



Golf Course Superintendent's Course Report

Winter 2014/2015

As I write this report, the golf course is covered in a blanket of snow. Whereas it does prevent golf from taking place, it is also nice to see nature in its place. From a greenkeeping point of view, minus temperatures and extended cold spells control a variety of pests and diseases as well as helping improve soil structure.

In this report I am going to review some of our ongoing activities during the last number of weeks and talk about the use of the golf course during frost conditions.

The course generally has come through the early winter period quite well. A lot of golf has been played and we have managed to maintain good quality playing surfaces.

Tees:

Playing off the grass tees during the winter months, even with the use of mats in some instances, is a huge improvement on what went before. This consequently requires extra maintenance on tee tops and paths (e.g. mowing, seeding and top dressing).

Fairways:

The height of cut has been raised and the frequency of cut reduced. This has helped increase the sward density for the winter months. They are now ready for fertiliser application which will be applied when conditions allow.

Greens:

The greens have performed well this winter: good rolling, reasonable speeds and disease free. We are continuing to maintain detailed records of the performance of greens which will act as a strong evidence base over time.

Greens & Frost:

During freezing temperatures, generally below 4c (this is the point below which we start to get freezing conditions) we have to consider taking the main greens or indeed, the whole course out of play. There are some obvious reasons for this but also some other reasons that may not be as evident. Damage can occur to the grass plant when the mainly water based cells of the leaf (stomata) are ruptured by traffic while frozen (imagine a sheet of bubble wrap packaging being walked upon). The resulting damage can be seen as a blackening effect. Potentially more serious damage can occur to the playing surfaces when a potential thaw occurs on the surface. In this situation the course can look virtually frost free. However, if pressure is applied by foot or mechanical means to this surface, a shearing of the non-frozen root mass can occur, leading to severe damage.

Whereas grass plants will nearly always recover given the right conditions and treatment, the winter months are obviously not the ideal time for this – low ground temperatures and reduced light duration and intensity inhibits the plant's ability to absorb nutrients and produce Chlorophyll.



Members' expectations are justifiably high for the quality of the course they play on and we have sharpened our focus in this regard. Any play that would lead to potential damage of the course has been avoided or mitigated. It may not always be visually apparent as low temperatures can lead to frost persisting below the surface at the root level.

We trust that members will understand that we take decisions on the closure of the course or the introduction of temporary greens based on the imperative of Members' safety and potential damage to the course.

Tree & Shrub Planting:

Hundreds of trees and shrubs are being planted in an on-going programme as part of the 18 holes course project. The species involved are compatible with our current species mix on the course and have an ability, in our particular ground and climactic conditions, to grow and flourish. Alongside this we are continuing to plant trees and shrubs to enhance the current course – for example, hydrangea planting on the 13th tee.

Trees:

Extensive tree pruning and strategic felling of macra carpa species (evergreen Leylandi) took place across the course. In particular, a number of Leylandi were removed from the right hand side of the 13th green. The primary objective was to permit increased light and wind movement across the green surface thus reducing incidents of disease and improving sward density. The 14th green is being looked at in the same context.

On the left of the first fairway, a number of trees were removed that were incompatible with the location and approaching the end of useful life. Extensive pruning on the left hand side of the 14th fairway after the turn took place. This, along with the removal of trees from behind the 14th green, gives a nice open aspect into our new holes.

Mulching the base of trees in certain locations is also taking place. This will enhance the appearance and reduce weeds in these areas.

Conclusion:

On-going work across the course will include bunker renovations (particularly the 5th) and tee top levelling, (particularly the 2nd) plus the day to day work to maintain the course to a high standard every day that golf is being played.

Eddie Walsh

Golf Course Superintendent