



Course Report Spring 2023

With a very dry February, the course was in reasonably good condition coming into the spring. However we had hardly a dry day in march so the place is really starting to show some signs of wear in high trafficked areas. Wear and traffic continue to be our biggest problems with a high number of rounds being played each week.

This high volume of traffic causes the soil to become compacted which reduces the pour space within the profile. In order for grass to grow well, it needs moisture, air and nutrients in the root zone. Compaction reduces air and moisture thus reducing the availability of nutrients. It also reduces the rate that moisture moves through the profile which means the surface becomes muddy during wet periods.



You can see in the photo above the effects of wear beside a tee box, with the area roped off much healthier.

This is why we need to rope off high trafficked areas during the winter. If we didn't then areas you would expect to be in good condition during the playing season just wouldn't perform to a high standard.

We have spent the entire winter trying to relieve this compaction with the use of verti-draining and slitting (shockwave) on all fairways, surrounds and walk off areas. We have also hollow cored and slit tee boxes and we have slit and spiked greens on a monthly basis.



Verti-drain



Shockwave

Pitchmark Repair

I have also noticed the increased amount of unrepaired pitch marks on the greens. Pitch marks have a dramatic effect on the smoothness of the green and balls will deviate off their line when they hit one.

An unrepaired ball mark during the growing season takes at least 3 weeks to recover, so it's very important that every time you step onto a green you repair at least one pitch mark. Even if you feel that your ball did not leave a mark, you should still repair one.

To repair a pitch mark, grass should be ***pulled in from the sides*** to cover it, NOT pulled up from the centre.



Don't tell me the person who made this didn't realise they had to repair a pitch mark!



A poorly repaired pitch mark.

Extension of 3rd Green

The 3rd green was extended in early January. This will help spread the wear over a larger area. This green has always been a difficult green to place pin positions on as it is quite undulating. In addition, the positions at the front of the green are quite punishing when the greens are a little faster during the season.

It's also hoped that this will help to encourage the finer grasses that we are trying to establish on our greens. The new section will receive higher nutrition to encourage growth and extra topdressings of sand to help even and smooth the surface. Water requirements will also be higher until a significant root mass is established.

Unfortunately, the weather was quite cold in February and early March so we have not had much growth and the green has been slow to establish itself. Any thoughts of an earlier opening date are very unlikely. I would estimate that weather permitting we will be able to open the new section around mid-May.



The new section has received a number of cuts and we are starting to reduce the cutting heights.

Bunker Renovation

We have now completed the renovation of bunkers. The sand in the bunkers had become compacted and some bunkers had quite a lot of stones in them.

The sand gets compacted as it becomes contaminated over the years with organic matter, soil and silt during periods of wet weather when water runs into the bunkers. Stones migrate up from the bunker bases, but the biggest problem is foxes and badgers digging holes not only in the base of the bunkers but also in the faces and edges. This throws a lot of undesirable material into the sand.

The process involved stripping all the sand out of the bunkers to relieve any compaction. We then repaired and refreshed the drainage, replaced the old sand on the faces and edges which see less play, removing any stones or debris at the same time. We then topped up the bunker with fresh sand. We used an extra 120 tonnes of sand during this process.

The bunkers should be playing a lot better now, although they will be slightly fluffy until we get some play in them to firm them up a bit. Even after that there will always be inconsistencies

between the individual bunkers on the course. This is because the consistency of the sand relies on so many factors including:

- Traffic - Some bunkers see a lot more play than others.
- Topography - Steep bunkers faces dry out, shallow don't.
- Orientation - North facing wet, south facing dry. Shade or sun results in damp or dry
- Weather - Wet gives firm sand, dry gives soft sand.



Stripping out the old sand.



Drainage repaired and old sand replaced



Spreading and compacting the face.



Topping up with fresh sand.

Members can also contribute to the maintenance of our bunkers. We prepare bunkers early in the morning and it seems just like with pitch marks some golfers decide not to rake the bunker or rake it poorly after they have been in it.

Smoothing footprints over with the bottom of your club is not sufficient to make sure the surface is in a reasonable condition for the golfers coming behind you. Also, sand should be pushed as well as pulled to maintain an even depth across the whole bunker.



1 down, 49 to go.

Grass Seeding and Irrigation

We have planted new grasses on the 5th tee and around the flagpoles at the club house. The old lavender on the 5th had become overgrown and unsightly.

We have also planted a number of trees to the left of the 18th fairway. This shouldn't impact on the playability of the hole as they are quite a bit off the golfing line, but it will help to screen the houses to the left of this hole.

We have upgraded the irrigation on the 4th fairway, 6th tee and 7th approach. There was already irrigation in these areas but some aspects of it were inefficient. The issue with irrigation is that the more you do the more you want to do as it improves the turf significantly during dryer periods.

We have upgraded and installed new irrigation on many areas of the course over the past number of years but unfortunately we are now at the limit of what our irrigation infrastructure can handle. Although we have an excellent water supply (our own bore hole/well) the pumps and mains pipework are at the limit of what they can produce with regards to water volume and pressure.

If we were in a drought period during the summer and I wanted to turn on water on every station, I need to start it at 20.30hrs in the evening and the programs will run nonstop until 07.30hrs the next

morning. I will then have to turn on certain areas that require extra water manually during the day in-between golf.

Fairway Sanding

All fairways were sanded in the autumn. They have received further sand recently. You'll be glad to hear that we got more sand out in the autumn than we expected so it will be a much lighter dressing this Spring.

I realise that sanding is very disruptive for golfers but it is essential if we are to continue playing golf all year round. It helps to maintain a free draining top profile and allows water to reach the drains, and helps to relieve compaction by diluting the soil. Sand particles don't bind together as easily and are larger than soil and silt particles so it creates a more free draining profile with more pore space for air and moisture. It also helps produce firm fairways during the season.

As we can no longer use any chemicals to control worms, worm casts have increased significantly, and sanding has never been so important.



This was taken after we lifted the sod from a fairway and left it completely smooth when we went home. The following morning it had all of these worm casts on it. This is happening on all fairways except much of it is hidden by the grass.

Tree Maintenance

All trees have now been up cut and pruned. This means that golfers can get in under them and also means that we are not damaging trees or machinery when we are cutting around them.



Some of the older trees have been pruned to allow light under them to try and maintain a good cover of grass.

We have also removed some trees from the right of the 18th fairway. This included a number of trees that were damaged in the fire and never recovered. We then lost another tree during the high winds. All the stumps have been removed and grass seed has been sown.

The trees in this area had reached a stage that the canopy was touching and no light was getting in. All the grass had died back, and as a lot of balls land here we decided to thin it out and try to get some grass growing so there is a better surface to play off.

Placing

Once we get a bit of growth all fairways will be scarified. This helps to stand the grass up and reduces lateral growth which helps to give better presentation of the golf ball. It also removes thatch which helps keep the fairway firm and free draining.

Traditionally placing has been removed around the third week in April and I hope that this year will be no different. This is very much dependant on the weather but is generally dictated by golfers not by myself. I'm happy to lift placing once golfers feel that it is no longer required, and that they are getting good enough lies with no plugging or mud on the ball.

Course Treatment

All areas of the course have received their first application of fertiliser. We had to wait until the temperatures increased for this to happen. If we put it out too early we will not get the full benefit of the fertiliser as much of it will have simply leached from the soil or released into the atmosphere and won't be available to the grass plant when it is needed.

Application timing is very much dependant on the weather and with the price of fertiliser having almost doubled over the last two years we need to make sure that it is as effective as possible. All areas are treated differently with greens, tees, collars, surrounds, fairways, rough, and walk off areas all requiring different fertiliser formulations, application rates and application frequency.

I hope you found this report informative and I wish you all every enjoyment on the course.

Keith Clancy
Course Superintendent