Keeping in touch.

Firstly my apologies for the lack of updates this season, it's been a tough year all round, but nowhere more so than on the course.
In my last report in April our problems were related to too much rain and snow!
I am sure no one thought that after such a wet period, that by June we would be talking about drought conditions and it ending up as the hottest, driest summer on record.

This weather has certainly taken it's toll on the course, especially our Fairways and tees.
With Redditch built on clay and retaining water well, early on, our fairways fared well against other courses built on better draining soils, but as the summer went on and the rain did not materialise we started to suffer. The shock waving procedures carried out in the winter to remove surface water worked against us as the ground dried out and the slits opened up. Our attempts at filling in fairway depressions over old drainage lines in the winter, which at the time seemed like a great idea, with no growth, proved to be a mistake.

A major fairway over-seeding programme is needed but we feel with the continuing dry spell, the upcoming lower temperatures and at a cost of £7000-£8000 pounds in seed alone, this would be a waste as germination conditions are not at their best.
We have therefore decided to wait and re-asses the situation in the spring.

After the summer we have had our greens and tees should have been excellent; all they needed was irrigation.
Unfortunately the water required to keep them irrigated was in short supply.
In May we lost one of our water storage tanks. Our oldest tank gave way due to corrosion leaving us without an irrigation system for over a week while we temporarily bypassed the faulty tank. During the drought further breakdowns in our ageing system, brought on by the continual use, meant we had several periods where we could not water.

Due to the sale of the land on which our tanks are located, we were this winter planning to replace both tanks with a larger storage facility along with a new pump house and in a new location. To spend £8000/£10000 on a tank that would have been surplus to requirements after the move, I thought would be wasted expenditure.
With water management I felt the existing tank would be adequate storage.
I made the decision to not replace the tank!
Hindsight would now have been a welcome attribute.
At the height of the drought we were applying approximately 80000 litres a day to the greens.
With only 50000 litres of storage we were unfortunately unable to store enough water to irrigate greens and tees adequately, with tees getting minimal amounts.

Applying this much water although necessary has caused problems and as I am sure you have seen our 5th 12th and 16th greens are badly diseased with Anthracnose.
Below is a short explanation of causes, effect and treatments.

Anthracnose is most common on *Poa annua grass* in the UK and Ireland but has been noted on *Agrostis* and *Fescue.*
This pathogen can cause two types of disease depending on the prevailing weather conditions causing the grass to turn a tan-yellow colour in irregular patches.
Basal rot then begins as yellowing of older leaves on individual plants. The plant easily pulls from the turf and a black rot is visible at the base of the stem.
Basal Rot also occurs during the late summer and is normally most damaging during August and September.
Where is Anthracnose found?
Any area of turf suffering from stress, especially golf greens and bowling greens.Anthracnose is widespread over the whole of the UK. It is the second most common disease on golf courses in the UK and Ireland.
When is Anthracnose likely to attack turf?
Foliar blight is most common during hot, dry periods of the summer. Basal rot is mostly found during cool, wet weather from late autumn through winter and into early spring.

High Risk Situation
Presence of *Poa annua* that is under stress.
Common stresses include drought conditions, humidity, compacted soils, areas of high wear, inadequate nitrogen and low cutting heights.
Effects of Anthracnose
Infection with anthracnose reduces the playing quality of golf and bowling greens as the surface trueness is reduced. In severe cases loss of turf cover may occur, which may encourage the ingress of even more *Poa annua* grasTurf
Management
Avoid a moist or humid turf surface and try to dry soil by applying infrequent, deep watering.
Increase the height of cut.
Regulate irrigation applied to relieve drought as it will be conducive to the spread of anthracnose rather than solve the problem.
Alleviate compaction.
Reduce the ingress of Poa annua grass into swards.
Apply a nitrogenous fertiliser if the fertility is low.

Our three affected greens are our ones that have poor airflow causing high humidity!
The continual drive for low height of cut to facilitate fast greens has also, most certainly, been a contributing factor.

Changes in regulations due to waterway pollution has meant that certain chemicals are no longer permitted. We can no longer use curative treatments and prevention is now the only option. This is not as effective and certainly more expensive!

As you can imagine in the short term there is not a magic answer to our problems.

We are treating the affected greens and leaving them longer to help grow out the disease.
Our aeration and fertiliser programmes are ongoing.
We are again carrying out tree work where necessary to improve light, airflow and rainfall especially to tees.
Long term we are trying to develop a preventative treatment plan that suits both our shaded and open greens but: something we must do is improve our irrigation system.
This year has shown us that irrigation on our USGA greens is of paramount importance. Without regular regulated applications greens and tees will suffer.
Our irrigation system as with most clubs was installed in the 70's and is now at the end of its useful live. Other clubs are changing their systems and it is something we must consider if we want to maintain our standards._
With a system that only irrigates greens and tees costing in the region of £300000 and in a perfect world we would love to irrigate approaches too, it is obvious that decisions cannot be taken lightly. This money has got to be found from somewhere and with the pending sale of the Marlpit land the club maybe in a better position to consider it.
However I am sure there will be other demands for the money generated and this is something members should now be actively considering.

This year has seen the course at its worst for many years but I assure you that as greenkeeping team we are driven to present the highest course standards we can within the restraints of the budget we have.
The chance of having another year with the extremes of weather we have experienced are most unlikely, but we must be prepared.

I do hope you understand how hard this year has been but the course is now improving and we hope to have it back to a more acceptable standard in the near future.

Please try to enjoy your golf and can we ask you to please be patient.

Your views on any of these matters is, as usually, greatly appreciated.

John Garey

Get in touch

email:- john.garey@yahoo.co.uk