We’re also mowing all areas pretty well every other day and watering where and when necessary.”

Like every other county club, at Kent there is no practice at all six weeks into the phantom season. All the players, with the exception of First Team Captain Sam Billings, are on furlough and simply keeping themselves fit at home. The St Lawrence grass had been totally unhindered by boot,

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Cricket's Big Test

In late May, The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) launched 'Together Through This Test', a nationwide campaign shining a light on the work undertaken by the game in response to COVID-19 and highlighting resources available to the public.

Cricket staff, volunteers and players across the country, from both the professional and the recreational game, had already taken part in over 200 initiatives during lockdown.

Projects include long-distance charity runs, delivering food to the vulnerable and a dedicated phone support service for those left isolated by coronavirus. The ECB had also set up a COVID-19 resource hub showcasing the spirit and solidarity of the cricket family during this toughest of tests.

A focal point of the ECB's campaign was a powerful short film called *The Wait*, narrated by 'national treasure' and cricket fan Stephen Fry. It captures the spirit of the cricket community and underlines the importance of patience during this difficult period.

Stephen Fry said: "It's wonderful how patient everyone has been during this incredibly difficult time. Like many cricket fans, I long to hear the sound of leather on willow again, but while we wait it out, we do, of course, have to stick together and do what we can to support each other."

"It was a pleasure to be able to read Jimmy Lee's poem, which so wonderfully connects the national game with the national spirit."

To see *The Wait* and get more on the ECB campaign visit <https://www.ecb.co.uk>



Kent's Director of Cricket Paul Downton

bat or ball and looks it.

At the time of talking to Adrian, the feeling in cricket circles was that the ECB's priority was to get Test Matches played, even if it meant doing so behind closed doors, which would at least gather in television revenue. Beyond that, Adrian felt that the required bio-testing and restrictions involved to keep everyone in cricket safe was going to challenge everyone in the professional game as never before.

Already, The Hundred tournament, due to be launched this summer, had been dropped. Kent's Beckenham ground would have been used as one of the training camps for this and later on would have staged two of the games in the women's competition. The pitches there are currently in the sole charge of Jess Jackson who is in daily touch with Adrian by phone during lockdown.

Like everyone in cricket, Adrian has to continue preparing the pitches despite the

uncertainty. He described it as a huge waiting game.

Adrian has fortnightly - socially distanced - meetings with club management, and talks by phone several times a week to Paul Downton. There is, of course, regular interchange of emails between the various sectors of club activities.

"Here at Kent we all know what we're all doing and why," says Adrian.

Adrian has trimmed costs by eliminating any unnecessary work and, of course, he is helped here by the absence of any post play repair tasks. The square is getting a normal high level of pre-season treatment, but he is cutting back on outfield feeding for the time being because, as he put it, visual appearance is not so vital until cricket is actually being played and seen.

Also, he and Riley are taking care of any basic repairs to machinery like a cable that went on one of the rollers. They are managing to avoid calling in any outside



An impromptu game of cricket during World War II with the iconic Spitfire in the background



Head Groundsman Adrian Llong - frustration!

help, which is always a useful money saver.

If things do get underway later in the summer, Adrian believes The Spitfire Ground like other county grounds will be 'on duty' deeper into autumn than usual, so combatting morning dew will be a task that moves up the grounds work agenda.

Four day County Championship matches may well be sacrificed to leave room in the remaining weeks for one-day cup and Twenty20 games. Kent Spitfires will be ready for take-off, you can be sure of that, and home fixtures at Canterbury and Beckenham will be staged on pitches fresh and raring to go.

Kent supporters will be raring to go too,

but it is likely they will be distance watching - either when a match is screened or by following a day's progress online. One of its longest fans, a Yorkshire man by chance, was barely off our screens this spring for his remarkable NHS funding feat. Captain - sorry, Colonel - sorry Sir - Tom Moore drew public praise from Kent Captain Sam Billings for his fortitude and endeavour in setting himself a challenge with such a magnificent result, and, of course, for reaching a ton.

"Our challenge is to keep the pitches at The Spitfire Ground healthy and in good enough condition for play to commence pretty well right away when the signal is eventually given," Adrian says.

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Our challenge is to keep the pitches at The Spitfire Ground healthy and in good enough condition for play to commence pretty well right away when the signal is eventually given

"We just have to follow Captain Tom's example and stick with it. Like he says, better days are ahead. We are being patient. Cricket will return."



Kent's famous lime tree ... and other history

Kent County Cricket Club's main ground is the St Lawrence Ground in Canterbury. This ground has been used by the club since 1847 and Kent have played over 500 first-class matches there.

It is famous for having a tree, the St Lawrence Lime, on the playing field. The original tree, around which the ground was built, was broken in two by high winds in January 2005 and replaced by a smaller lime tree later in the same year.

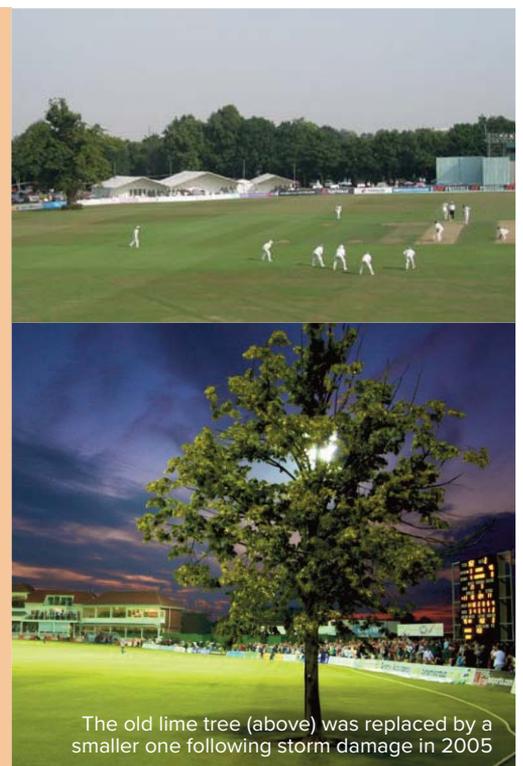
The ground hosts the annual Canterbury Cricket Week, the oldest cricket festival in the world. This dates from 1842 and has been held at the ground since the club moved there.

Kent played their first official match at White Hart Field in Bromley in August 1842 and, since then, have used twenty-nine different grounds within the historic county. Some of these grounds, although

still in the historic county of Kent are now also within the Greater London area.

Two outgrounds remain in regular use, the redeveloped County Cricket Ground, Beckenham and the Nevill Ground in Royal Tunbridge Wells. The latter ground hosts the Tunbridge Wells Cricket Week and has seen over 200 Kent home matches played on it. Former venues include Mote Park in Maidstone, which was used until 2005 and has been the venue for over 200 Kent first-class matches, as well as grounds in Gravesend, Tonbridge, Dover and Folkestone, all of which have had more than 100 home matches played on them.

The county's main offices are based at the St Lawrence Ground. Indoor cricket schools are in place at both this ground and at Beckenham which acts as a centre of excellence for player development in the west of the county.



The old lime tree (above) was replaced by a smaller one following storm damage in 2005

Hollywood Cricket Club

Passing down the skills

It's had a long innings and moved a few times over the years but Hollywood Cricket Club sure excels in the sport. Chris McCullough speaks to main groundsman **Philip McCormick** who is following in his father's footsteps



Don't let the name fool you as to which side of the Atlantic Ocean Hollywood Cricket Club lies on, as this historic venue really highlights excellent sporting achievements in Northern Ireland.

Dating back to 1881, when the club was founded, the first games were played at its original base at Kinnegar, but that was a short-lived relationship.

Four years later, a bad storm blew the pavilion away so the club was forced to find a new home on the nearby Belfast Road, where it stayed until 1996.

This move signalled the start of a few more relocations for Hollywood Cricket Club before it found its forever home, so to speak, at Seapark in Hollywood.

That complicated journey was made even

more difficult in 1997 when the club experienced difficulties as a result of St Paul's Gaelic Athletic Club setting up on an adjacent pitch, which was being used by the cricket club as its outfield. For the 1997 season, the club moved to Sullivan Upper School thanks to the generosity of the school and its then headmaster John Young. This arrangement lasted eight seasons until the club moved to their current home at the Seapark Oval, to give the site its proper title.

Catering for both male and female cricket, Hollywood Cricket Club also incorporates its own cricket academy for all those budding young batsmen and batswomen out there.

The male teams are known as The Black Knights, the junior and youth teams as the Green Dragons, and the women's teams as the Aces and Bandits.

The club has produced many great players over its history and some of those who have excelled are Bill Pollock, Brian Shannon, Ernie Shannon, Con McCall, Stewart McCormick, and Kevin Hinds.

International wicketkeepers that learned the game at Hollywood are Paul Moore and Gary Wilson. On the administration side, the club has produced NCU presidents such as RM Erskine and Dawson Moreland. Cecil Cave was president of what is now Cricket Ireland in 1976.

The Graham Cup, which is the Premier U15 competition on the NCU, is also linked to Hollywood Cricket Club. The cup was donated by Mr H Graham, and his son Harry was a member of the Hollywood team that won the trophy in its first year.

More recently, in 2018, the club created



an extensive schools coaching programme that provides an introduction to the game for many primary and secondary schools in North Down and East Belfast.

The club has a large junior section for both boys and girls, over 300 children in 2019, aged from three years old, and fields two under nine teams; four under eleven hardball teams, including one all-girls team, plus many more.

Also, in 2019, Hollywood introduced Mini Bouncers for kids aged three to seven to provide them with their first contact with the sport of cricket and the fundamentals of movement.

There is also a summer scheme, normally run in July and August, and a summer cricket camp held also during the school holidays.

The man in charge

With such a demanding schedule, the grounds at Hollywood must look their best at all times and that task is the responsibility of Philip McCormick, who also looks after nearby government playing fields on the Stormont Estate.

For the past twenty-five years, Philip has been tending to the grounds at the cricket club as well as his full-time job at Stormont for the past twenty-four years. Now that is a good innings!

Philip said: "I have worked as the main groundsman for Hollywood Cricket Club for the past twenty-five years. It was really my dad who introduced me to this industry in the beginning. He was involved in part time groundsman work at Cregagh and North Down Cricket Club."

"As an eighteen year old, I took on my first full time job at the Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association at Stormont and I am still there some twenty-four years later," he said.

To keep up to date on the latest skills, Philip attended Greenmount College at Antrim in 2000 and completed the NVQ Level 2 in amenity horticulture.

"However, it only took me another seventeen years to

go back and complete the Level 3!" laughed Philip. "My inspiration in wanting to work in the groundcare industry would undoubtedly be my dad William, who also works at Hollywood Cricket Club."

"He still says he taught me everything I know. Others that influenced me were Tommy Hamilton, who was my boss during the first twelve years at Stormont. Also, Karl McDermott at Lord's is someone I admire as he made the move from Dublin and is now working at the pinnacle of cricket groundsmanship," he said.

Hollywood Cricket club is run under a subscription based system which does put pressure on the budgets, as Phillip alluded to when saying "every bag of fertiliser needs to go a long way."

Talking about pitches, the soil profile on the wickets at the club was constructed using a low clay content loam, but the team have been using Surrey Loam's GOSTD 125 loam over the last ten years. The outfield is high sand content, being only 50m from the shoreline, and drains very well, according to Philip.

He said: "We have seven wickets on the square, six are used for matches and one used in quarters to provide four grass practice strips. Each are used for two or three senior sessions, and then rotated. We have a set of four mobile covers and two flat sheets each measuring 80ft x 20ft, should the weather turn bad and we need them."

The ground extends to 2.5 hectares and is also home to one football pitch, a bowling green and four hard surface tennis courts, as well as the cricket fields.

The cricket pitches are used by the club at all levels and pupils from Sullivan School play some games there. The football pitch is located on the outfield and is used by Hollywood FC.

Philip added: "On the other side, we would play kids cricket on the outfield during the summer. There is one artificial wicket used for practice and kids cricket."

Philip is certainly a busy man when the main sporting seasons roll out but, as every groundsman knows, good preparation is the key to having the best grounds possible.

“Our work at the cricket club starts in late March with pre-season rolling using our Stothert & Pitt 32RD,” said Phillip. “Then, usually around Easter, we hire in a 2.5 tonne roller from a local hire company for a few days. The square is marked out at this time and wickets selected for first games.”

“Grass cutting usually begins on the square before the first roll and continues as needed. Usually, there isn’t much growth until mid-April as being so far up north it takes a bit longer for the soil temperatures to pick up.”

“One cut a week at 13mm does it until the end of April, and then twice weekly cuts continue for the rest of the season,” he said.

“Wicket preparation starts two weeks before the first match with a light scarification if the sward needs thinning out, otherwise a brush with the Sisis MK5 is carried out just to lift the grass before cutting at 9mm.”

“Then we continue to roll, covering and drying until match day with the cut height being lowered to six to seven millimetres two days before the game.”

“Marking out is usually done two days before the game, but plenty of times it’s been left to an hour before start time!”

“We use our wickets for a maximum of two weekends in a row, depending on weather conditions, and always have two wickets prepared at any one time.”

Pitch procedures

Some of the main issues at the cricket club for Philip are the coastal winds plus a lack of a water source at the square.

“Our biggest issue is watering as we have no water point at the square,” explains Phillip. “Instead, a garden hose is run from the pavilion out to the square and a B&Q travelling sprinkler does the job, albeit very slowly.”

“We would then stick a sheet on to keep the moisture in. Fortunately, it’s a rare event getting the hose out as global warming means global wetting



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At the end of 2019, there were 326 registered participants from ages three to eighteen, of which forty percent were female. This was a remarkable turnaround in numbers; from the brink of extinction to the equal, or better, of any cricket club in Northern Ireland

in Northern Ireland!”

After a wicket is used, a light fertilisation using a 16:16:16 mix is used as it is “cheap and does the job.” The ends are seeded using Proseed 365 and seed spotter, or by Philip’s handmade dimpler, and then levelled up with GOSTD 125 loam.

Philip said: “My dad is a great help. When I’m busy with international cricket at Stormont, he takes up most of the slack and prepares the wickets at Holywood and only really leaves the marking and cutting the square to me.”

“Presentation of an international cricket square is a top priority and it’s no different for my club ground. End of season work starts with cutting the square down to 4mm and this usually means three passes and a lot of brown bins being filled.”

“A light scarification with the Sisis MK5 in two directions precedes the main passes by the Sisis SR600 set at a depth of around 5mm depending on hardness of the square. The thought of getting the hose out to water the whole square scares me!”

“Three bags of Proseed 365 are applied and brushed into the grooves, and then fifty bags of GOSTD 125 are added using a Sisis Truspread over the seven wickets and finally dragmatted in.”

“The ends are then levelled before one bag of 16:16:16 fertiliser is applied. After that, all there is to do is rope off the square in an effort to keep the footballers off.”

“Winter aeration starts six weeks later using the Groundsman 345HD and I aim to spike monthly and fertilise with one bag of 6:5:10 each time. The fertiliser and seed we use is dictated by budget and obviously I’d like to replicate what I use at Stormont, but the seed germinates, the grass grows and the wickets are good, so I can’t really complain.”

“Our weather patterns are definitely changing. There has only been one good summer in the last three. Wetter summers with extremely heavy downpours and warmer winters seem to be the norm now,” said Philip.

The team at Holywood Cricket Club occasionally take soil cores to check root depth but have never checked what’s in the clay. The long-term project at the club would be to have a specific practice area with astro and turf wickets for youth and senior cricket.

When it comes to investing in machinery at the club any purchase is, of course, dependent on budgets.

Philip said: “Three years ago we got a grant approved for the scarifier and aerator which we had to have to prepare the pitches



Holywood Cricket Academy

From a historic low point in 2016 of only twenty or so registered children, the junior section of Holywood Cricket Club has expanded enormously in number and range.

At the end of 2019, there were 326 registered participants from ages three to eighteen, of which forty percent were female. This was a remarkable turnaround in numbers; from the brink of extinction to the equal, or better, of any cricket club in Northern Ireland.

This respectable achievement was only reached through engagement with various schools. The club now has in-school delivery of cricket for between six to ten weeks to more than 1,500 children and twelve schools.

The club is very popular with female

players and has four all girls teams - the only cricket club in Northern Ireland to have this - which gives it a significant advantage to attract and inspire young female players. The girls still play on mixed boys and girls teams, but now they have single gender teams too, playing against boys’ teams.

In order to develop the large numbers of kids, the club has created a coaching academy to deliver technical development to the junior players. Led by former Irish International James Shannon, NCU coach Mike Grossett and Holywood lead coaches John Hunter, Emma McCay and Philip Wilson, the Holywood Cricket Academy runs all year round at partner schools of Sullivan Upper and Rockport, as well as at the home ground of Seapark.

What’s in the shed?

- Sisis MK5 scarifier
- Lloyds Paladin pedestrian mower
- Stohtert & Pitt roller
- Groundsman 345 HD aerator
- Waterhog water collector





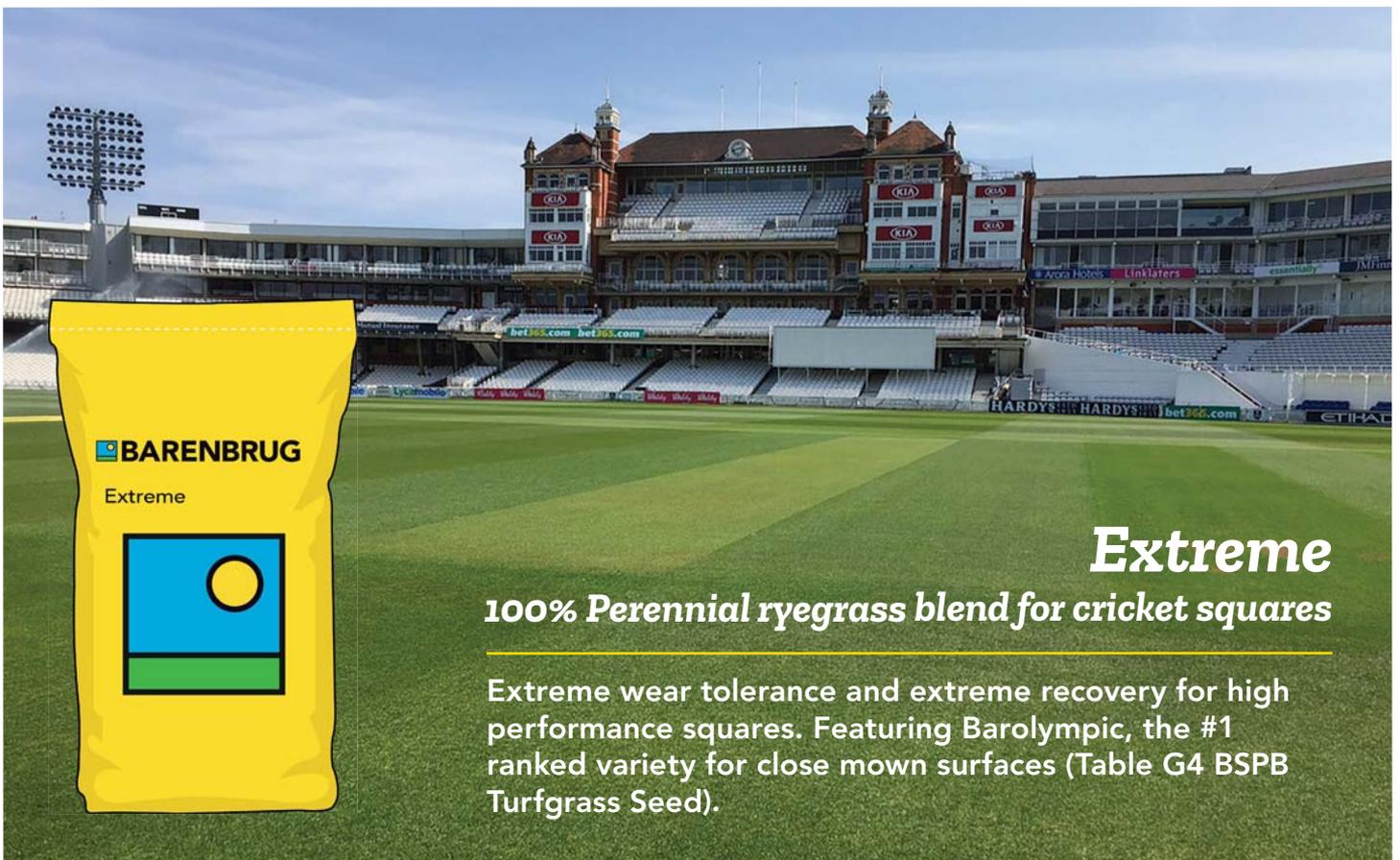
We would then stick a sheet on to keep the moisture in. Fortunately, it's a rare event getting the hose out as global warming means global wetting in Northern Ireland



and be able to do end of season renovations.”

“We are currently in need of a roller which would be part of a grant or internal funding by holding fundraisers throughout the year. Both the scarifier and the aerator were bought through local dealers.”

“Overall, we have the machinery we need to do the job. The equipment doesn't need to be brand new or replaced every few years as long as it is looked after regularly and given a basic sharpen and service every year,” he concluded.



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The Edgbaston Priory Club

Coronavirus: the impact



It's fair to say we've agonised over writing this article; the new normal is dictated by Coronavirus, and as much as we wanted to write something different (and possibly more uplifting), the simple fact is that the biggest story of the year 2020 is just too big to ignore.

Our journey navigating the last few months has seen us having to overcome massive challenges, alter our methods to fit a changing picture and, ultimately, allowed us the chance to attain some of the highest job satisfaction we've ever known. Grounds Manager **David Lawrence** and Assistant Grounds Manager **John Lawrence** at The Edgbaston Priory Club report

In early 2020, we had conversations about writing a very different article. One that looked at one of the most positive aspects of the work we are involved in, namely our association with the Heart of Birmingham Vocational College and the fantastic success of the internship programme we have been a part of delivering. We wanted to tell a story of the great success our first intern has had in his first eighteen months with us and encourage anyone reading to get involved too.

Whilst that article will get written, like everybody else in our sector (and virtually the rest of the world), Coronavirus has completely altered what we can do, how we can do it, and when we can do it. Of course, this isn't meant in just a professional sense. Everyday life has changed entirely for everybody, and the trials of trying to maintain the grounds of a prestigious members club, which also hosts an international tennis event are, quite frankly,



“
Across society, we all have a duty to adjust to the ‘new normal’ including in our industry, and if the ‘new normal’ for us is to deliver a facility which allows our service users to exercise, socialise, and safely social distance, then we have a responsibility to deliver those experiences”



a long way down on most people's list of priorities.

Like most of the country, we spent the early part of 2020 hearing of a mystery illness which was spreading through Wuhan, China. Whilst the early presence of Coronavirus in the east was cause for concern, we simply could not imagine the impact it would go on to have. Even as the first confirmed cases were identified in the UK in late January and early February, we were still gearing up for a 'normal' season. We'd also agreed on the subject of the previously mentioned article to produce for this magazine!

Even as the scale of the outbreak in China escalated, and spread to other parts of the world, it was not immediately obvious that it would have an impact on day-to-day life in the UK. The obvious assumption for many of us who aren't epidemiologists was that, much like illnesses such as SARS and MERS, Covid-19 would be contained before it had a chance to have any real impact on our lives. Obviously, the ending to this story is very different, but hindsight makes critical thinking much easier.



The first week of lockdown working was incredibly unusual. We had two courts which required a full autumn renovation as they had been in play until late September

We first began to explore the idea that Coronavirus might have an impact on our operation in early March, as the number of confirmed cases became more than a 'handful' and, sadly, deaths associated with the disease began to occur and rise. We were also following events in Italy, and were aware of the various stages of lockdown being implemented.

At this stage, with the exception of vastly enhanced hygiene procedures, things were still very much business as usual. We still had a members' season to deliver, and a major international event to prepare for. However, to fall on the side of caution, we quickly took the decision to analyse our forecast budget purchases for the first half of 2020. Whilst we hoped that this action would be an unnecessary safety net, we made the call to place orders for all the critical items we would need to continue working should there be any interruption to our supply chains. We were quickly in touch with Mark Allen at Agrovista Amenity to arrange deliveries of grass seed, line marking paint and all the other items we would need to facilitate a tennis season and

maintain our grounds.

We also worked with the Lawn Tennis Association and Stuart Canvas to get our tournament rain covers on to site much earlier than normal. For most of the year, these are stored up the M6 in Warrington, where the Stuart Canvas team can inspect the covers and carry out any repairs. Whilst they were due to be with us in early April, we opted to get them delivered to site early. Our thinking was that as long as the covers were on site, we could get them installed one way or another, even if we had to lead on this ourselves.

We still didn't foresee that the tournament wouldn't happen. Our biggest concern, when arranging the earlier delivery date, was that with all the panic buying going on in supermarkets, that we might struggle to arrange the necessary haulage to get the covers delivered to site, if HGV's started to be prioritised for stocking essential services such as supermarkets. However, by the time the covers were delivered just over a week later, on 17th March, it had become apparent that the situation was much more serious than we could have imagined.





Whilst the early presence of Coronavirus in the east was cause for concern, we simply could not imagine the impact it would go on to have. We were still gearing up for a 'normal' season

The week we had the covers delivered (w/c Monday 16th March) turned out to be the last week that we were open as a club. When we were arranging to have the covers delivered to site, the number of UK deaths was in single figures. Just over a week later, that figure had moved into the hundreds. This was an obvious indication that our season, albeit a minor concern in the grand scheme of things, was undoubtedly going to be impacted, although

we still had no idea how.

On 18th March, as a club, we moved to reduced opening hours, with much of our 'indoor' operation being put on hold or moved outdoors, and by Friday 20th March, in line with the advice of the UK government, the club closed its doors completely.

At this point, our role was very clear; we still had a job to do. Whilst we had seen all our pre-planning as something which would hopefully not be needed, the bottom line

was that we had carried it out under the assumption of a worst-case scenario. This meant that ultimately, we had prepared ourselves to continue working in some form, unless government advice was to stop. As testament to this, we even had plans in place for the grounds team to live on site in order to continue working, and be isolated from the rest of the population!

Realistically, at the point of lockdown, we understood that the Birmingham Classic was

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unlikely to go ahead in 2020. However, this was not confirmed (and would not be for another week or so) so we had to continue to prepare as if it would go ahead, just in case. On top of this, as a members club our grass court season goes on into September. If the club were able to re-open, there would be an expectation that courts would be available.

What therefore followed was an incredibly surreal week of work, aimed primarily at delivering a tournament we were pretty sure wouldn't go ahead. The weather through the autumn and winter had already put us on the backfoot, to the point that we only completed autumn renovations on some of our courts in early April.

With everything that has happened over the last few months, it is worth noting that it is easy to forget how awful the winter of 2019/20 was. Like many venues in our industry we suffered, unable to maintain surfaces which sat wet for months. We do realise how lucky we have been to continue maintaining our site and surfaces through the lockdown. We know many smaller venues and clubs will have not had

this opportunity, likely for understandable financial reasons, and the impact of vastly reduced maintenance during the pandemic will only exacerbate the problems caused by the winter we've all faced. As an industry we're going to have to really pull together to support each other, and particularly the smaller clubs and grass roots venues that contribute so much to our industry, as well as sport in this country.

As mentioned above, the first week of lockdown working was incredibly unusual. We had two courts which required a full autumn renovation as they had been in play until late September, when the weather changed, seemingly permanently! We also had another three courts which required a full top dressing as we'd been unable to complete this work the previous autumn. However, to really top things off, the three courts which had received a 'full' autumn renovation also required a full over seed and top dressing to address the damage the winter had caused.

As noted in some of our previous articles, we aim to keep a winter cutting height of 12mm, as this allows better air movement



As we headed into early May, we were becoming increasingly optimistic that some restrictions might be eased, and so we started to assess where we were with our grass courts





For a lot of our members, the club is their touchpoint with friends. It is the place they got to socialise; to enhance their mental wellbeing as well as exercise physically

through the grass sward, and also makes it easier for us to break up and clear worm casts more effectively. However, the 2019/20 winter meant that this was completely unattainable. Our first cut of 2020 saw us coming down from a grass length of around 30mm, with this extra length through the winter contributing to a fair amount of die off through damping off and disease. As such, the courts were not in good health, and we spent the first week of lockdown working some very long hours to try and get to grips with the length of the grass on our courts, and the outstanding renovation procedures.

Despite the volume of work, we also had to adjust to a new way of working, to make the workplace as safe as possible. This is a good time to point out how helpful BIGGA (British and International Golf Greenkeepers

Association) have been throughout all of this. We have been BIGGA members for a number of years now and have always found the information they put out to be particularly useful. However, the practical advice they have put out throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, and their lobbying of government to attain clear advice on the position of greenkeepers and ground staff during this time has been invaluable.

Indeed, we quickly adapted documents they had created to implement our own safe working practices. This covered everything from the way staff travelled to work, to the sanitisation of equipment, keeping works vehicles to specific operators, and even allocating specific toilets to specific individuals! We needed to ensure our team felt safe coming to work; through all of this, health has been the most important

factor to consider, and it was imperative that we never lost sight of this in pursuing a continued service output from our department.

During the second week of lockdown, the news we had been expecting was announced; namely that the Wimbledon Championships for 2020 had been cancelled. As a result, the rest of the grass court season, including the Birmingham Classic fell off the calendar. Whilst this was a disappointment, it wasn't entirely unexpected at this point. As we've alluded to above, we were becoming aware of the seriousness of the public health crisis and were fully expecting that the 2020 tournament would be very unlikely to happen.

As a result of this, we'd already begun to shift our mindset in the week leading





Centre Court



The happiness and job satisfaction we've felt, having been able to facilitate just that, for our members, and the community we are part of, is exhilarating

up to the announcement. Firstly, if the Birmingham Classic had gone ahead, we were viewing it as a bonus, but in the grand scheme of things it wasn't really important to the situation.

Firstly, we felt a responsibility to our colleagues. Like many businesses, we've had staff who have had to be placed on furlough. We therefore felt an obligation to ensure that the site they came back to was something special. Our fear was that if we allowed the site to be anything less than what our members have come to expect, this could potentially have a negative impact on membership numbers. We're also aware

though, that people build an impression of our club when they first step foot through the gates, long before they make it into reception. We might specialise in sports turf, but we're aware that we play a significant role in membership satisfaction, and the satisfaction of our current members, as well as the ability to recruit new ones, has a financial impact on the business which ultimately equates to people's jobs.

Secondly, we also felt that as a (partly) outdoor sports venue, we were always likely to be one of the first businesses to be able to open, at least in part, as restrictions were eased. We therefore saw a responsibility to our members to make sure that when we could open the gates, we had facilities for them to use. For a lot of our members, the club is their touchpoint with friends. It is the place they got to socialise; to enhance their mental wellbeing as well as exercise physically. It was important to us to make sure that when we got the go ahead to allow some activity to resume, we were ready to go as quickly as possible.



Artificial court maintenance





Artificial court maintenance



Our thinking was that as long as the covers were on site, we could get them installed one way or another, even if we had to lead on this ourselves

These two priorities made it easy for us to reassess and refocus when the Birmingham Classic was cancelled. As much as we love the tournament, and can't wait for 2021, for 2020 at least, we have felt as though we've had a greater purpose. As a collective our team really bought in to this ethos, and it allowed us to carry on at pace through the lockdown.

With our 'spring' autumn renovations completed on the grass courts, we then

turned our attention to our artificial surfaces. The grow-in period on the grass afforded us a window to complete some pre-season works on the surfaces, which included topping up sand infill on four of our artificial grass courts, and sand dressing on our two clay courts. Throughout lockdown, we also significantly increased the frequency of routine brushing of all our artificial surfaces. The foot traffic associated with general play, along with the routine maintenance

carried out by our maintenance contractors Sports and Courts Limited, is normally enough to keep the courts in top condition. However, with no members on site it fell to us to artificially keep the surface agitated. Ultimately, any stagnation of the surfaces would likely lead to the ingress of weeds, as well as moss and algae, and so we were keen to guard against this.

We also pressed on with pressure washing of the block paving around our

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There is no greater feeling for us, than to come to work everyday and see people, having had to be isolated for so long, now able to come together to safely enjoy sport again

site. In truth this had been a job we started through the winter, when the poor weather limited what we could do with our natural surfaces. Whilst our main walkways tend to stay relatively clean, owing to the foot traffic, the further reaches of our car parks, and some of the lesser used walkways were beginning to look less than desirable. The period of closure allowed us to finish the cleaning of these areas, and also to top up the sand brushed into the block paving.

Throughout the early weeks of the lockdown, we were mindful of capturing all the work that was going on around the site. There was going to be a big change in the look of vast areas of the site between the time of the lockdown starting, and when members were able to return. We even took this a step further, after a suggestion from the Chairman of the club, and started putting grounds update videos out through YouTube (you can find our channel by searching for Edgbaston Priory Grounds). This offered us a way to engage with our members remotely, and we took this one step further when, at the suggestion of a colleague, we put together a series of lawn care advice videos for our members to work their way through during the lockdown.

Despite all of this, we still had our sights on delivering a grass court season in 2020. As we headed into early May, we were becoming increasingly optimistic that some restrictions might be eased, and so we started to assess where we were with our grass courts. The renovations we

had completed were growing in well, with swards thickening and courts catching up to where they should be for the time of year. However, our biggest challenge was not having the use of the tournament rain covers.

Whilst we had the covers brought to site, and we may have installed them ourselves if push had come to shove in the run up to the tournament, without the temporary staff we take on to operate the covers in the build up to and during the Birmingham Classic, it would be impractical to install and use the covers. Our three practice courts are impossible to operate without temporary staff, and whilst the five match courts can be used by our full-time team of six people, it would take us most of a day to put the covers on or off with such small numbers.

The biggest problem not having the covers presents isn't an obvious one. Most people would assume that the issue would be that when it rains, we can't keep the courts dry. In fact, the problem is that we can't keep the courts wet, at least not in the way we normally would. In a normal year, we use our rain covers to help consolidate the soil profile. We use the covers, left flat on the surface, to pull moisture up from deeper in the profile, a little bit like a roller will do. This means that we are able to consolidate the surface evenly at a depth, which creates a strong soil profile which offers good, even bounce during play.

However, being able to leave a cover flat, also allows us to trap moisture in



Our fear was that if we allowed the site to be anything less than what our members have come to expect, this could potentially have a negative impact on membership numbers





the profile. In dry conditions, like we've experienced through April and May, we're able to irrigate the courts, and then pull the covers on to hold moisture at a desired depth in the profile. This allows us to very precisely control the drying of the courts, and therefore ensure the courts play evenly during the playing season.

This is a particularly effective method with courts like ours, which aren't constructed evenly. This non-uniform construction means that the courts don't drain, or dry evenly, and so being able to hold moisture is imperative to building uniform consolidation, and even playing characteristics across the surface. Whilst we can consolidate the courts using a roller, we don't have the same uniformity of control.

The other challenge not having the tournament rain covers presents is that we lose the ability to 'greenhouse' the courts. On a hot day, we can pull the covers on and inflate them to create a microclimate over the court surface. We've regularly recorded temperatures under the inflatables of over 40°C, even in April and May. The ability to do this in a year where we're playing catch

up on autumn renovations is very useful, and so being so far behind going in to the spring this year meant we really could have done with the covers for getting new grass seed through quickly. There is only so much you can do with germination sheets!

Despite the lack of rain covers, we made the best of what we had, which included moving around a lot of germination sheets, which got us to a point where, at the start of May, we were ready to start measuring and marking in tennis courts on the grass. At the time, we had no indication that we would be able to open any time soon. However, a sense of optimism, coupled with a desire to be as ready as possible when the go ahead came, meant we were keen to press on with his work. Even with some less than helpful weather in early May, and a reduction in staffing levels whilst several of the team had to self-isolate owing to potential Covid-19 symptoms, by the end of the first full week of May, we had all of our grass courts, apart from Centre Court, marked in.

As it turned out, this was good timing on our part. As we now know, on the Sunday 10th May, Boris Johnson announced that

some restrictions would begin to be eased, and by the following day, it became clear that tennis could resume, under strict controls, on Wednesday 13th May. Fortunately, our keenness to be ready in advance paid off, as the Prime Minister hadn't given us much time to prepare otherwise!

The Monday morning saw us drawing up a list of jobs that were still outstanding which needed completing prior to re-opening. We then found ourselves parked in front of our PC's (in our socially distanced offices which have been moved home for the time being!) reading through the technical document released by the government to identify anything else that we need to get done prior to re-opening.

The Tuesday priority to opening, and especially the Wednesday morning, felt strangely similar to the final days and hours before the start of our major tournament, the Birmingham Classic. We've gotten used to the last minute rush to complete jobs in the run up to the event each year, and whilst the jobs were different, for example taping directional signage to paths around the





Centre Court

site, the adrenalin rush of working to hit a deadline was still the same.

What wasn't the same however, was the sense of achievement. Having not been able to open the site for eight weeks, it has been a genuine high to welcome members back, even if only to use the outdoor tennis facilities initially. We understand that the people who use our facility aren't just customers of a gym or hiring a tennis court. They are members of a tight-knit community, which is something we are privileged to be a part of too. Being able to deliver a facility where safely, they can begin to exercise, and more importantly socialise again, is an unbelievable feeling.

At a time when there is, quite understandably, a considerable sadness due to the loss of life we have seen because of Coronavirus, it is important to reflect on positives too. Don't be mistaken; there is far more important work going on, being carried out by heroes across our National Health Service and the Social Care sector. However, across society, we all have a duty to adjust to the 'new normal' including in our industry, and if the 'new normal' for us

is to deliver a facility which allows our service users to exercise, socialise and safely social distance, then we have a responsibility to deliver those experiences. The happiness and job satisfaction we've felt, having been able to facilitate just that, for our members, and the community we are part of, is exhilarating. There is no greater feeling for us on a professional level right now, than to come to work everyday and see people, having had to be isolated for so long, now able to come together to safely enjoy sport again.

With all of that said, we do have one matter outstanding. Having marked in and opened seven of our eight courts, we just had our Centre Court outstanding. At the time of writing (19th May) we've today marked in and 'match striped' the court, and tomorrow, we'll be bringing it in to our regular rotation for use through the playing season. In a normal season, Centre would be used for the first time in the second week of June for our tournament week, and then for a very select number of member events, before being closed for end of season renovations in late July.

This year however, capacity is king. If we have more court space, we can allow more members to use the site whilst still maintaining social distancing. Whilst we'll still need to take the court out of action at the end of July to renovate in preparation for 2021, right now, every court space we have allows more people to make use of the site, and in that sense it would be criminal for us to not make the court available. Hopefully, as many of our members as possible will get the chance to enjoy the experience of playing on our most prestigious court this year, and that next year we'll be back to some semblance of normal!



Having not been able to open the site for eight weeks, it has been a genuine high to welcome members back, even if only to use the outdoor tennis facilities initially



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So, do 3G football pitches require regular maintenance? The straightforward answer is yes. 3G pitches should be brushed regularly and have a maintenance schedule in line with that recommended by the manufacturer. As a guide, the industry has a general rule of one hour's maintenance required to every ten hours of use.

3G surfaces should not have any rubber visible on the surface; if rubber lies on the surface, it is a sign that the pitch needs maintaining. There are a number of external companies who provide additional maintenance for de-compaction and deep cleaning. The FA encourages sites to take the maintenance of their facility extremely seriously.

An artificial turf pitch (ATP) is a great

addition to any sports facility and should be seen as an advantage as it will assist any adjoining natural turf pitches. However, it will not be maintenance free, weatherproof and better than natural turf as they still can become flooded, subject to freezing conditions or get covered with fallen leaves - but this shouldn't be seen as a burden. All of this can be taken care of if one plans the maintenance of an ATP over the coming autumn and winter months

The FA is aware that the playability of the surface needs to remain as consistent as possible throughout its life span. Unless a pitch is maintained properly, it will lose some of its playing quality in the long term.

Artificial turf certainly demands less investment in time and cost for maintenance and can be used for many more playing hours than a natural turf pitch. Maintenance

on an artificial pitch is just as important as a natural playing surface.

The correct maintenance of a synthetic surface ensures the optimum performance of the facility is achieved for the longest period of time and that the operator is able to maximise the investment.

The need to maintain a synthetic surface is fundamental for several reasons. These can be highlighted as follows:

- Longevity
- Playing Performance
- Safety
- Aesthetics

The maintenance does not need to be complex or costly, but it does need to be consistent and effective. When an artificial turf surface is used, the footfall will naturally

3G playing surfaces

Maintenance is essential

GKB's **Tom Shinkins** discusses the importance of maintaining 3G artificial football pitches to comply with exacting standards and to ensure the full-life of the surface

compact the infill and flatten the fibres; the infill is imperative in supporting the fibres.

The fibres stand vertically to ensure the correct playing characteristics are met and the resultant surface gives all the important traction and ball bounce the player demands. It is necessary to move the infill around the surface to prevent it from compacting and locking. Should the infill compact, the surface will become hard under foot; drainage ability will be reduced and, inevitably, the fibres will no longer be supported and cause them to lie horizontally.

This is when we see surfaces which may look aesthetically good, but truly are not. The 'tell-tale' green haze of a 3G pitch tells the trained eye that the surface may not be receiving the maintenance it requires. It should have a slightly black 'tinge' to

indicate the rubber infill is near the top of the fibres and is in situ to do its job. Should the fibres be left in the horizontal position, and play continues, then the most vulnerable part of the fibre is exposed to loading and UV. This will undoubtedly cause premature wear and breakage of the fibre, dramatically reducing the expected life of the carpet.

This is where the simplest and most effective tool any groundsman will own should be utilised - the brush. Whilst not the most engaging of implements, this tool will do far more than any other when used correctly and at the right intervals. The brush should move infill around the surface, help alleviate compaction and stand fibres up, which should take no more than forty-five minutes to cover a full size surface.

It is commonplace to see an operator

taking some two hours doing maintenance on the surface, only to see very little reward for the effort. Whilst it is good to see some activity, if it's the wrong type of brush or method then the result can be very frustrating for all involved.

A brush can be towed by a small tractor, ride-on buggy or ATV. It will preen the surface, redistribute the infill and stand the fibre up. Taking pride in our work is human nature; we will get more satisfaction from it if it looks different after we have completed the task.

It's always good to work with your contractor and, typically, they should be employed between two and six times a year just to get into your surface and cleaning all the organic matter out. Hair, leaves, skin can cause blockages in drainage. There are a number of synthetic surface contractors out





Brushing and cleaning is not the complete answer to maintaining a synthetic surface. These facilities will also require more intensive cleaning to remove finer materials and particles that will have built up

there that can assist as well as provide you with yearly reports on how your surface is progressing.

Of course, brushing and cleaning is not the complete answer to maintaining a synthetic surface. These facilities will also require more intensive cleaning to remove finer materials and particles that will have built up.

In addition, access and wear is another consideration to educate all on. It is normal to have a 'lazy-end', invariably the half of the pitch nearest the gate. The team only need to train for twenty minutes, so they enter the facility and do what needs to be done - on the same area of the surface every time. This will certainly cause uneven wear across the surface and will not be conducive to maximising the lifespan of the surface. It is important to educate all staff, especially those who look after the booking of the



facility, to ensure the footfall on the surface is well distributed. This can be done by locking nearside gates and opening gates at the far end of the facility.

Weekly maintenance

The surface should be brushed at least once a week. The brushing frequency will be related to the intensity of use; the more often it is used the more often it will need to be brushed.

The main effect of brushing is to get the fibres standing up and the rubber infill supporting the fibre. Many synthetic fibres have a tendency to lean; to help overcome this, regular brushing will tend to keep the fibres upright.

A variety of brush types are used but the most common is the the drag brush. This is normally attached to the rear of a tractor.

Always brush in different directions as

brushing in one direction will tend to cause fibres to lean in that direction. This will result in different ball roll.

Higher wear areas will require additional brushing as this will be a heavy area of play. It is usually most effective to brush the surface when it is dry.

Levelling infill

Penalty spots, corner arcs and goalmouths are prone to disruption of infill, these areas need to be assessed weekly and topped up when required. It is very important to keep the levels correct and fibres upright.

Additional maintenance

There should clearly be signs present on all entrances to the 3G surface regarding no food or beverages to be taken on the surface, whilst chewing gum and smoking should be strictly forbidden.



There should clearly be signs present on all entrances to the 3G surface regarding no food or beverages to be taken on the surface, whilst chewing gum and smoking should be strictly forbidden





Organic matter, like leaves and dirt, will result in moss or weed growth. It is essential to remove as soon as it is practical.

Boot brushes and scrapers must be visible and serviceable; the brush will need replacing every six to twelve months, so ensure you have a ready supply and someone responsible for changing them.

Less frequent maintenance

Check for compaction, particularly in high wear areas. If you feel the surface is hard to walk on, this is a good indication that compaction is within the surface. At this point, a specialist contractor can visit your surface and give you guidance to help prevent this and do necessary works.

Snow/Ice

With artificial turf pitches (ATP) being damp for the majority of the winter months, it is highly likely the surface will freeze through the night, requiring a good risk assessment in the morning. More importantly, when the ATP is in use, checks should be made in the evening as the temperature can drop rapidly, causing the surface to freeze. This can be quite tricky as pockets of frozen material can lie under a few millimetres of infill, so always ensure the players

understand this and monitor the surface during their usage.

Through their very nature, artificial turf surfaces take longer to thaw than natural surfaces and, because of the very limited solar heat during the winter months, ambient ground heat will be the main source available to clear any snow or frost.

PDV salt is used as a preventive on artificial surfaces. This will only work in certain temperatures. To cover a full size surface, the minimum you will need is one tonne. Do not attempt to brush the snow off the surface as this will mount at the sides of the pitch. This will cause the levels to be uneven and new rubber crumb will have to be redressed to the surface

Moss, algae and weeds

Weeds are easily removed by hand if the infestation has become too excessive. Moss and algae require specialist treatment normally using specific chemicals. Pitchcare can advise on the best products to use.

Footwear

Ensure that the correct footwear, as specified by the manufacturer, is worn at all times. Incorrect footwear can cause considerable damage to the surface.

Additional line markings

If you have been asked to put additional line markings on the pitch for mini soccer, this is acceptable so long as it is in a different colour. There are a number of products on the market that can be applied that vary in terms of how long you want the them to last. Again, Pitchcare can provide more information.

Testing

The FA's standard code of rules regarding the use of 3G pitches became effective from 2014/15 season and, provided a pitch has been tested and appears on The FA Register, it will be allowed to be used for match play in all competitions outside the National League System (NLS), i.e. Step 7 and below, including Women's and Youth Football. There is already clear guidance for use of these pitches in FA competitions and also in the NLS and WSL.

All pitches of all sizes wishing to be used for competitive play outside the NLS must be tested in accordance with and in the positions defined in the British Standard for synthetic turf sports surfaces; BS EN 15330-1; by a recognised test house - a test laboratory accredited by FIFA and/or having

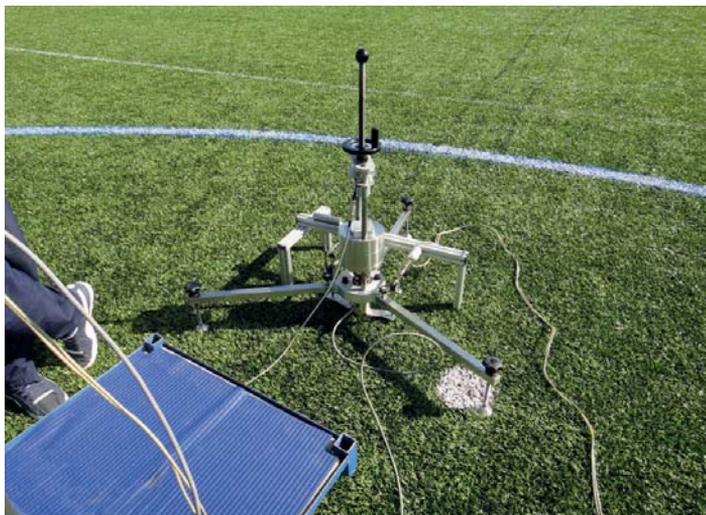
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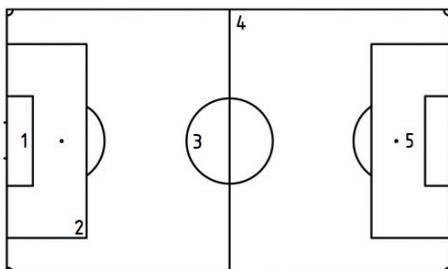
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A copy of the test report will need to be sent to The FA so they can review and determine if the pitch is suitable for competitive play. If suitable, the pitch will be added to the register and the facility operator, County FA and Leagues will be notified of this



ISO 17025 accreditation by UKAS - for each of the tests specified. The facility operator should commission and pay for the cost of this.

Full-size long pile synthetic turf football pitches should be tested in the positions shown in the image left. For smaller pitches (less than 3000m²), positions 1, 3 and 4 should be used.

A copy of the test report will need to be sent to The FA so they can review and determine if the pitch is suitable for competitive play. If suitable, the pitch will be added to the register and the facility operator, County FA and Leagues will be notified of this. If not suitable, then the site should not be used for competitive play until remedial work has been undertaken and another test performed. NB a pitch may still be suitable for training even if it is deemed unsuitable for match play. If a pitch needs to be re-tested and this is not done on the same day, there will be an additional charge.

The pitch will need to be tested every three years to remain on the register. Competitive matches from step 6 and below of the football pyramid will be tested every year.

Conclusion

An active maintenance programme will maximise the lifetime of the carpet. The maintenance programme is based around

simple principles:

- Keeping the surface clean
- Infill levels
- Fibres upright
- Reporting minor defects before they become major problems.

Article written by Tom Shinkins, Operations Manager, GKB Machines Limited.

Telephone: 07495 883617

Email: tom@gkbmachines.com



The pitch will need to be tested every three years to remain on the register. Competitive matches from step 6 and below of the football pyramid will be tested every year



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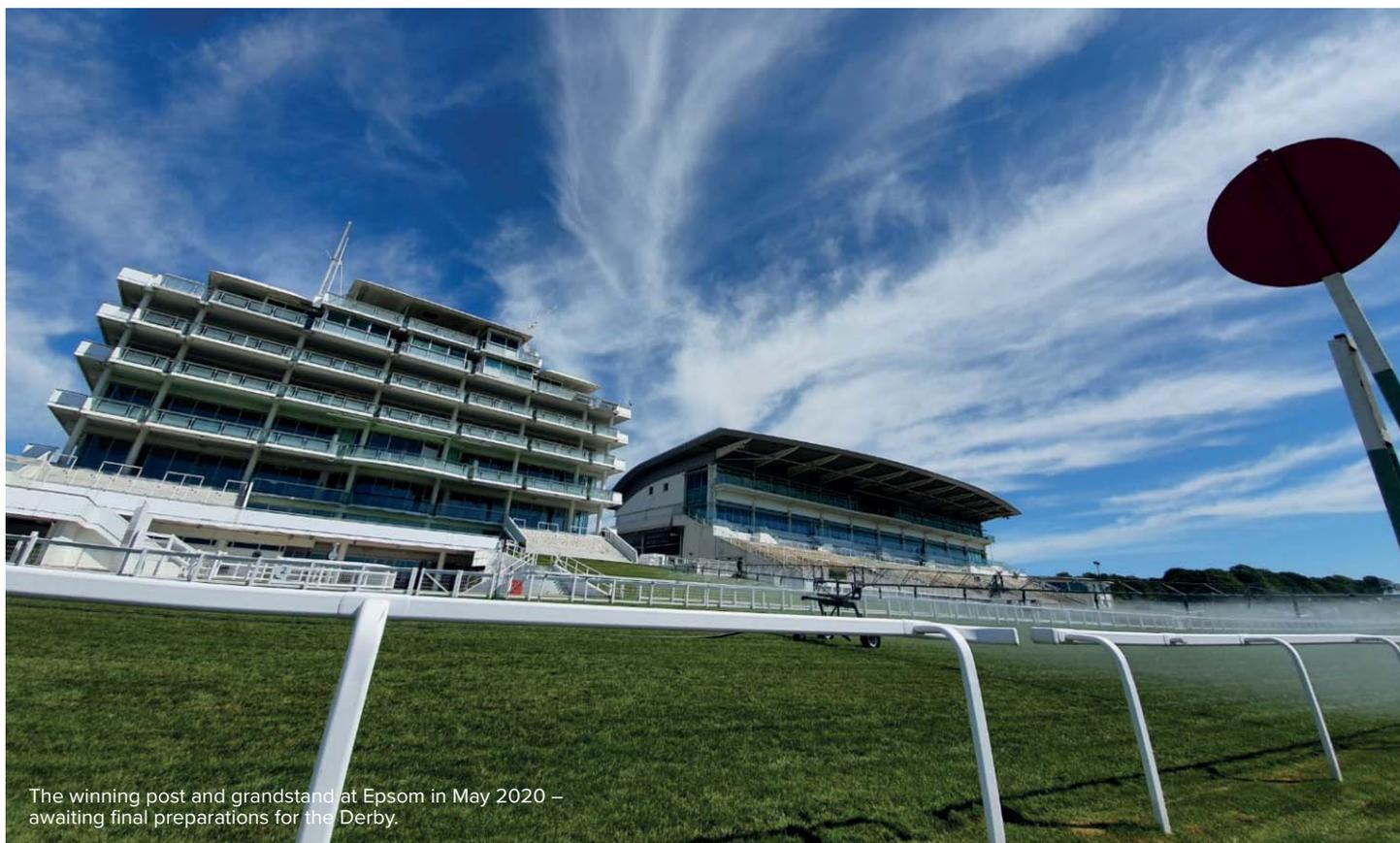
Equestrian Lockdown

Adapting to the 'new normal'

Andrew Cooper and Craig Williamson, working together to get Epsom and Sandown Park ready for the resumption of racing (photo taken before Covid-19 restrictions)



The groundcare regime has been kept pretty much as normal at Sandown, but there's been more uncertainty surrounding Epsom and its ability to race behind closed doors



The winning post and grandstand at Epsom in May 2020 – awaiting final preparations for the Derby.

Equestrian sports have been as hard hit as any with major championships cancelled and racing and polo seasons put on hold. But turfcare regimes have continued and are now stepping up a pace to ensure perfect footing when resumption is allowed. Managing groundstaff, participants and would-be spectators - who may be excluded for much of the year - is another challenge

Jane Carley speaks to three top equestrian venues to find out their plans moving forward from lockdown

Epsom and Sandown Park

Andrew Cooper and Craig Williamson

When racing in the UK was brought to a halt on 17th March, the grounds team which looks after Epsom and Sandown Park was looking ahead to its jumps season finale at Sandown before switching its focus to preparations for the Investec Derby.

“We knew early on that we would lose the Sandown meeting, plus the April season-opener at Epsom so, since then, I’ve been working on how we will run racing behind closed doors once we have resumed, and visiting the racecourses at least once a week, whilst Regional Estates Manager Craig Williamson and his team have been keeping the tracks ticking over,” explains Head of Racing and Clerk of the Course Andrew Cooper.

The uncertainty of the resumption date - initially set for 1st May and then pushed back to 1st June - had made groundcare regimes more challenging, he admits.

“We usually work to having the tracks in

optimum condition for a specific date or race meeting. At the moment, the Derby and Oaks are scheduled for Saturday 4th July, as if racing resumed in June, to allow a four-week period after the 2000 Guineas, now planned to run on 6th June.”

Whilst there is a provisional target date in place for Epsom, Sandown’s fixtures resumed on 13th June, although Andrew expects that it will be required to stage plenty of racing going forward.

“The groundcare regime has been kept pretty much as normal at Sandown, but there’s been more uncertainty surrounding Epsom and its ability to race behind closed doors.”

The legendary home of the Derby has also experienced some logistical complications due to the pandemic.

“We had planned to replace the irrigation pumps in early 2020, but we were not able to complete the work once lockdown began as it required working in underground tanks using breathing apparatus,” explains Craig Williamson. “However, we were able to



We were able to source a diesel pump from Briggs and, along with my deputy Chris Youngs, I've integrated it into our system so that we now have the required irrigation capacity



Planned replacement of underground irrigation pumps at Epsom was put on hold, so Estate Manager Craig Williamson worked with supplier Briggs to find a solution

source a diesel pump from Briggs Irrigation and, along with my deputy Chris Youngs, I've integrated it into our system so that we now have the required irrigation capacity."

The Epsom track had been 'put to bed' in the normal way in October 2019, with scarification and aeration to get it through the winter, and then kept dormant apart from an early application of seaweed pre-lockdown.

"We had to take account of the staff shortages due to necessary self-isolation and furloughing, but it has stayed in good condition with a full grass cover, despite the very wet and then very dry spring," comments Craig. "In mid-May, we began feeding and bringing back the turf ready for the resumption."

At Sandown, the cancellation of the National hunt Finale meant that the jumps track missed out on its normal levels of irrigation and end of season renovations.

"It's something we will have to look at in the autumn. We've kept it cut a bit shorter to reduce the mowing frequency requirement

for our smaller team," comments Andrew.

"However, the flat track is ready to go as we were prepared for a May resumption."

A more pressing dilemma for Andrew was how to facilitate racing 'behind closed doors' at Epsom where an Act of Parliament grants the local community the 'right to take air and exercise' on the Downs, theoretically 365 days a year.

"We needed to find a compromise, having never envisaged that public access could jeopardise the Derby. Similar issues exist at other courses such as York and Chester for example, but we wanted to find a way forward that would maintain the history and unique test of the Derby which can only be achieved by running it at Epsom," he says.

Having studied law at university, he scrutinised the 1984 Epsom and Walton Downs Regulations Act in detail and saw that it might be possible to enclose the entire 150ha area for twenty-four hours, using fencing and stewards to exclude the public.

The proposal was then put to the Epsom

and Walton Downs Conservators - a ten-strong committee comprising six members of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, three from the racecourse, including Andrew himself, and Horserace Betting Levy Board representative and local trainer Simon Dow. At a meeting, held via the now-ubiquitous video conference, it was agreed in mid-May.

Racing behind closed doors will mean that the world's most famous race will be attended by a maximum of 250 people, including racecourse staff, jockeys, trainers, stable lads and TV crews.

"We're still testing the protocols needed - which could include Perspex cubicles for jockeys to change in, while all jockeys and staff will wear masks."

The racecourse will cover the cost of the fencing for the Derby meeting, but the difficulties of excluding the public could cast doubt on the rest of the season.

"Whilst the community will support the move for the Derby, it's questionable whether we can disrupt their rights for later meetings," Andrew says. "Sandown could



We needed to find a compromise, having never envisaged that public access could jeopardise the Derby. We wanted to find a way forward that would maintain the history and unique test of the Derby



An act of Parliament means that the public have free access to walk on Epsom Downs even on race days; permission has been given for the Jockey Club to enclose the area for this year's one-day Investec Derby meeting



The unique features of Epsom, including Tattenham Corner, make it a special test of the racehorse, an incentive to keep the Derby in its 'home' despite the obstacles encountered



Everyone has set jobs and their own machines and we tend to work alone anyway, with the tasks well spaced out around the course

potentially take the Epsom fixtures, and we would have to factor in the extra turfcare requirement there accordingly."

The later running of the Derby also presents some groundcare dilemmas at Epsom itself, explains Craig.

"We normally plan Chafer Grub treatment for a couple of weeks after the Derby, but this year it will have to be done before. It can stress the grass so we will aim to boost its health and then fertilise to get the turf to its peak for July."

A number of staff across the business were furloughed from the outset, with three groundsman required to self-isolate for twelve weeks due to health conditions.

"We also had to furlough two apprentices as it is not practical to supervise them under social distancing rules, so we are down from five groundsman to two at Epsom and from ten to seven at Sandown, working under Craig, whilst the stable manager is also taking on groundcare tasks," he explains. "The teams work across both tracks as

necessary to keep up with jobs such as brushcutting, litter picking and watering. We can be quite stretched if someone is off sick or a machine goes down."

Craig says that putting social distancing measures in place has not been too trying.

"Everyone has set jobs and their own machines and we tend to work alone anyway, with the tasks well spaced out around the course. We've made sure that all staff have access to their own pick-up so they are not having to travel around the



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Hickstead is regarded as the home of show jumping, with its unique arena and fences attracting large spectator numbers in a 'normal' year



A dry spring meant plenty of watering was needed, but by May, the new sward was coming on well

course together. Divot filling and repair work will have to be monitored; we supervise course repair contractors after racing, but need to work out how they will travel etc.”

Andrew Cooper reflects: “The team are working hard and getting on well and we will be ready to race, but the timing of the Derby remains dependent on what happens next with the virus and, consequently, with the resumption of racing.”

Hickstead

Edward and Lizzie Bunn

At Hickstead, the Bunn family has taken the difficult decision to cancel the Longines Royal International Horse Show, due to run 21-26 July, and the internationally-renowned Al Shira'aa Hickstead Derby Meeting, which had already been postponed from June to September.

Plans to run a smaller event, the Science Supplements All England Jumping

Championships in September, are continuing, although this will be reassessed on an ongoing basis.

The All England Jumping Course was first opened in 1960, and this season was due to celebrate its 60th anniversary.

Director Edward Bunn, responsible for the day-to-day running of the venue alongside his sister Lizzie, has taken a hands-on role in groundcare.

“We’re coming to terms with having cancelled our two major shows, but recognise that running horse shows ‘behind closed doors’ in the way that is proposed for racing would not work. We have 3,500-4,000 horses over the duration of the show and each is accompanied by an average of three people, so that’s 3,000 people per day, which would make social distancing impossible.”

To accommodate the horses, 1,500 stables are brought in, another challenge for social distancing as the walkways between

them are just 4m wide. Other issues include pinch points around the site and the difficulty of judging horses without coming in close proximity with their riders, grooms or the stewards.

“Spectators are also key to the atmosphere of the event, as well as its finances, along with the trade stands. But the seriousness of the situation was brought home to us when one of our most senior show jumping judges recently died of coronavirus, and ultimately there is far more at stake than just horse shows.”

That said, Hickstead’s famous turf continues to get the utmost in care, and the initial postponement of fixtures allowed Edward to carry out renovations to the main arena that have not been possible during the wet winter.

“We’ve fraise mowed the surface, decompacted with an Earthquake and Verti-Drain, spread 180 tonnes of sand and reseeded,” he explains.



At Hickstead, initial postponement of major fixtures allowed the main arena to be renovated ...



... contractors fraise mowed the surface, decompacted with an Earthquake and Verti-Drain, spread 180 tonnes of sand and reseeded



Hickstead is renowned for its unique obstacles



A new innovation at Hickstead, schooling facilities constructed on two all-weather arenas, has been highly popular and is now available for hire once again, under strict social distancing rules

In the absence of much rain in April, the irrigators have been kept busy, and a recent inspection showed satisfying recovery.

With four groundstaff furloughed, the team is down to one full time groundsman, one building maintenance man and a self-employed contractor. Edward and his son William are also taking turns on the tractor seat.

"We're mowing, applying fertiliser and irrigating the other grass arenas as necessary, and keeping the rest of the showground tidy," he says.

Show ring four has been all-weather since 2011 and, in 2019, ring three was also surfaced. The two are linked and can be hired for cross-country jumping training, a facility which re-opened in mid-May as lockdown was eased and the British Equestrian Federation issued new guidance on riding and training horses.

"They just needed watering and harrowing so were easy to prepare,"



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Edward Bunn, whose family own Hickstead, turned groundsman to help with staff shortages during lockdown
© John Perlam



We don't want to lay staff off - we've been grateful for the government's staff retention scheme and, including the admin team, we've got twelve on furlough. They are one of our greatest assets and they are keen to have a job to come back to

comments Edward. "The cross-country hire scheme has been a big success - it was used by 2,000 people over the winter - and will make a welcome contribution to our income. We've undertaken an extensive risk assessment so that we can meet social distancing and hygiene requirements."

Advance bookings are taken from up to six individual riders (reduced from the usual eight) for timed slots in the arenas. To meet government guidelines they may only be accompanied by a trainer or groom - who must travel separately if they are not from the same household - and group bookings are not being accepted.

Collapsible marker flags on the fixed obstacles have been removed where possible and hand sanitiser points located around the arena and marked parking spaces. Toilet facilities will only be available by phoning for a lock combination to avoid overcrowding, and signs have been posted to remind participants about social distancing.

On site first aiders will have appropriate PPE and the local ambulance service has been alerted.

"We're only taking bookings two weeks ahead - we're normally booked up months in advance - in case lockdown is tightened but from the moment we announced the re-opening we have been inundated with enquiries."

Edward says that the family-owned business has reserves that it can call on, but some major renovations may be delayed for twelve months due to the shortfall in income from cancelled events.

"We'll continue to do safety-critical work, for example we're re-decking one of the grandstands."

He adds that there are few opportunities for cost cutting - the venue's insurance bill alone is £70,000, which could be reduced by £10,000 if public liability for events is not

required, and business rates will be returned.

"We don't want to lay staff off - we've been grateful for the government's staff retention scheme and, including the admin team, we've got twelve on furlough. They are one of our greatest assets and they are keen to have a job to come back to."

Plans for a celebration of Hickstead's 60th anniversary will merely be put on hold, he says.

"No problem is insurmountable. We will run next year and, although we have been unable to celebrate 60 continuous years, it will still be our 60th anniversary!"

Guards Polo Club

Antony Fanshawe

Guards Polo Club began stick and balling in mid-May, ahead of a possible return to competitive polo in mid-June.

Polo Manager Antony Fanshawe explains that a reduced team of ten groundstaff has been busy getting the fields ready, whilst adhering to social distancing rules.

"We're progressing steadily, gradually reducing the height of cut down towards 20-22mm where it will need to be for tournaments. May was very dry, so irrigation has been key, and we also verti-drained the fields - it takes 4-5 days to do each one, so it's a slow process," he says.

Topdressing with sand is on hold until just before play begins and, whilst slow release fertiliser has been applied, liquids will also be reserved for final preparations.

"We have to do as much as we practically can otherwise we won't be able to catch up when the resumption is confirmed," he explains. "We're just waiting for rain so that we can take the cut height down. Frosts in May were also an issue - I didn't want to mow too close and risk damage but, on the other hand, if you leave the sward too long,



Polo Manager Antony Fanshawe



Guards Polo Club is home to the Cartier International Polo; as the grounds are within Windsor Great Park, consideration will have to be given to managing public access once the season starts © Images of Polo



The newly constructed Princes' Ground at Guards - members are taking part in an online auction to be the first to play on it

poa can take hold.”

The club plans to extend the season into October, and hopes that the uptake will be sufficient that all ten fields will be needed, Antony explains.

“Costs have already been cut by the later start and, if we don't need all of them, we simply don't make the final preparations. We have also delayed putting the boards out, which gave a further advantage that we could continue to cut at different angles and reduce the scuffing on turns.”

Guards has rescheduled its flagship tournament, the Cartier Queen's Cup, to 28

July - 23 August, and Antony is hopeful that some sort of spectator presence may be possible by then, although resumption will initially be 'behind closed doors'. This may be slightly more difficult to achieve than for many clubs, seeing as the fields are at Smiths Lawn in Windsor Great Park.

“The park has been busy right through lockdown with walkers, cyclists and horse riders, so we will have to consider how this will be managed,” comments Antony. “We have been stick and balling in the quieter areas and, in normal circumstances, it is never an issue, but I understand the need to

avoid crowds of people congregating.”

2020 also marks the debut of a newly constructed field, the Princes' Ground, and the club has gone some way to satisfying members' competitive needs with an online auction for the opportunity to be the first to stick and ball on the field, in aid of a local domestic abuse charity.



Action from last year's Cartier International Polo © Images of Polo



**Windsor Great Park
has been busy right
through lockdown with
walkers, cyclists and
horse riders, so we will
have to consider how this
will be managed**

Saproxylic beetles

Dead wood is dead good

There's a saying amongst ecologists and entomologists that 'dead wood is dead good', which refers to the importance to wildlife placed on seemingly decaying and redundant areas of woodlands. **Peter Britton** looks at that 'ugly' bunch of insects that provide an important role in local habitats far beyond their size

Saproxylic beetles are insects that depend on dead and decaying wood for at least part of their life cycle and play important ecological roles in our habitats. Together with fungi, they contribute to the breakdown of dead wood and are involved in decomposition processes and the recycling of nutrients in natural ecosystems.

Saproxylic beetles interact with other organisms such as mites, nematodes, bacteria and fungi, assisting in their dispersal across the landscape. They also provide an important food source for birds and mammals, whilst some species are involved in pollination.

In Europe, there are fifty-eight families of beetles (order Coleoptera) with nearly 29,000 species. The exact number of saproxylic species is unknown, but a database of French saproxylic beetles includes 3,041 species. According to expert opinion, there may be closer to 4,000 saproxylic beetle species in Europe. In the UK, the figure is thought to be in the region of 800.

Dead wood is dead good

Dead and decaying wood offers a large variety of microhabitats, and different saproxylic species have evolved to exploit these niches, with certain species having very specific ecological requirements. Some saproxylic beetles require live old trees with cavities for their larval development, whilst others are dependent on trees that have recently died.

Saproxylic beetle richness depends on the quantity and quality of available dead and decaying wood in any environment with trees and woody shrubs, as well as on tree

age structure, total number of trees, varying tree density and habitat continuity.

The diversity and numbers of saproxylic beetles can be influenced by the degree of sun-exposure, frequency of habitat disturbance, i.e. forest fires or clear-cutting, hedgerow management, clearance of fallen deadwood from parks, age of tree stands and presence of certain types of wood-decaying fungi, among others.

Threats

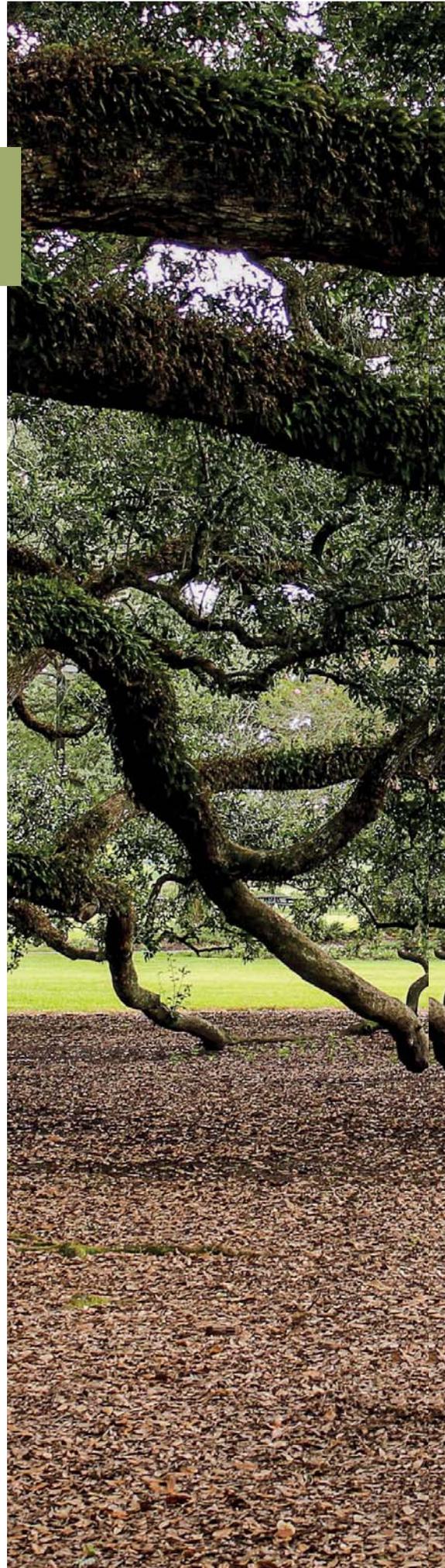
The main identified long-term threats are habitat loss in relation to logging and wood harvesting, and the decline of veteran trees throughout the landscape, as well as lack of land management targeted at promotion of recruitment of new generations of trees.

More short-term and localised threats arise from sanitation and removal of old trees due to safety constraints, in places heavily influenced by humans, e.g. a golf course or park. Other threats include agricultural expansion and intensification, urbanisation, fires and climate change.

Much is left to learn about the saproxylic beetles. In comparison with other species groups, and despite all the efforts of generations of entomologists, the biology of many species is still poorly known. Any research on saproxylic beetles enhances our knowledge of the functioning of ecosystems in wooded landscapes.

One of the most valuable attributes of any golf club, woodland area or parkland is the species that are directly or indirectly dependent on dead, old and decaying wood.

Veteran trees provide nutrition, shelter and anchorage to a whole ecosystem of species and the richness of species a tree



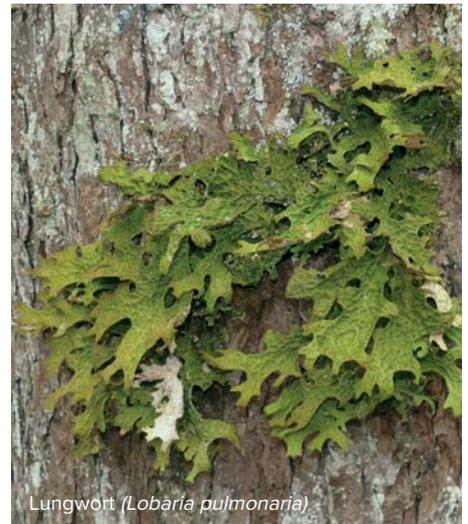




Artist's conk (*Ganoderma applanatum*)



Mushrooms growing on dead wood



Lungwort (*Lobaria pulmonaria*)

supports generally increases with age.

Dead wood is an ephemeral habitat; it will decompose over time, creating rot holes in the branches and hollow trunks that are used as nesting sites by birds, bats and squirrels. Veteran trees support a huge quantity and diversity of invertebrates that can also act as food for nesting animals.

They are also particularly valuable for non-parasitic plants such as lichens, mosses and liverworts. These groups are particularly rich on old open grown trees because these trees provide nice light surfaces to colonise, but also because these groups have a slow colonisation and succession rate, so it can take decades to develop the rich communities.

These trees are important for fungi that decompose dead wood, fungi that form symbiotic relationships with the tree roots and those that live in the leaves or the bark or even between the living cells of the tree. Fungi feed much of the rest of the species in this ecosystem, either directly with species eating their fruiting bodies or mycelium, and indirectly through softening up the dead wood which enables it to be digested by others.

Each feature on the list of veteran tree features adds to the diversity of micro-habitats that the tree provides, so also the variety of wildlife it accommodates.

The role of fungi

Fungi have developed this role over 290 million years, since they evolved the capability to digest lignin, the building blocks of wood.

The living tissue in a tree trunk or branch is found just under the bark and, from here, the tree grows outwards over the years. This leaves a legacy of dead woody tissue on the interior of the tree. Broken or cut branches, tears and other damage to the tree can let in fungi colonies that will start to decompose this dead heartwood.

Although known as a dead wood habitat, most of the specialised beetles for which this habitat is so important actually eat wood that is decaying rather than just dead. As such, the initial decay caused by fungi in the dead wood of a tree is always the first step to creating this habitat. In this way, fungi are the pioneer species that convert, or 'soften' this initial dead wood into the rich habitat for which it is noted. They create the space and the substrate that enables the richness of other saproxylic communities of species to flourish.

This process of fungi assisted tree hollowing is natural and, contrary to older ideas, not a threat to the tree. It is a natural part of the ageing process and, in some instances, can help extend the life of an ancient tree.

Lichens

The richest tree dwelling (epiphytic) lichens occur in old-growth woodlands with long ecological continuity. Old-growth woodlands include old trees, natural death of trees, standing and lying deadwood (left in situ) and natural regeneration; these are usually associated with sites over 200 years old. Wood pasture and parklands support many of the highest grade sites for lichens, with 33% of Red Data List species associated with grazed woodlands.

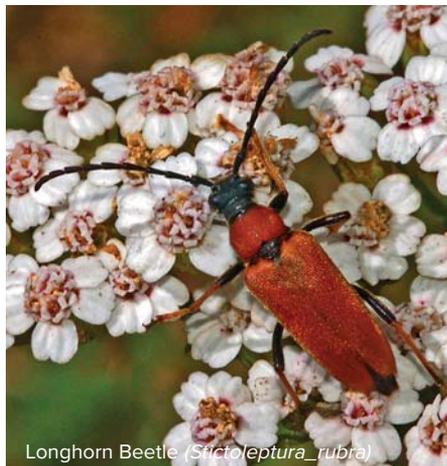
Lobaria and *Sticta* are flagship species for ancient wood pasture in the UK and are included on the European Red List of macrolichens.

An individual veteran tree can support a great diversity of species within its myriad of niches; from acid-barked well-lit twigs, to base-rich shaded trunks, from dry overhangs to rain tracks, and wound marks below points of damage. The highest diversity in wood pasture and parkland will occur where there are a range of tree species and ages and fallen or standing deadwood left in situ.

Although south facing slopes are often favoured, lichens are found in a great range of lit conditions from very exposed to deeply shaded at the base of tree trunks. The variation provides different niches allowing for a number of species to colonise one tree or area.



Stag-Beetle (*Lucanus cervus*) © Dumi



Longhorn Beetle (*Stictoleptura rubra*)



Darkling Beetle (*Iphthimus italicus*)

The scale of a site and opportunities for expansion of lichen communities is vitally important; fragmentation of sites through development impacts directly on species that are not able to disperse spores over distance. Neighbouring riverine, hedgerow and way-side trees are important links in the continuum of diversity.

Saproxyllic insects

Saproxyllic species are not only specialised to what is now quite a rare habitat but are also only able to disperse over small distances. This makes fragmentation a real threat. These beetles now mainly reside in the isolated refuges that have been able to provide a continuous and plentiful source of dead wood.

Almost one-fifth of Europe’s wood beetles are at risk of extinction due to a widespread decline in ancient trees, according to a new report which suggests their demise could have devastating knock-on effects for other species.

18% of saproxyllic beetles now exist on a conservation plane between “vulnerable” and “critically endangered”. Another 13% of the insects are considered “near threatened” and their disappearance could have a disastrous impact on biodiversity and ecosystems.

What can you do?

The demise of insects, especially bees and butterflies, is well documented, with a 40% decline estimated worldwide.

Sometimes, it seems that ‘doing your bit’ in your corner of the world will have little effect, but leaving a fallen tree or branch to go through its natural decaying process is one of the simplest things to do - assuming it hasn’t fallen across a fairway! Even then, the tree can be moved to a safer place and/or chopped up and converted into log piles and living walls.

Include signage to explain to members and the general public the reasons behind these seemingly disregarded areas. Write about them in your newsletters. The more you inform, the more informed they will be and, given the concerns for the welfare of the planet in general, you are likely to garner the respect of your members ... and the wildlife you are helping!



Musk Beetle (*Aromia moschata*)

The good old days!

I remember a time when mum used to hang fly paper from the kitchen ceiling to catch flying insects - especially houseflies and bluebottles - in an effort to stop them infesting the house.

No home, it seemed, could avoid half a dozen or more houseflies dizzily circling the lampshade, whilst bluebottles entered any open window or door - at speed - and proceeded to visit every room in the house like an out of control drone, bashing themselves senseless against any closed window in the process. This would go on for what seemed an eternity until the bluebottle either exited from whence it had come, or dad had been successful in hunting it down with a rolled-up newspaper or a purpose-made plastic fly swat.

Outside in the garden, the buzz of bees could always be heard and butterflies fluttered prettily by, whilst wasps would pester anyone foolish enough to be holding a soft drink, jam sandwich or similar sweet confection, often resulting in much thrashing about and screaming. “Just sit still” would come the not so reassuring advice from parents.

Summertime car journeys would result in hundreds of insects being splattered against windscreens and headlights; so many, at times, that the driver would be required to pull over to remove them using a scraper kept in the boot for just such a purpose. Wipers and screen wash did nothing more than smear them over the glass!

May Bugs (cockchafers) and flying ants would swarm in vast numbers, with the former happy to settle in the back-combed or permed hair of young ladies; their buzzing leading to screams of delirium from the temporary host!

Cabbage white caterpillars would appear in huge numbers on dad’s prize vegetables and proceed to munch away at the leaves. No problem for me as I despised cabbage!

Many common garden butterflies, such as red admiral, comma and small tortoiseshell, laid their eggs on stinging nettles, the host plant providing food for the caterpillars. Now, nettles are often grubbed out to make way for more ‘attractive’ plants.

If all this seems a tad fanciful to younger readers, believe me, it is not. Such was the abundance of insects in the sixties through to the eighties. Such occurrences are very rare these days and most car journeys now are ‘fly free’, whilst homeowners can open their windows and doors safe in the knowledge that, apart from the occasional six-legged intruder, the same is true.

So, what happened?

Intensive farming, in short. It is too deep a subject to go into in detail, but an ever



increasing - and demanding - human race required feeding, so all manner of chemicals were poured onto the land to achieve this, whilst hedgerows and trees were grubbed out to provide the maximum area for growing produce and raising livestock.

Supermarkets too insisted on perfect products. No spots on apples, no blemishes on fruit, uniform vegetables, and a plentiful supply of cheap and tasteless chicken; all requiring considerable ‘advances’ in land management. Something had to give.

The first real signs of anything being wrong came in the early 1980s when a sharp decline in farmland birds was observed; a trend that has sadly continued. A few years later, and woodland birds also suffered a decline in numbers, although not to the same extent. The decline in wetland and water birds has not been so marked, quite possibly because much of their food source is not affected by chemical use. That said, we may yet see a decline in this sector due to microplastics in the sea.

Whilst insects are at the bottom of the food chain, their importance to all life cannot be overstressed. From general pollination - an essential role in itself - through to being a vital food source for birds and animals, insects demand both our respect and protection.



How it works

The facts of science



Nearly two years ago, back when the world still felt relatively normal, I decided to leave the world of academia and research and step into commerce. To use a term that has now become part of everyday language, my learning curve was exponential. As the new Assistant Technical Manager at Maxwell Amenity, I found that the commercial world works at a far quicker pace than anything I had experienced in academia. **By Abigail Graceson**

The number of projects I might be working on at any one time was also far greater. However, the learning curve has, in the main, been an enjoyable one and I am pleased to say that many of the working practices and processes learnt within academia have proven extremely useful in my new setting. I have listed some of those that I have found most useful below:

1. Collaboration
2. Knowledge acquisition
3. Critical analysis
4. Knowledge transfer

Now, I am in no way suggesting that academia has the sole jurisdiction over these practices and processes, but that is where I learnt them and, I believe that sharing ideas and knowledge with others ultimately leads to improvements for all.

I am now a Technical Manager at a far larger company, since the acquisition of Maxwell Amenity by Agrovista, which again brings a steep learning curve. Like all of us, the company and all the individuals within it are engaging in navigating our way through our changing social and economic landscape as world events, unprecedented within any of our lifetimes, unfold at lightning speed, causing us to think, plan, implement and re-evaluate to keep up with changing demands and requirements.

Now, as much as ever, there is a value in making scientific principles that encompass the attributes listed above the keystones for



Abigail Graceson

decision making; not just for those important decisions that are being made by policy makers at local, national and international level, but also within our day to day lives, both at home and in business.

So, I would like to use the rest of this article to discuss why it is that science is always right but, simultaneously, often wrong and how critical analysis of the facts can help us make good decisions.



So, when you're looking at the latest fact or idea from science and thinking to yourself 'that sounds like nonsense', it almost certainly is. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow but at some point in the future, the current facts will be debunked and replaced with new ones



Inorganic granular materials



Critical thinking wheel

additions and, over time, these new facts will also be replaced. This process continues for as long as we have an interest in and ability to research any particular theme or idea.

So, when you're looking at the latest fact or idea from science and thinking to yourself 'that sounds like nonsense', it almost certainly is. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow but at some point in the future, sometimes sooner and sometimes much, much later the current facts will be debunked and replaced with new ones.

It is this idea of continual and incremental changes in perception means that it is okay to be critical when considering developments in science or knowledge. However, this should not be conflated with the idea of criticising or being overly negative about the work or ideas of others. Instead, the concept of critical thinking relates to an ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses, in ideas or arguments, whilst building an understanding of alternative positions and drawing conclusions about their validity (Cottrell, 2005).

This process happens informally and within the internationally utilised formal



I believe that sharing ideas and knowledge with others ultimately leads to improvements for all

How can science be both right and wrong?

The reason for this is that scientific 'facts' can only ever be created according to our best understanding at the time and, inevitably, our best understanding changes over time; at any point, scientists should be ready to reevaluate their position given new information. This change rarely happens as a result of one massive shift in understanding and knowledge, but through continual and incremental additions to the existing body of knowledge. Over time, this leads to changes in the original understanding of a fact and replaces it with new facts. The new facts undergo the same process of critique, leading to continual and incremental





process of writing peer reviewed articles. In this process, researchers submit an article to a journal but, before publication, it will be assessed by other experts within that subject area. Articles are often re-written several times before they are published and some never make it beyond the initial peer review process. This process ensures the academic rigour of articles that are published, but it is the material within the articles themselves that demonstrates the concept of critical thinking.

A practical example

As it is a subject that I know well, I will use my own PhD research as an example of this. My research was about green roofs which are a means of placing vegetation onto the rooftops of buildings, not with the aim of creating a garden but to stimulate positive environmental outcomes. For example, green roofs are thought to reduce the likelihood of flooding in urban area, reduce the urban heat island effect, reduce particulate and gaseous pollutants, improve building sound and heat insulation, and to increase biodiversity. With all these benefits, it is unsurprising that there has, in the

last ten or so years, been a considerable increase in the number of papers, including mine, published in this issue.

Way back in 2014, I published a paper in the journal, *Ecological Engineering*, entitled 'Plant growth responses to different growing media for green roofs' (Graceson, et al., 2014). One of the limiting factors in installing a green roof is the ability of a building to withstand the extra load placed upon it. Because of this, green roof design has focused on the use of relatively thin growing media layers (usually <150mm deep). These are made from a high proportion of inorganic granular materials, such as crushed brick, to minimise the extra weight on the building. Amongst other things, my work extended that of another research group who had contended that:

Increased fertility due to higher organic matter content may encourage excessive growth which cannot easily survive drought conditions (Nagase & Dunnett, 2011).

To expand upon this, I identified that, by utilising different materials for the inorganic component of the growing media, it is

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Why it is that science is always right but, simultaneously, often wrong and how critical analysis of the facts can help us make good decisions

possible to limit growth of some of the more enthusiastic plants. This allows for greater species diversity and introducing the possibility of increasing the amount of organic matter in the growing media. This would result in a lower overall bulk density and, therefore, increase the number of buildings that would be suitable for green roof installation.

Through critical thinking, I had extended the ideas within the original concept to generate one of those incremental changes:

Concept Mk 1. Growing media for green roofs must contain little organic matter to prevent excessive plant growth.

Concept Mk 2. Organic matter content in growing media for green roofs can be increased provided that another component will act to restrict plant growth.

There was nothing wrong with Concept Mk 1, it was simply created using the best knowledge available at the time. Its creation enabled the development of Concept Mk 2 which will, in turn, enable the creation of Concept Mk 3, and so the development of ideas continues.

So, as you read or hear about the latest ideas from the scientific world, please don't dismiss them out of hand, they will almost certainly be the best we can come up with at the moment. Perhaps, in time, those ideas will be rewritten but our best hopes of improvement lies in our ability to think critically.

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Plant-soil interactions

Grounds maintenance inputs

In this article, **Daniel Ratling**, BSc Hons. PCert TSC, Head Groundsman at Whitgift School in London, considers plant-soil interactions and how we turf managers might improve this vital region of the turfgrass ecosystem



Already we have lost the use of several pesticides, it seems we will face increasing legislative and public pressure on our use of resources, as well as the quantity and type of inputs. Additionally, we will increasingly have to consider how we interact with, and impact upon the environment

Broadly speaking, plants are immobile and are limited in their capacity to obtain water, nutrition and other beneficial substrates.

Above ground is the aerial portion of the plant. This is the lungs, the powerhouse, converting the sun's energy to food in the leaf to provide energy for the plant to metabolise. This could not happen without the below ground activity of roots.

As well as offering structural support and facilitating transpiration, roots also exude compounds, beneficial to organisms within the soil, with the aim of enhancing the environment in which the plant is growing.

Plant roots can move soil particles as they grow, create pore space, and physically reorganise their environment, although this is restricted by compaction of the soil and the soil's mechanical resistance to root

penetration. A well aerated, friable soil offers less resistance to root penetration and allows air (oxygen) into the soil. Oxygen is critical to the success of both roots and soil microbes. Total soil pore space can range from 35% to 55% by volume in an ideal mineral soil, but may be less due to compaction. Total pore space is less important than size and interconnectivity of pores. Pore size can be broadly divided into micropores and macropores. Macropores drain water via gravity, allow for aeration of the soil and gaseous exchange with the atmosphere. Micropores retain water under tension, therefore water losses and gaseous exchange are slower. In practice, most sports pitches will have a complex matrix of different pore sizes, the makeup of which may be determined through the careful selection of appropriate sand-soil materials





Soil is not only complex in structure, but also in the complexity of life it supports. It is a diverse ecosystem containing a wide range of organisms



Fertiliser application at Newquay Golf Club



Soil microbes and plant roots communicate via chemical signalling pathways

during design and construction of high end sports pitches, or can be influenced in the fullness of time via long-term management of native soil pitches.

Soil is not only complex in structure, but also in the complexity of life it supports. It is a diverse ecosystem containing a wide range of organisms including Bacteria, Archaea, Fungi, Nematodes, Protozoa, as well as more complex organisms such as Ants and Earthworms. Distinct from the 'bulk soil', an area of great interest is the rhizosphere. The rhizosphere is the area at the root-soil interface. It is on a scale of millimetres but can sustain an immense variety of organisms. It is directly affected by the plant itself and is the habitat of many soil-borne microorganisms that facilitate plant life and therefore life itself. Typically, the microbial community in the rhizosphere is more populous compared to the bulk soil but is less diverse due to the selective pressure of plant rhizodeposition.

Rhizodeposition is the release of root exudates into the rhizosphere. Root exudates may take the form of simple sugars

formed during photosynthesis, amino acids, protein complexes or organic carbon residues. Some plants direct a significant proportion of photosynthetic product to rhizodeposition. Increases in organic soil carbon rhizodeposits have shown bacterial increases of up to 5 to 10 times when compared with the bulk soil. Soil organisms confer significant benefit to the plant, so much so that plants are reliant upon them to survive. These relationships are 'active' and over millennia have evolved complex chemical signalling pathways and exchange of substrate for the mutual benefit of both organisms.

There is evidence to suggest that the maturity of the plant influences selection of rhizodeposits. For example, sugars may be exuded in greater quantity at seedling stage, potentially attracting a broad range of microbes during plant infancy. This will typically boost the overall population numbers of organisms in the soil and critically within the rhizosphere. In contrast, rhizodeposition of amino acids and organic compounds have been



It seems sensible to give some thoughts as to how we can best improve or enhance life in the soil and thus the performance of our sports surfaces





We have to get best value for our employer, not to mention our responsibility to manage sports surfaces in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive way

shown to increase with maturation of the plant, possibly as it selects for specific beneficial organisms at various stages of its life cycle. Different plants have been shown to select for a core range of organisms within the rhizosphere through exudate deposition. These organisms can form a protective layer around the root system known as a biofilm. In doing so, groups of organisms act on mass to protect the plant from pathogen attack and confer various other unique benefits.

Plants can both enhance microbial function through secretion of specific exudates or increase the number of beneficial microbes to perform a specific function. Some microbes promote plant systemic response to abiotic stresses and allow the plant to better tolerate drought or heat stress. Others directly boost the plant's own immunity against attack from pathogens or act directly on the pathogen to the benefit of the plant. The array of molecules, including naturally occurring antibiotics, produced by some Plant Growth Promoting Rhizobacteria (PGPR) to combat soil borne

pathogens is staggering! This is before you even consider the interplay of plant roots, Mycorrhizal Fungi and the myriad of other plant-soil interactions known and unknown. This is an important and exciting area of research and one that is increasingly relevant in our industry. Already we have lost the use of several pesticides, it seems we will face increasing legislative and public pressure on our use of resources, as well as the quantity and type of inputs. Additionally, we will increasingly have to consider how we interact with, and impact upon the environment. We need to demonstrate that we are a force for good. Key to this is understanding how the soil works. How its

existing function could be utilised, even encouraged, to improve pitch performance and playability, this is critical if we are to meet these challenges head on.

Clearly there is much that nature and evolution has put in place a long time before sports turf managers came along. In an undisturbed grassland, the natural ecosystem may maintain equilibrium that requires no outside interference or supplementation. Of course, an undisturbed natural grassland is unlikely to be robust enough for sport or offer adequate playing surface performance or quality. In many sports turf situations, soils may be compacted through play or maintenance



Mycorrhizal Fungi



Deep tine aeration



Seaweed



operations. Typically, monostands of grass conferring desirable traits are sown, and in some instances soil profiles may be artificially constructed using materials offering benefits to playing characteristics and pitch carrying capacity. Of course, this is all entirely necessary for the good of sports provision and is where we turf managers come in, attempting to not just manage nature, but work with it to produce high quality natural turf surfaces.

Given the very clear benefit of a healthy soil ecosystem, as well as the known and unknown impact we may have as sports turf

managers. It seems sensible to give some thoughts as to how we can best improve or enhance life in the soil and thus the performance of our sports surfaces.

Of all cultural practices, apart from mowing, aeration would seem the most important. Allowing gaseous exchange to take place is critical. For plant or microbe, a soil devoid of oxygen is not a good place to be. Often, aeration will be coupled with a means of decompaction with the resultant reduction in soil bulk density and increase of air-filled pore space, a proportionally higher number of macropores and associated

gaseous exchange and drainage. Aeration not only directly benefits the grass plant by allowing air and water to the roots, but also benefits the diverse ecosystem that lives within the soil and confers all the essential benefits the grass plant and wider soil ecosystem could not do without.

Soil fertility is important for successful grass plant growth and, if lacking in any of the essential nutrients, grass plants will be limited by that deficiency, may suffer stress and potential failure. Therefore, fertiliser application may be necessary to maintain nutrition at an acceptable level. Evidence suggests that, as nutrition increases, the composition of microbial life within the rhizosphere and the bulk soil changes. This may be for a number of reasons; perhaps the benefit of 'good' soil fertility and the selective pressure of plant rhizodeposits alters the microbial composition, or in some instances it may be a negative response to accumulations of inorganic molecules and salt damage within the soil ecosystem. I have written previously on Salt Indices and Soil Microbiology, so I will not go over old ground here. However, it is worth reiterating that nutritional inputs should be well thought



Microdochium nivale significantly impacts on surface quality



We need to demonstrate that we are a force for good. Key to this is understanding how the soil works. How its existing function could be utilised, even encouraged, to improve pitch performance and playability



Sugars may be exuded in greater quantity at seedling stage, potentially attracting a broad range of microbes during plant infancy

through and considerate.

If possible, limit the use of plant protection products (PPP) as much as possible. Clearly not requiring PPPs is an ideal scenario, but in some situations that may be entirely unrealistic without significant grass failure or unacceptable levels of pest/disease outbreak. An Integrated Pest Management strategy should be in place and, following that process, applying a Fungicide or similar should be the last step anyway. For many, using PPPs is not affordable so isn't an option. In some cases, tolerable levels of pest or disease incidence can be achieved using sound cultural, mechanical and biological practice.

Biostimulants and Plant Health Elicitors are viewed as sustainable alternatives, or supplements to chemical fertilisers, and in some instances fungicides. They are typically applied at low rates compared to fertilisers but are often expensive in comparison. Biostimulants differ from fertilisers in so much as they attempt to improve plant development or health without reliance on essential nutrients. They do this by interacting with plant signalling

pathways, reducing the onset of stress, or promotion of existing/introduction of new beneficial microbial communities. A huge range of biostimulants are available for use, the following list is not exhaustive but includes - sugars, seaweeds, humus derived products, protein hydrolysates from both plant and animal sources as well as beneficial fungi and bacteria. Some, like seaweed, have been used in agriculture and horticulture for millennia. Others, like PGPR are new commercially, although of course exist naturally within the soil and have done for aeons. Plant Health Elicitors include the likes of Phosphite and are used to activate plant systemic response mechanisms. Phosphite has been proven to prime the plants defences against *Microdochium nivale* pathogen activity through the formation and accumulation of defence compounds at fungal entry points, leading to *M. nivale* suppression. Many biostimulants will offer some benefit to plant and soil health given the right conditions during and after application, but that poor product selection, timing, misapplication, or inadequate cultural

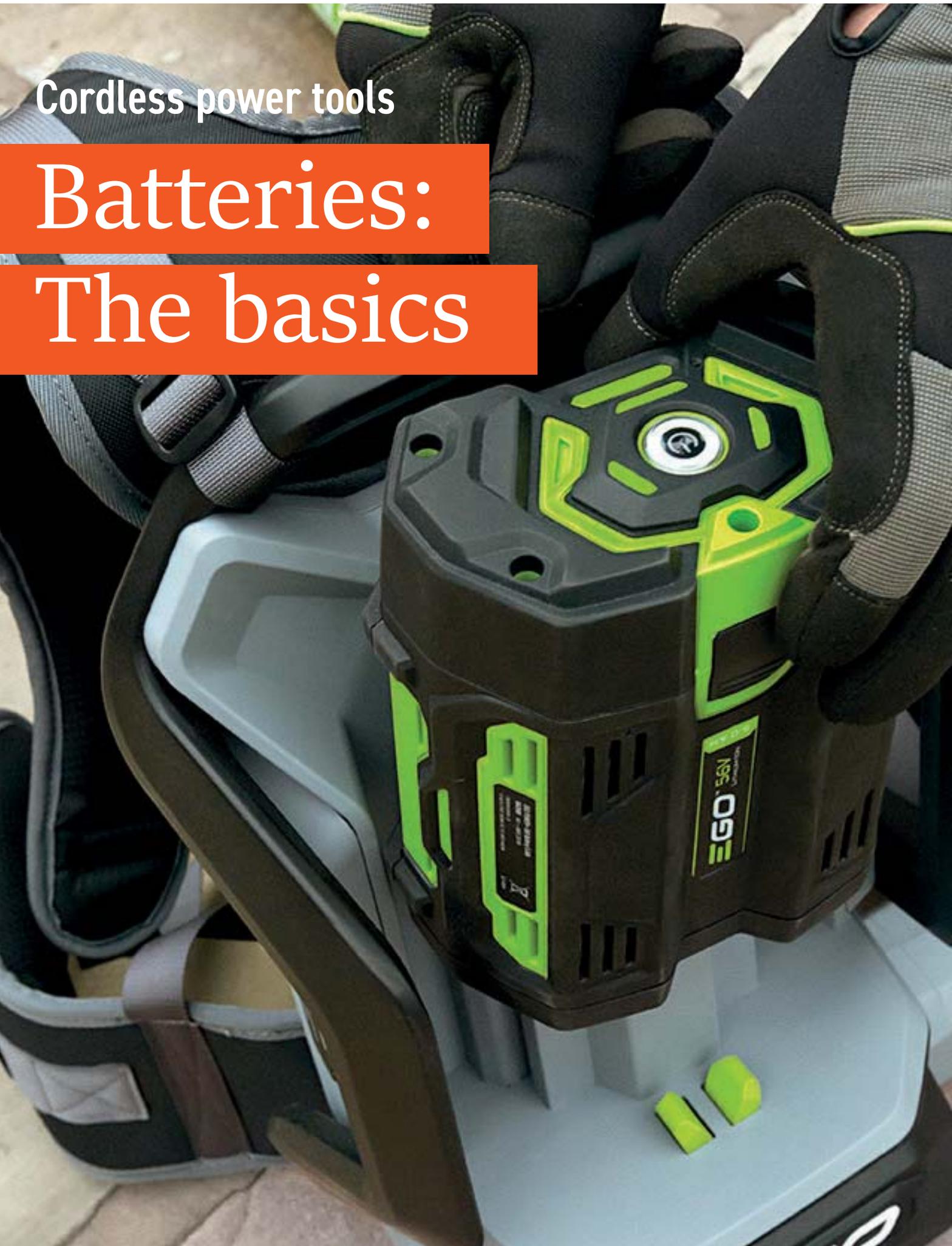
practices could render them ineffective. If using biostimulants, they should be regarded as a component part of an overall management strategy and not as a replacement for sound cultural practice and fertility management.

Resources are often tight, and we have a duty to get best value for our employer, not to mention our responsibility to manage sports surfaces in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive way. As sports turf managers, what we are trying to achieve is to bridge the gaps in nature on often artificially created, certainly artificially managed and sometimes stressful growing environments. Keeping our pitches aerated, considerate fertilisation and the promotion of good soil biology makes sense and is often economical in the long term. The information garnered from ongoing research into soil microbiology and the plant-soil interactions of the rhizosphere should only serve to empower our decision making and further our knowledge of how our sports surfaces might perform at their best. Get the soil functioning right and everything up top gets a whole lot easier.



Cordless power tools

Batteries: The basics





The cordless outdoor power tools market is changing fast, with environmental footprints moving higher up the priorities list for many organisations, along with increased EU legislation. Gardening, landscaping and grounds professionals are looking for cleaner, quieter and safer alternatives to the typically used petrol-chugging machinery. **Vince Brauns**, European Product Manager at cordless outdoor power equipment specialist EGO Power Plus, explains the evolution of battery technology, the technology’s basic principles and why there is no better time than the present to adopt battery power

In a world of professional landscaping and grounds maintenance, petrol has been the fuel of choice for over 100 years. The reason being that, up until now, there has been no viable challenger that delivers equal measures of convenience, power and performance.

No viable alternative

One of the huge barriers in uptake of battery power tools is the misconception that the tools simply won’t provide enough power or run time to complete a job, which in years gone by, may have been the case. Even though the harmful emissions from petrol power is known, the need to get jobs done quickly and efficiently have, in the past, always outweighed the negatives.

Governments the world over are having to find alternatives to fossil-fuel powered transport, power and heating in a last-ditch attempt to save the planet. It’s time that the same level of urgency is applied to outdoor power tools.

Battery power reimagined

In addition to reducing their environmental footprint, many in the grounds maintenance and landscaping industries are realising the disadvantages of petrol in noise pollution, cost and health risks of both the emissions and vibration associated with petrol.

It wasn’t until 1991 that the world woke up to the power of lithium-ion, however continued research over almost three

decades has enabled manufacturers like EGO to harness the best of lithium-ion and create tools that match and, in some cases, outperform their petrol counterparts.

While upfront cost, charging time and battery deterioration also remain a concern for professionals that are apprehensive about making the switch, understanding the evolution and capabilities of battery power is massively important. Knowledge is the next crucial step in changing attitudes and proving why battery power tools are a preferred and future-proofed solution for a wide range of outdoor applications.

Knowledge is power

When choosing battery tools, it’s important to ensure the battery can consistently deliver power for the application required. Power is measured in watts (W) and is calculated by multiplying voltage (V) and current (A). To work out how long the power can be delivered, users need to multiply voltage with capacity (Ah) to find out the energy in watt-hours (Wh).

It’s the relationship between voltage and

VOLTAGE (V)	×	CURRENT (A)	=	POWER (W)
To work out how long the power can be delivered, the following equation can be used:				
VOLTAGE (V)	×	CAPACITY (Ah)	=	ENERGY (Wh)



Initially, buyers would spend approximately £690 extra on battery-powered equipment in year one, however would see a turnaround in just their second year of ownership, making a total saving of £365



Power pack

current that counts though. A big voltage doesn't necessarily mean big power - there also has to be enough current (and vice versa). In the instance of battery-powered technology, the current depends on the cell types being used, the condition and quality of the cells and the control system put in place to manage them.

As a buyer, be mindful of battery labels that use watts instead of watt-hours or amp hours. This isn't as helpful because users don't just want to know how much power the battery generates in a given moment - they want to know how long it can deliver that power. Run time, however, can depend on many factors such as the capacity of the battery to begin with, which tool being used,

how it is being used, how tools are taken care of, and how the batteries are stored.

The full circuit

A basic knowledge of circuits will also help you choose the kit with the best bang for your buck. When battery cells are connected end-to-end in a single row they are in 'series'. Arranging cells together in series delivers the required voltage (V). When more than one series is combined, the rows of battery cells are connected in 'parallel'. Adding an identical number of cells in parallel delivers more capacity and run time (Ah). The batteries have been designed to deliver 56V for an extended period of time in order to meet user expectations. To achieve this, we arrange the right number of cells in series to deliver 56V - then increase capacity (Ah) by adding more cells in parallel: (W) Fig. 1a.

Theoretically, a manufacturer could build a battery with more power than a user would ever need for outdoor applications. This is where manufacturers must apply a balancing

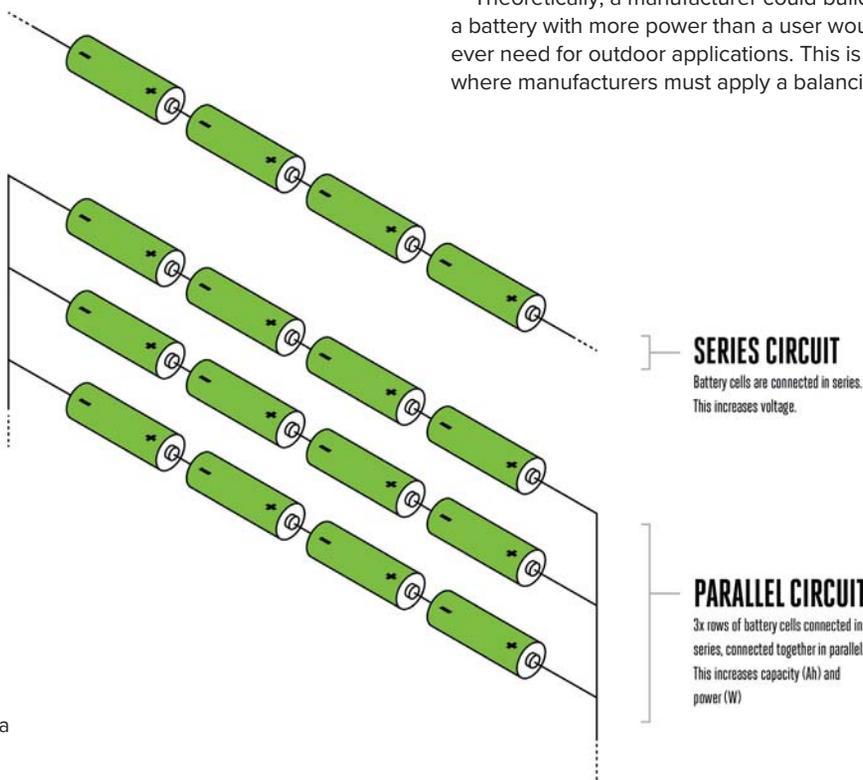
act between power and usability. More cells mean more weight and size. That's why EGO has settled on a 56V platform. We have found 56V provides the optimum balance between petrol matching performance and run-time.

Quality over quantity

Cell consistency is also critical to battery performance. Inconsistencies could lead to over-charging and discharging, which can impact battery lifecycle and create potential safety issues. When selecting the right manufacturer for battery-powered tools, look for a brand that uses high-quality cells and a company that continually assesses the market to ensure the best quality.

In addition to sourcing components from the world's leading suppliers, our tests and selects every single cell before building a battery. This includes testing and sorting each cell to ensure only those with the most consistent voltage are used while monitoring and managing each cell during operation. Power is nothing without control which is why the Power+ 56V Arc Lithium battery is continuously controlled by software, microprocessors and power management systems.

Microprocessors and software within the



SERIES CIRCUIT
Battery cells are connected in series.
This increases voltage.

PARALLEL CIRCUIT
3x rows of battery cells connected in series, connected together in parallel.
This increases capacity (Ah) and power (W)



It's the relationship between voltage and current that counts. A big voltage doesn't necessarily mean big power - there also has to be enough current (and vice versa)

Fig. 1a



BCX3800 line trimmer and brushcutter



Until now, there has been no viable challenger that delivers equal measures of convenience, power and performance

battery monitor each cell for temperature and voltage to ensure that charging and discharging is managed in a balanced and controlled way with the other cells within the pack. This ensures each cell is performing optimally and prolongs the lifetime of the entire battery pack.

Managing heat

Managing heat is key to maximising performance. A battery gets hotter the

longer it's used and, the more power it generates, the more heat is released. Too much heat and the battery will shut down for safety. Heat also degrades cells over time, reducing battery life. That's why batteries must be cooled effectively to increase performance run time and battery life. EGO manages heat in three ways: mechanically, chemically and electronically.

Mechanically - an arc cell design is used rather than the brick-shaped battery packs

chosen by many other manufacturers which can be quick to overheat, causing a shutdown of the battery. The unique arc design increases surface area, dissipating heat more effectively. The design also means that cells are as close to the surface as possible allowing more air to pass over each cell to keep it cooler for longer periods. Lastly, the batteries are mounted to the outside of the tools allowing for quicker heat dissipation, meaning they can deliver



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Power Plus STX3800 trimmer



LBX6000 blower

longer-lasting power over manufacturers which have their batteries encased within their tools.

From a **chemical** perspective, each battery cell (up to and including the 5.0Ah battery) is surrounded by a unique phase change material (PCM) that absorbs energy and keeps individual cells at their optimum temperature for longer. The more heat the PCM absorbs from the battery, the more heat the battery can generate without overheating, helping to maximise run time.

Electronically, many manufacturers of battery-powered tools will use one or two sensors to monitor the battery's temperature. Typically, these are located on the cells that are most likely to become the hottest and some have even been known to locate them by the coolest cells. EGO recognises that cells can change after several charge cycles, meaning that these sensors can become ineffective by no longer monitoring the hottest cells.

To counter this, there are engineered sensors to monitor the temperature of all the individual battery's cells. By doing so, in the event of a cell reaching a high temperature, the entire battery will shut down until it cools down to within the optimum operating parameters. This not only ensures safe use but also extended battery life.

How should batteries be stored?

Contrary to popular belief, the batteries don't require special temperature requirements for winter storage. All that is advised is that batteries aren't

stored in direct sunlight or in a place where they can attract moisture.

The cost of evolution

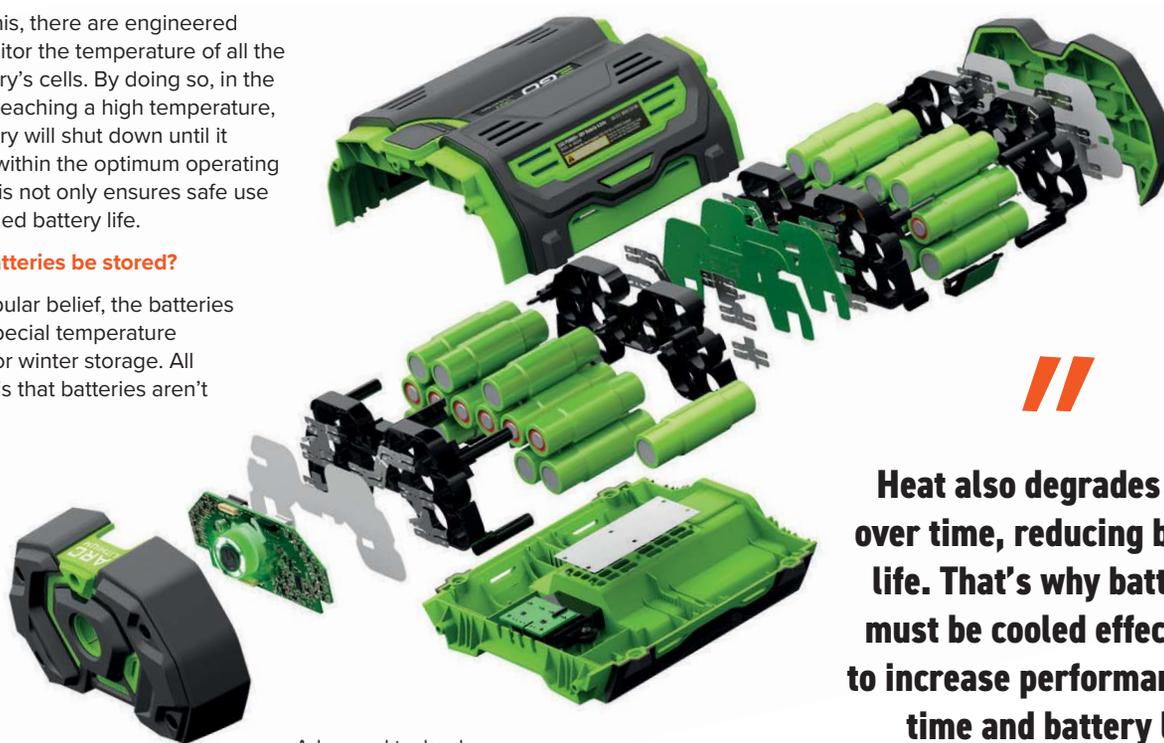
Now that you have a basic understanding of battery technology and its role in the outdoor power tool market, you will probably have one more burning question; cost.

Upfront costs for the technology can be higher than that of your average petrol-powered tool. However, research investigated the total cost of ownership between petrol and battery-powered outdoor equipment over an extended period.

The test looked at the cost of a petrol brush cutter, hedge trimmer and leaf blower compared with their battery-powered counterparts. Initially, buyers would spend approximately £690 extra on battery-powered equipment in year one, however

would see a turnaround in just their second year of ownership, making a total saving of £365. In years three and four, the real savings of ditching petrol begin to show themselves, with users saving a total of £1,430 and £3,500 respectively. By the fifth year, the test factored in a full replacement of all equipment and yet the savings amounted to a total lifetime saving of over £4,500! This is in large part due to the inexpensive cost of recharging a battery (typically well under 10 pence for a full recharge) compared to the cost of petrol, and also the lack of servicing required for battery powered tools.

With the additional environmental benefits of using battery technology, discover how your business could seamlessly make the switch to battery power at www.egopowerplus.co.uk



Advanced technology



Heat also degrades cells over time, reducing battery life. That's why batteries must be cooled effectively to increase performance run time and battery life

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PROUDLY BRITISH

Total cost of ownership

It costs less
than you think



In this article, Reesink Turfcare's Service Manager **Lee Rowbotham** says that total cost of ownership (TCO) is a vital part of the decision-making process when looking to invest in a new machinery fleet, but certainly never before has the concept had such weight

Whilst forecasts, budgets and plans for 2020 have been thrown a huge curveball due to COVID-19, it doesn't mean all plans for the year have to be shelved or put on hold. What it does mean, however, is that now more than ever, if you're going to invest, make sure you invest wisely.

It's undoubtedly true that you get what you pay for, but turfcare professionals are now learning that there's actually a lot more that you get if you pay attention to the devil in the detail or, in some cases, the angel in the detail.

With economic uncertainty as it is, it's never been more important to make sure you consider more than just the purchase price. The equipment purchase price (net purchase or financed value) is important, but often no more than 35 percent as a cost component of the equipment's operating life. It's equally important to look for value, with features that enhance performance (productivity), reliability (downtime) and durability (longevity for residual value), such as a high quality transmission, strong cutting frame and components and large capacity cooling systems. These can impact other significant cost components over time.

Total cost of ownership provides a data driven perspective for determining the total economic value of an investment, in this case machinery. It includes the total cost of acquisition and operating costs, as well as costs related to replacement or upgrades at the end of the life cycle.

Lacking TCO information means that the decision to replace a large asset such as a £40,000 wide area reel mower can become more subjective than data guided. If the TCO is calculated at an appropriate level of detail, the information can guide informed decisions in procurement, maintenance, labour savings and energy management. When all management use the same cost data, they can cooperate in making better decisions that improve company performance and return on investment.

When it comes to machinery, the TCO of any physical asset should reflect investigation of three key segments:

- Acquisition cost [typically 30-35 percent]
- Depreciation [typically viewed as future residual value]
- Operating costs (fuel, maintenance,

repairs and labour) [typically 55-60 percent]

Without this information, any organisation will be inclined to focus on short-term cost rather than the overall investment over the equipment's expected 'life cycle'.

Acquisition

Acquisition cost includes the first cost or purchase price of an asset. Our data needs to include the cost of borrowing money to acquire equipment or lost interest from making a cash investment. An operating lease, for example, will reduce finance costs/interest paid by virtue of an agreed residual value being factored in, compared to another finance product. Equally, annual finance repayments are more interest efficient than monthly.

Inflation will impact most of the operating component costs, however, contract hire (leasing with an inbuilt service contract) is a tool that can remove or significantly impact inflationary pressures on maintenance costs, effectively fixing them for the same term as the borrowing for the equipment.

Depreciation

Depreciation is a big factor affecting the end of use value of your machines and the total cost to own them over time. No one would want to invest money and decide to sell or change after a few years and find they owe more money than the machine is worth.

Understanding the rate of depreciation is important, but no more so than understanding a good residual value is worth its weight in gold within the component costs of TCO. Getting a 'return' for your equipment significantly impacts the total cost of ownership. New technology can sometimes adversely affect the residual values of older models, as can the discontinuation of a specific model. It can be affected by OEM reputation, model reputation and the popularity of units in the field, together with long-term availability of parts and service.

An operating lease can be a useful tool to lock in the residual value and remove the risk element, but conditions of return will apply. The fundamentals are, look after the equipment, maintain it, look after its visual condition, and do not keep so long as to rack up excessive use (hours) which will affect its residual much as mileage does in a car.

Maintenance

Maintenance recording should include all repair and servicing costs, labour, fluids, parts and environmental disposal. A robust, preventative maintenance regime will reduce and/or prevent unnecessary, costly and unexpected breakdowns. A proactive cleaning and greasing regime will protect the residual value of the investment and reduce overall service costs while prompt operator action to indicators such as noise, smell and vibration changes can save money through early intervention. Clean air and oil are the fundamentals to long engine life and reliability, in a similar way to cleanliness, good quality oil and controlled operating temperatures are key to hydraulic system reliability.

It is surprising how the areas of maintenance that generate service time or bills are relatively easily avoided, such as lack of greasing, contaminated fuel or oil and blocked radiators or oil coolers.

Downtime

Arguably the most important consideration. There's nothing more frustrating than a machine out of action after all. Downtime costs money and time is money.

Downtime is basically a record of the cost of lost operator hours, lost income (if applicable) and replacement equipment hire costs. When recorded accurately, it helps to

support an 'instinct' that equipment is unreliable and 'costing' money. It can also support a considered decision to change equipment before its planned time.

There is a direct correlation with maintenance practices - preventative maintenance reduces downtime. An ageing or poorly maintained equipment fleet is likely to generate unwelcome repair costs and spiralling downtime, creating additional difficulty in controlling maintenance budgets.

Fuel

Fuel consumption is a significant component which can be up to 15 percent of the TCO. It's determined by engine efficiency and the mower's horsepower demand.

Horsepower demand is dictated by the equipment's design and the mowing conditions. The height, density and moisture content of grass and mowing frequency must all be taken into consideration and different heights of cut will require different amounts of fuel. In simple terms, the heavier or more extreme the conditions the more fuel used. Plus, fuel consumption is dependent on the type of mower - cylinder mowers, for example, will generally require 50 percent less horsepower of rotaries, per inch of cut. Air-cooled engines will consume 15-30 percent more fuel than liquid cooled engines, per horsepower per hour, while liquid cooled diesel engines can be 20 percent more fuel efficient than petrol

alternatives.

New and emerging power technologies can make a big impact. Hybrid and alternative energy technologies can save a further 20-25 percent over diesel. The Toro eTriFlex 3360 hybrid greens mower provides up to 20 percent fuel savings over comparable triplex mowers, and the Toro eTriFlex 3370 all-electric eliminates the need for a liquid fuel source altogether.

Maintenance will also come into play and affect the amount of fuel used. Dull, blunt or poorly adjusted cutting blades will increase horsepower demand and fuel consumption, as will items like blocked hydraulic oil coolers.

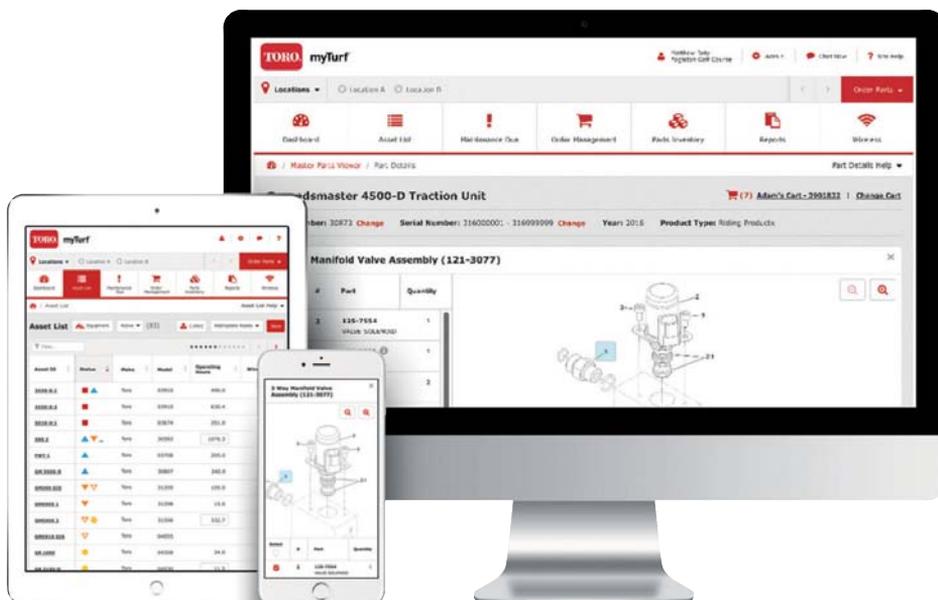
Labour

Labour is the largest cost input when you take into consideration the hourly cost of labour, pay, pension, other social costs and training investments. The key is to ensure the operators are well trained on their equipment, comfortable and find it easy and intuitive to use. Factors that contribute to productivity, which is the key return on your team investment. Where mowing is concerned, productivity drives down the per hour or per acre/hectare costs, making labour more efficient.

In assessing total application costs, such as mowing, over the life, it's possible to determine a 'per hour' cost. By recording all the TCO cost areas and dividing these by



A typical wide area five-unit cylinder mower, such as a Toro Reelmaster 5610-D, would have an engine size of approximately 43hp. If the engine were governed at a maximum engine speed of 3000rpm, in 100 hours of operation time the engine would have approximately consumed over 5.5 million litres of air and completed around 18 million crankshaft revolutions



Toro's web-based asset management system, MyTurf Pro, makes recording the balancing of investment, component costs and residual value easy

the equipment's actual operating hours. Cost per hour is useful and easy to determine but doesn't reflect differences in machinery productivity or between different sizes, types or prices of equipment. A cost per acre, hectare or identified site can be preferable, by simply dividing the established hourly costs by area cut per hour. Of course, in some finer turf applications, productivity will have to be balanced with specific presentation requirements and standards.

Robust record keeping

By robust record keeping, it is possible to confirm the balancing of investment, component costs and residual value. It's simple enough to do using technology - Toro's web-based asset management system, MyTurf Pro for example, which gives turf managers the capability to monitor fleet health, order parts and schedule service activities, helping to improve staff efficiency, lengthen the life of equipment and reduce overall maintenance costs. Without that, you can record the data on a spreadsheet - if you can measure, you can manage!

As mentioned, it's important to buy machinery that's proved to be reliable and built to last. Look for features and benefits that will enable your team to do more with that machine. Does the machine allow for easier servicing - providing ease of access, simplicity and visibility? Can quality components be evidenced to aid maintenance and limit downtime? Will it allow you to go longer between servicing? Does it have features that will make it more cost effective to run? Enhanced fuel efficiency for example, or hybrid technology.

We can see and already understand that the lowest cost of ownership is achieved through the purchase of productive, good quality equipment, supported by a robust preventative maintenance and repair regime which protects the machines' performance and integrity. In addition, it is accepted that a

well-trained and attentive operating team will also impact on running costs by catching things early, so dealing with them at the most cost-effective point.

But, by focusing and drilling on each component of contributory cost and recording that data, it's possible to further drive the return on investment and control unexpected costs. This will put the equipment manager in charge of the powerful data and in a strong position to achieve the best residual values when the product is replaced, and keep a handle on maintenance costs by replacing at the optimum moment for change.

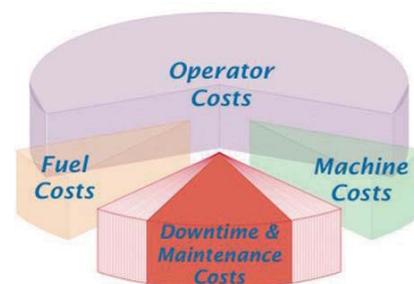
Replacement life

In considering the replacement life of modern turf equipment and the maintenance costs and requirements associated with that equipment, an interesting theoretical comparison can be made between the operating characteristics of a professional mowing machine engine and that fitted to a modern car, a comparison that pops up from a price perspective from time to time.

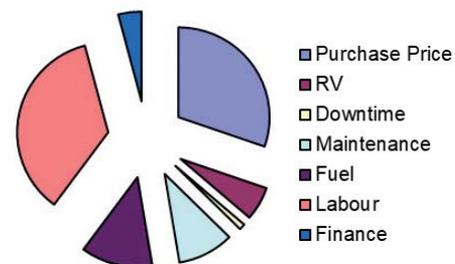
A typical turf machinery engine runs at a governed speed of 2800rpm, whilst a modern car running at 2800rpm can easily equal a travelling speed of 80mph or even significantly more. Therefore, theoretically, every 100 hours of full throttle operation on a turf machine engine could be considered to equal 8000 car miles (100 hours x 80mph).

A car engine operates at about a 20 percent duty cycle (full power only 20 percent of the running time on average), trucks operate at about 50 percent duty cycle. Turf machinery engines, on the other hand, run at about 70 percent duty cycle, so the turf engine duty cycle is up to three to four times as demanding as a car.

Compared to a car, the turf engine and its oil has done almost four times the work! That's equivalent to 24,000-32,000 car



How total cost of ownership breaks down



Using data collected from full maintenance contracts, customer fuel and labour data, the following TCO breakdown was found for a five year old grounds machine with 2000 hours accumulated

miles based on the theoretical 100 hours. That could mean that considering the increased load on the engine, a typical 450 hour season for the turf equipment is equivalent notionally to around 100,000 miles.

Hypothetical and theoretical comparisons can be entertaining but, in these times, it's more important than ever for the owner and operator of commercial turf equipment to ensure their pound delivers. This can be honed by taking the emotion out of the decision and relying more on gathered and projected data in order to make an informed choice.

Now is not the time to be governed by what you've always bought. The industry must work together, sharing its knowledge, to understand the issues customers will face in these new times and meet the challenge to lower the total cost of ownership.

Reesink is available to explain how TCO can be applied to your fleet or talk through other ownership or operating problems to help you solve them. There are always flexible finance deals available with deferred start dates, subsidised rates or that can be aligned to peak income months to help manage cashflow. It only takes a conversation. Make contact online at reesinkturfcare.co.uk, by phone on 01480 226800 or by email at info@reesinkturfcare.co.uk.



Your impact on others

Are You Putting People Off?

Grounds Training Instructor and Conference Speaker **Frank Newberry** looks at how our interpersonal skills, or lack of, might be putting people off. Our off-putting behaviour might be limiting the potential of key working relationships, i.e. with colleagues, peers, and bosses



In this article, Frank offers some advice on how we might reduce the risk of putting people off. This should then improve our prospects of inclusion, trust and recognition at work. Frank ends with five tips for supervisors and others; particularly those who want to prevent, reduce, or remedy conflict in the work team.

Your circumstances may have changed because of the Covid-19 crisis. You may be unemployed, happily back at work full-time, or part time, you may still be furloughed, or you may have another job altogether.

Whatever your current situation, we all surely need to ensure that our responses and reactions to people and events do not put people off. We need to be aware of behaviour that will cause us to be excluded, or not trusted, or not recognised for our qualities in the workplace and elsewhere.

Many of us are unaware of our impact on others

As you can imagine, self-awareness is an important issue here. In my experience, many of us do not know that our responses and reactions are putting people off. We are unaware of our impact on others and happily go through life not knowing that we are definitely a pain in the neck - at least sometimes!

We are often unaware because people in our culture find it hard to criticise other people - so we never find out! Others find it hard to be self-critical. There are some who know that they are putting people off - but try to make it a virtue. You may have heard people say something like: 'no one is perfect, my true friends accept me and my faults, warts and all'.

To these people it is hard not to say - 'your true friends would be honest with you about your faults. Your true friends care about how others perceive you'.

So, what is it that puts people off us?

I have asked people in the turfcare sector about this for over twenty years and nothing much has changed in that period. Most turfcare professionals, when confronted with a list of off-putting behaviours that research shows will make them unlikeable - own up to the same two things:

1. Inappropriate humour

2. Complaining and moaning

Inappropriate humour - this would include jokes, banter or comments that are sexist, racist, intimidating, or in any way offensive to the individual. So, if one person in a team finds something offensive, that is enough. We do not have to take a vote on it.

Complaining and moaning - this would include frequent negative reactions, maybe on social media (whining), even a negative tone in the voice when describing others like colleagues, employers, customers, e.g. end-users like footballers, cricketers, golfers etc. Complaining about others on social media, e.g. Facebook, can even have career limiting consequences.

I know for sure that prospective employers and their representatives check out each candidate's social media content. Dodgy pictures, swear words and negative responses online do not help our career prospects! I know a barrister who checks out people's Facebook content for his clients! He tells me that it saves him having to do a lot of research into a person's character.

Bullying and harassment

Using a mocking tone or being cynical or sarcastic might make us feel better for a moment - but it is a form of aggressive behaviour. It is a type of bullying and harassment - sometimes described as 'indirect aggression' or 'passive-aggressive' behaviour. It is unpleasant for everyone and could lead to legal action being taken by victims of it in the workplace.

Supervisors would do well to check if, what started out as enjoyable teasing and workplace banter, has now gone too far. We need to ask if it has now become bullying and harassment in the workplace.

Five tips to try

- 1) Supervisors perhaps need to set a good example in the way that they respond to negativity in the workplace. If someone is teasing, then supervisors and others should stay cool and not read negative intent into what may be an ambiguous situation
- 2) We can also look for the positives in the negative comments being made at work and respond with a confident and constructive remark about the situation

- 3) If we cannot resist being sarcastic sometimes, then maybe we can add a little raised eyebrow, a nod or a wink that signals that we are just having fun
- 4) Part of being a positive example is to make sure that we take a moment to commend and praise the genuinely witty banter or comment - 'good one'
- 5) We might think it is necessary to condemn the unkind comment or negative reaction. If we have to do this, then we need to react in a low-key way. We should under-react (keep cool) rather than over-react. We do not want our reaction to become part of the problem!

So, good luck with not putting others off with inappropriate humour and complaining and moaning. Stay safe - until we meet again in these pages.

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PRE-GERMINATION

Overseeding - chitting and sheeting

Pre-germinating grass seed is an important, yet often overlooked, tool in a groundsman's armoury. Following a number of requests on the Pitchcare Forum, here are a few basic tips to get you started

Overseeding worn and bare areas on sports pitches is an essential maintenance regime to ensure the upkeep of a healthy grass sward. Successful seed germination will be determined by a number of factors; weather and ground conditions at the time of sowing, methods used to sow the seed and, finally, the choice and quality of seed used.

It is important to use viable seed that is certified and from recent fresh stocks. Use cultivars that suit your requirements e.g. cricket, bowls football, rugby.

Sow during optimum conditions when soil and air temperatures are consistently above 10°C. Grass seed will usually germinate between seven to fourteen days.

However, seed establishment can be achieved much more quickly with the aid of germination sheets or when using pre-germinated grass seed.

This latter method is known as chitting. Soak the required amount of seed needed in a bucket of water for three to four days. The seed can be

loose, but it is better to put in either a small jute sack or in a pair of ladies tights.

Tie a knot in the top of the tights, first ensuring your wife or partner is not still wearing them!

Place the bucket in a dark, warm room (such as an airing cupboard) and leave until the seed begins to germinate,



showing small white tips. Then mix with some soil/sand or rootzone and brush into the area you have prepared for seeding.

Another method is to pre-mix seed with a dampened carrier of either sand or soil rootzone mix in a container until the seed germinates. Then use to repair worn and damaged areas.

Once you have repaired the bare areas, you will need to ensure the seed is not allowed to dry out and die. Keep the newly sown areas moist by covering with germination sheets or watering until the seed has established.

One of the biggest concerns for many is getting the pitches back into play after reseeding. Whether it is during in season repairs or after end of season renovations, it is important to get the seed to germinate as quickly as possible.

Seed sown during favourable soil/air temperatures (above 10°C) will germinate anything between seven to fourteen days. However, under the cover of a germination sheet, these times can be reduced to five to seven days, and even quicker if the seed has been chitted.

A germination sheet is simply a sheet that is used to cover and protect the newly seeded areas, creating a greenhouse environment, which often raises the air temperature under the sheet by two or three degrees whilst, at the same time, stopping any physical damage by birds and animals.



Horticulturalists and farmers have been using fleeces and plastic sheeting to speed up the germination and maturity of their crops for many years.

Germination sheets come in many different guises; hessian matting, plastic sheets, canvas sheets, wind break netting etc. Bespoke sheets to suit individual requirements are also available from various manufacturers and suppliers.

Depending on the desired results, the use of sheets vary. Some may leave them on overnight and take them off during the day but, in the main, most groundsman and greenkeepers will leave them down until the seed has germinated and showing signs of growth.

In short, germination sheets save on seed and labour, speed up germination (which, in turn, produces faster growth), bring worn pitches back into use quicker, extend reseeding periods, give uniform and even coverage and protect seed from weed contamination, wind, birds, frost and scorching by the sun.



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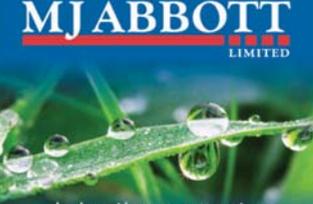
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SOIL SAMPLING

Understanding what is going on

Understanding what is going on below the surface is critical for successful turfgrass management. This article discusses the reasons for doing so, the objectives and the results you can expect

Visual inspections, backed up with a professional analysis of soil properties, will give vital information about the condition of the soil and help to produce a more productive environment for plant growth and sustainability.

A simple 'visual, feel and smell' inspection of a soil sample can identify many things:

- Thatch content (dead grass and fibre found in the top 5-35mm of the sample)
- Dryness/wetness of soil (soil water content)
- Soil compaction (lack of airspace in the soil)
- Presence of black layer and algae
- Anaerobic conditions (indicated by a smell similar to rotten eggs)
- Extent of soil layering (indicated by root breaks)
- Root depth and vigour
- Pest and disease problems
- Extraneous matter content (glass, ceramics and stone)

The easiest way to make this inspection is by using a soil sampler. They come in different shapes and sizes and are designed for different reasons; some allow you to see a clean profile of your soil without removing it from the sampler, whilst others simply collect a soil core.

On a regular basis (at least once a year) soil samples should be collected and sent away to a laboratory for a detailed analysis. The testing can reveal a lot of important data to help you diagnose any problems and to make an informed decision on future maintenance regimes.

The following five soil tests are the ones you should be aware of:

- Particle Size Distribution (PSD) soil classification (soil type)
- Soil pH (acidity level of the soil)
- Soil nutrient status
- Soil Organic Matter (OM) content
- Soil Toxicity

The standard soil analysis package measures acidity (pH) and estimates the plant-available concentrations of the major nutrients in the soil - phosphorus (P), potassium (K) and magnesium (Mg). Soil acidity is measured as pH (the concentration of H⁺ ions) the scale running from pH1 (very acid), through pH7 (neutral) to pH14 (very alkaline). The normal soil range is pH 4.5-8.5.

When taking samples for analysis you will, in most cases, be required to collect at least one



kilo of material. This is required by most soil laboratories, particularly if undertaking Particle Size Distribution tests to determine the amount of clay, silt and sand in the soil.

A representative sample of soil will need to be taken from several areas of the facility, and at the appropriate depth, usually the top 100-150mm. For example, taking samples of a football pitch would require taking twenty-four samples (twelve from each half) taken from different areas of the pitch.

Sample on a 'W' pattern over the field; for a regular shaped field this means six cores per leg of the 'W'. All the soil material is mixed together and put into one bag and sent away to an approved registered lab for analysis. The same 'W' technique should also be used on fine turf areas (golf and bowling greens).

Remember to clearly label all samples and record the time, location and date when they were taken.

Guide to sampling

1. Use of a suitable tool (cone auger, screw auger, corer etc.) which facilitates and encourages the taking of more rather than fewer cores, of a uniform size and down to the full depth of sampling
2. Use equipment and packaging that will not contaminate the sample. Galvanised sampling tools are unacceptable for trace element analysis
3. Label samples clearly
4. Sample to a consistent depth, usually between 100-150mm
5. Divide the field into areas which are as uniform as possible in soil type. Small areas of different soil, e.g. wet, chalky, shallow, stony etc. should be excluded
6. Avoid taking samples from mole hills, urine patches
7. Take at least between twenty to twenty-five cores from each area to be sampled and put them together to form a single representative sample. The numbers of cores should not be restricted simply because the container is full! Thoroughly mix all cores and take a sub-sample from this for despatch to the laboratory - this must be done carefully

8. Ensure the sample represents the whole area. Sample on a 'W' pattern over the field; for a regular shaped field this means six cores per leg of the 'W'

9. Avoid sampling under extremes of soil conditions, e.g. waterlogged or very dry soil

A range of soil samplers are available in the Pitchcare shop:

The soil profile sampler is a very useful tool, especially for fine turf situations where you want to see a wide profile of the green down to a depth of 200mm.

The impact 50mm soil sampler is specifically designed for taking samples on cricket squares (heavy clay soils), the sampler takes a 50mm wide core down to a depth of 300mm.

Standard core samplers come in a range of diameter sizes - 16mm, 20mm, 25mm, 38mm - usually to a depth of 300mm.

Samplers are available in the Pitchcare Shop: <https://www.pitchcare.com/shop/search/soil%20sample>

For a soil sampling kit and an array of different analyses, visit Pitchcare PWS analysis service at <https://www.pitchcare.com/shop/search/PWS%20analysis>



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GLYPHOSATE

Setting the record straight



There's no doubt that there has been controversy around glyphosate, and its use in the public sector. However, the active ingredient has been around for over forty years and is a very valuable tool for contractors and groundskeepers to control weeds in public spaces

Pitchcare talked to Mark Buckingham, Communications and Government relations manager at Bayer, to set the record straight on glyphosate and give you the hard facts to help make informed decisions on weed control.

Is glyphosate safe?

"All chemical pesticides go through a rigorous registration and testing process which they must pass before they are available for use," says Mark.

"The regulatory process for each chemical product involves a careful scientific assessment of the evidence around the product and this is carried out by independent scientists who are funded by the government."

"Their job is to act as independent safety guardians for the public, not supporters of the chemical industry. They exist to properly understand the safety of the active for operators, bystanders and non-targets in the environment," he adds.

"Because glyphosate - the chemical active found in Roundup branded products - has been around since 1974, it's been extensively tested, often with studies being repeated several times. For example, there has been more than 800 scientific studies and reviews submitted to U.S., European and other regulators in connection with the registration process."

"Because of this wealth of data, our confidence in what we know about the active is high," says Mark.

Is glyphosate harming the environment?

Mark explains that to maintain modern life, we need to manage the environment.

"It is all about doing it in a way that is as sustainable as possible," he says.

"Ultimately, this is an important question about the decision to use any weed management tool because, if you decide to manage weeds, every tool has some environmental impacts."

"The decision comes down to why you are managing these weeds. This may be a safety issue to help maintain a smooth pathway and reduce trip hazards or maintaining sight lines on roadways for transport safety requirements."

"In this instance, a tool that does this with the minimum of side effects is required and glyphosate is just one of these tools."

Mark adds that often the alternatives to chemical herbicides can have a bigger and unseen impact to the environment.

"We're increasingly concerned about climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, and mechanical alternatives can increase these. Using an effective herbicide like glyphosate is one of the lowest greenhouse gas emitting weed control methods," he says.

What would it mean if we lost glyphosate?

"If glyphosate was lost, there would be a significant cost increase to groundskeepers," says Mark.

"Typically, the costs of larger scale weed control on pathways and in parkland, for example, can be up to ten times more expensive without the use of chemical controls."

"Add to this that non-chemical methods typically require more visits, so more travelling to and on the site. This would not only increase fuel and labour costs but also increases greenhouse gas emissions."

Mark adds that, in some situations, such as control of invasive species, we would seriously struggle to keep these at bay without glyphosate.

"For example, giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed would be extremely difficult, or even impossible to effectively control, without the use of glyphosate," he says.

Why the controversy?

"One of the questions you're probably thinking is - if it is so safe and cost effective then why the controversy and why am I reading about it everywhere?"

Comment from the industry

"Glyphosate more than ever has a huge role to play in controlling the cost of weed control. With the unquestionable scientific data that exists worldwide from respected bodies with regard to the products safety case, to lose such an important active ingredient as a consequence of political pressure in the near future would be a remarkably poor decision."

Ian Graham, Complete Weed Control.

Mark explains that, in 2015, a research group called IARC, linked to the World Health Organisation (WHO), published a paper stating that they thought glyphosate was 'probably carcinogenic' and this kicked off the controversy.

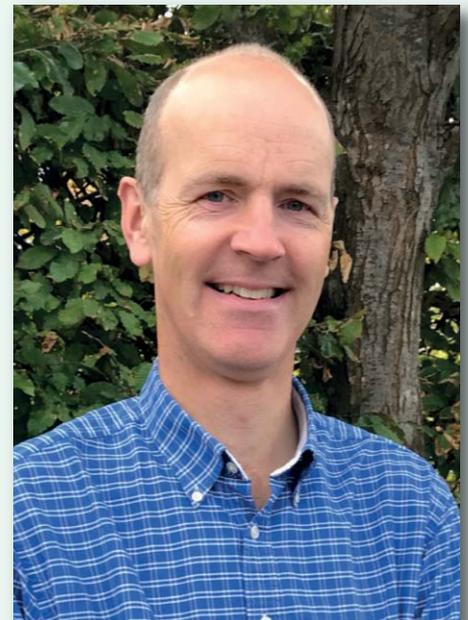
"However, since 2015, many government regulators have looked carefully at what this research group said, as well as all the other available evidence, and concluded that glyphosate is not carcinogenic."

"It's important to always review the latest science, and the independent reviews continue to confirm that glyphosate and our glyphosate-based formulated products can be used safely and are not carcinogenic."

"Bearing this in mind, we can be confident that glyphosate should remain part of an integrated weed control strategy."

"With the vast investment in herbicide research over many years, it's rare to find such a combination of effectiveness and safety, so it is worth looking after."

For more information visit:
<http://www.glyphosatelitigationfacts.com/main/>



Mark Buckingham joined Bayer in 2018 with their acquisition of Monsanto who he started with in 1999 in the UK. He later worked in a variety of corporate affairs roles at Monsanto's Headquarters in St Louis, USA and their Australian business in Melbourne before returning to Europe. Mark has a BSc in Agriculture from Reading University UK and is a 1996 Nuffield Farming Scholar.

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ENVIRONMENT

A threat to the population of bees

Are we ignoring biodiversity risks in the same way we ignored the pandemic? Before the coronavirus outbreak began late last year, scientists had been warning of the likelihood of a global pandemic for decades

A number of experts across the world had predicted that it was not a case of if - but when - a new debilitating disease would sweep the planet, and that we were greatly underprepared. And while it is now obvious that the risk of a pandemic and its global impact was severely underestimated, it is far from the only biological risk that we have been ignoring.

Biodiversity, and the threat to the population of bees in particular, may not seem the most pressing issue on the horizon amidst a global crisis. However, the importance of bees to both the environment and our economy is more important than many people realise, and their populations are under threat.

Bees are vital to our way of life because they pollinate food crops, fertilising plants so that they can produce fruit, vegetables, seeds. According to the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, pollination is worth £691 million to the UK economy.

"Insect pollinators are essential for food production," Gill Perkins, CEO of Bumblebee Conservation Trust told The Independent.

Bees and other insect pollinators together pollinate 87 percent of all plant species, and about 75 percent of crop species. Without bees, it has been estimated that supermarkets may have half the amount of fruit and vegetables.

The extinction of bees could lead to a significant

disruption in our food supply chains, drive up the price of fresh produce, and likely cause famine in poorer regions, according to a number of wildlife organisations.

"Without them, we would have no apples, tomatoes, strawberries, peppers, cherries, chocolate, coffee, and much much more. We could not feed the human population; billions would starve," Dave Goulson, Professor of biology at the University of Sussex specialising in the ecology and conservation of insects, said in an interview.

Their decline or extinction would also have a knock-on effect on the makeup of our ecosystems, as bees contribute significantly to the pollination of wildflowers that provide the basis of many food chains.

"Numerous flowering plants would disappear from natural ecosystems, leading to a collapse of biodiversity with further dire consequences for planetary health," Prof Goulson added.

Importantly, there are three different types of bees in the UK, including bumblebees, solitary bees and honey bees, alongside over 280 bee species in total, which are all important pollinators.

According to a report by World Wide Fund in 2019, 17 species of bees had become regionally extinct in the UK, with 25 other

types marked as threatened and another 31 of conservation concern.

Further afield, twelve wild bee species within Europe are classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as critically endangered. A further 52 are listed as endangered.

Their populations are threatened by a number of factors including habitat loss due to agriculture and farming, urban and suburban development, pesticides, climate change and disease. And, whilst the climate crisis has drawn more mainstream attention in the last few years, experts urge that acknowledging threats to biodiversity, that are often easily overlooked, is just as important.

"Loss of biodiversity is as big a threat to our future as climate change, but gets much less attention, perhaps because the benefits we get from biodiversity, though vast, are largely hidden to us in our everyday, urban lives," Professor Goulson said.

Ms Perkins echoed the sentiment that while "climate change is rightly front and centre of many people's minds" it is "vitally important that we address biodiversity challenges such as habitat loss and the role of invasive species."

To assist in the protection of bees and their habitats, anyone can take action to help prevent the decline of their populations.

Experts encourage that there are lots of small steps everyone can take to protect bee populations such as refraining from using pesticides on gardens, cutting grass less often, and planting more nectar-rich flowers, shrubs and trees.

Ben Keyword, Entomologist at Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust, said that "as individuals, we can all help by avoiding the use of chemicals in our gardens" and "leave more of our gardens blooming rather than turning them into decking or parking areas. As a species, we have started to think of ourselves as outside of nature rather than a part of it and yet it is vital to our health and wellbeing," he added.

Ultimately, experts have warned that risks and impacts of depleting biodiversity, climate change and disease all go hand in hand and that in light of the coronavirus pandemic, the world needs to evaluate the impact it is having on the planet and its environment.

"We have a small window of opportunity, in overcoming the challenges of the current crisis, to avoid sowing the seeds of future ones," they said.

Article by Louise Hall, The Independent



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Machinery and Supplies

Product Update

A round-up of the latest product news announced in recent weeks



GKB Machines are providing the solution to ground compaction with the launch of the revolutionary GKB Deep Tine Aerator (DTA).

Designed to relieve compaction, the GKB DTA works on natural sports pitches to relieve the surface compaction enabling water to travel through and for stronger roots to develop.

With an adjustable 25-degree heave angle, the GKB DTA's tine holding system allows users to take control on removing compaction from varying depths up to 16 inches.

Featuring a 3-speed heavy duty gearbox, users can adjust the speed of the tines to create the required hole pattern in the turf and, with its unique tine mounting system, quick changeover for different size tines has never been easier.

In addition, built on the understanding that 'the worker is king', GKB Machines ensure that the GKB DTA requires minimal maintenance as it is fitted with a heavy-duty sealed bearings on the crank shaft, ensuring focus is always on improving the ground and less on maintaining the machine.

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Developed to meet the demands of the commercial market, the new EGO RotoCut attachment has dual sharpened blades made of high strength alloy steel and a cutting width of 23cm.

Combined with an integrated guard, it is designed to cut close to the ground, quickly and safely in areas where scattering debris could be damaging.

Weighing in at just 1.9kg, it's powered by market-leading 56-volt Arc lithium-ion technology, eliminating the noise and pollution generated by petrol powered equipment. With low vibration rates (1.1/1.5m/s²) and a LpA noise level of 79.3dB(A), it's ideal for prolonged professional use, especially in built-up areas.

EGO Professional-X RotoCut is a compatible attachment for EGO's commercial line trimmers and brush cutter (BCX3800, STX3800, ST1530E and BC3800E), which are



ECHO has introduced a new range of three domestic and semi-professional use double-sided hedgetrimmers: the HC-2020, the HC-2020R and the HC-2320. These hedgetrimmers, which replace existing models, are lighter in weight and feature a reduced emissions engine which has to be a major consideration in present and future times.

With its new engine design for lower emissions and 534mm length cutting blades, you get a hedge trimmer with improved ergonomics and better precision for tackling those small to medium jobs. The Japanese double-edged cutter blades offer sharpness and durability whilst, overall, the hedgetrimmer is balanced and lightweight at just 4.5kg dry weight.

The HC-2020R replaces the HCR-1501, offering a rotatable handle version of the HC-2020 double sided hedgetrimmer. It's a lightweight, highly manoeuvrable double-edged trimmer specifically designed for medium-sized jobs and ideal for domestic users or professionals working on small to medium-sized hedges. The rotatable handle may be a small feature but it makes a huge difference. The 5 position handle allows you to find the most comfortable position for cutting at different angles. The HC-2020R weighs in at just 4.6kg dry weight with an even distribution for optimal comfort and performance. The renowned quality of Japanese blades offers super sharpness making precise and clean trimming a breeze.

Replacing the HC-156, the new ECHO HC-2320 is a lightweight, double-sided hedgetrimmer with an extra-long 639mm blade for tackling larger, taller hedges. The lighter weight and ergonomic construction combine with robust components to give you a rugged yet easy to use hedgetrimmer, again with sharp Japanese blades for precise cutting and higher productivity.

All the new hedgetrimmers come with the latest ECHO low-emission engine for cleaner operation and reduced impact on the environment. Each machine has an industry-leading 5-year domestic or 2-year professional warranty.

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ICL has announced the launch of Gronamic - a new range of organo-mineral fertilisers.

The Gronamic range comprises various analyses and particle sizes to suit the demands of all types of fine and coarse turf. The range combines the benefits of mineral and organic sources of nutrient to provide consistent and long-lasting growth responses.



The granulation process produces consistent, uniform and dust-free products. This range allows you to incorporate all the benefits of organic sources of nutrition into your fertiliser programme without compromising on quality or reliability.

The Gronamic fertilisers utilise organic and mineral nutrient sources to provide a phased consistent release that creates consistent growth responses. The consistent granulation facilitates even spreading and ensures reliable performance.

There are four products in the Gronamic range:

Gronamic Golf - "High N" 16-3-6 +2MgO +2CaO +0.5Fe

Gronamic Golf - "High K" 5-0-22 + 2MgO +1.5CaO +0.5Fe

Gronamic Sport - "High N" 16-3-6 +2MgO +2CaO +0.5Fe

Gronamic Allround - 10-4-5 +2MgO +0.5 Fe

All of the products have a low C:N ratio to ensure optimal nutrient availability (as C:N ratio increases, plant nutrient availability in short term reduces).

The Gronamic range is also part of Turf Rewards - purchasing 25 x 25kg will earn 5 points.

ICL has also announced the launch of SierraformGT CalMag into the UK & Ireland market.

New for 2020, SierraformGT CalMag is a homogenous slow release fertiliser supplying calcium, magnesium and trace elements for turf growth and all-round plant health.

The product is ideal for fine turf or stadia pitch application through the late spring, summer and early autumn. The nitrogen content is mostly slow release (MU) based to create a sustained release and steady even growth.

The new analysis also contains the mineral polyhalite to supply potassium, calcium and magnesium when these are indicated as required from soil testing. The added SeaMax (soluble seaweed concentrate) in the formulation aims to bring benefits from plant rooting and stress tolerance.

Pitchcare are an appointed distributor of ICL products. Visit the Pitchcare Shop to view the full range.



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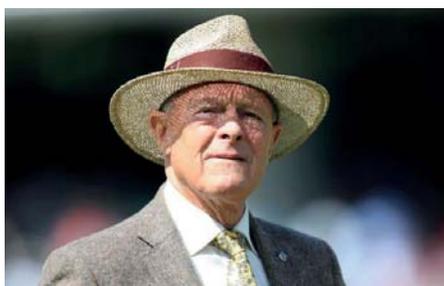
OFFSIDE

The not so serious side
of the industry

Boycott leaves Test Match Special

Covid-19 has seen Sir Geoffrey of Boycott's 14-year spell on the BBC's iconic Test Match Special come to an end, with the commentator saying the coronavirus pandemic had essentially made the decision for him following his quadruple heart bypass.

The 79-year-old former England batsman said he had "to be realistic".



The ex-Yorkshire player, who scored 8,114 runs in 108 Tests, had the operation in 2018.

"I would have loved to continue but I need to be realistic," he said.

"My contract with the BBC finished at the end of last summer. I would like to thank BBC TMS and BBC Sport for a wonderful 14 years. I have thoroughly enjoyed it and just love cricket with a passion, but Covid-19 has made the decision for both of us."

Love him or loathe him, his dulcet Yorkshire tones are going to be missed.

It's a weed

A woman who decided to research the species of plant she had been watering and feeding for 'months' shared the results on Facebook to give other gardeners 'a good laugh.'

Having taken the plant under her wing, she decided to do some more research to identify exactly what the species was and how best to care for it.

But her quest quickly produced an unexpected result because it turned out the plant she had been lovingly caring for was



in fact a weed. With no intention of letting her hard work go to waste, she pledged to continue looking after the fireweed, as it does produce flowers.

Life's not such a grind for Cal

So there I was watching *Hugh's Wild West* on BBC2 when who should pop up as a 'local peregrine expert' other than Patrick



Cal is pictured on the left with Pat Roach

'Cal' Callaby, former workshop manager at the Celtic Manor Resort.

Cal was in charge of all things mechanical at the now infamous 2010 Ryder Cup - the wet one - and also oversaw many Wales Open tournaments.

Along with his pal Pat Roach, Cal has been monitoring and recording data on the peregrines' nesting site - opposite the Boat Inn on the banks of the River Wye in Chepstow - for the past ten years.

Now happily retired, it was good to see this thoroughly decent man enjoying a drink ... whilst keeping an eye on the birds obviously!

Vintage Toro Greensmaster cuts like a dream

Some eBay finds are just pure gold. In this case, a vintage circa 1971, unused and undoubtedly collectable Toro 21" Greensmaster pedestrian mower.

The listing was won by the father of Toro's Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award 2018 winner Dan Ashelby. Mark, from Mark Ashelby Grounds, who has spent twenty-five years in sports turf management, knows a good deal when he sees one.

Dan says of his dad's win: "We couldn't believe it when we saw the listing. The machine was bought new by a cricket club in the early 1970s but never used. It's in mint condition with no wear anywhere. It came with the original user manual and the original stickers on the engine. The red paint is still freshly painted like new on the cutting reels!"



Most people will relate to this conversation:

I had a 'discussion' with the Chairman of the bowls club. It went as follows:

Chairman: "The green is lightning fast, but then you are cutting it short."

Me: "I'm not actually!"

Chairman: "You are" - smug grin.

Me: "Actually, I have levelled and consolidated the soil surface. This, combined with the fact that it is dry, is giving the illusion it is cut short."

Chairman: "No your cutting it short. I play on greens all over the county and this is cut the shortest."

Me: "Okay, I'll cut it longer then."

Yorkshireman keeps 500 lawnmowers in his conservatory

Enforced self-isolation has put lawnmower enthusiast Stan Hardwick's plans to grow his impressive collection on hold.

The 80-year-old retired golf club greenkeeper keeps around 500 vintage mowers in his Filey home, with many taking up the conservatory and some still in their original boxes in the loft.



© jpimedia

Stan travels around the country in pursuit of rare models that come up for sale, even taking the ferry to Ireland with his wife Margaret to acquire one of the few surviving Elwood Maguire mowers.

Unfortunately, the lockdown has prevented the couple from making their May pilgrimage to the annual gathering of The Old Lawnmower Club at Milton Keynes Museum.

Stan began collecting mowers around 30 years ago, and also enjoys restoring them. The rarest model in his possession is a Shanks that dates back to 1861, which he paid £250 for.

Football lockdown haircuts

The closure of hairdressers across the world has led to some interesting trims in the world of football. So, it was inevitable that many Premier League footballers returned to training with some far from ideal haircuts - and all in front of the watching eyes of club photographers.



Sadio Mane



Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang



Erik Lamela



Adama Traore



Jorginho



Kelechi Iheanacho



Jack Grealish



Jonny Evans



Alisson Becker

QUOTE ME HAPPY

"That is Jurgen Klopp in a nutshell, that's why everybody loves him. He's the ultimate people person. Brendan Rodgers was here three years and still doesn't know his name." **Jurgen Klopp** recently left 'The Voice of Anfield' speechless when he introduced himself.

"I don't trust you, I think you have been playing games behind my back, you have used me as a bit of a pawn in your game of chess, I can't put my boots on and play for you every week. I can't respect you, I think you are a bit of a snake." **Sam Burgess** recently revealed what he said to then-Bath coach Mike Ford during England's dire 2015 Rugby World Cup campaign.



Chris Pennell

"The fans bring the intensity. They give you the pressure and the pressure sometimes brings out wonderful moments in sport. If you had no fans there, I don't know if you would have the same excitement and the same butterflies as when you've got an amphitheatre there with 20,000 or 30,000 people up at one hole." **Stephen Gallacher**, part of Europe's winning team at Gleneagles in 2014, says tournaments wouldn't be the same.

"I've found out that I'm not as good a teacher as I thought I would be and maths isn't my strong point." **Bournemouth AFC manager, Eddie Howe**, spoke about home schooling his sons.

"Sports people have a lot, a lot of pull, and I think we don't even realise how much it really is. We start trends." **American tennis player Frances Tiafoe** says athletes do not always appreciate the influence they have.

"I think it's going to be a case of it needs to take as long as it needs to take for those guys to be at the lowest level of risk of injury, because if things go wrong in those positions, they can go drastically wrong." **Worcester full-back Chris Pennell** says he is pleased rugby union is taking time to decide when to resume playing.

"Covid-19 allows you permission to try things a little bit differently. You have to be as creative as you possibly can when you are playing behind closed doors." **European Tour chief executive Keith Pelley** wants players to wear television microphones to enhance coverage of events played behind closed doors.

It's about obsessing over the little things, the details no one else sees. It's never tolerating anything less than the best. Perfection is a mindset. And that's worth being proud of.

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