

Time flies by so quickly! About time I sat down and updated on all matters regarding your green. In my defence until recently it was a case of keeping on repeating myself, which is rather boring for me and my reader.

The performance of your green during the 2024 season was rather disappointing, The green did not improve at all from the previous season. It is always easy to blame the weather, but this time the rainy weather did play its part with regards to green speed, but it also encouraged diseases.

I do try to manage your green in an ecological, sustainable and organic way. I am sure that this approach is better for the members, myself and others that give me every valuable help throughout the season and beyond, and also for the environment in general.

In previous updates I made very clear that the level of the thatch layer was a problem. This layer of thatch resulted in slower green speeds and a haven for many diseases. Well the good news is that over around 80% of the green, the thatch has now gone. So now I would expect a quick green with less disease. Well it has not happened yet! So the obvious question is why? The vast majority of the thatch degradation has happened due to increased good bacteria and fungi. These are microscopic organisms which have done a great job turning the thatch layer into humus rich compost which the grass can use for food and will harbour an excellent biome. Unfortunately the makeup of this layer makes it very difficult to firm up and remains 'fluffy'. So we have carried out quite a lot of spiking at very close spacing and have spread just over 4 tonnes of top dressing. The theory is that some of the degraded thatch layer will go down the spike holes and the same for the top dressing. We will carry on regular off season spiking every 6 weeks or so when the weather and green conditions allow. When I walk across the green I can feel the difference under foot, the green feels firmer, I just hope this is not just my imagination.

So with little or no thatch layer the levels of diseases should be greatly reduced. What are the main diseases that bowling greens suffer from? In no particular order:

- **Mychrodium Patch.** Previously known as Fusarium and often called Fuzz, and in my youth was referred to as Stadium Disease, as it proliferates in low air movement situations, Well the incidents of this has been greatly reduced and have not needed to be treated. Grass usually recovers from Mychrodium Patch, so no long lasting damage.

- **Anthracnose.** This disease usually only attacks the species of grasses that I am trying to discourage. These are the Poa types which root only to 40-50mm, so require a much higher requirement in feed and watering. The Anthracnose runs through the sward and kills these grasses; they do not come back. So the sward is thinned. We have applied a lot of extra grass seed and have selected mixtures that have a very high disease resistance amongst other good qualities. If I can figure out how to fly a small drone over the green I am hoping that it will show how the ends of the green have been affected.
- **Dollar Spot.** As the name suggests this disease came to us from the North American Continent as recently as the early 1990's. It likes to over winter in the thatch layer and when conditions are to its liking it appears as a dying patch of grass the size of a US dollar coin. It kills the grass and continues to grow into large patches which eventually coalesce. We know that it prefers a thatchy sward and tends to attack the older species/ varieties of grass. It can be controlled, if treated early enough, by applying Nitrogen in a very quickly available form, and/or by aeration which is not so popular with bowlers, and of course by one or two applications of a suitable fungicide. The problem with all fungicides is the side effects on the microbial biome which is vital to my system.

We are working on the ends to get rid of the drop off into the ditch. This has not gone to plan unfortunately, and we will be turving the last 600mm with golf greens grade turf as soon as the weather improves. Hopefully the turf will be fully grown before the start of the season. If not we will delay play away from the clubhouse for a few days to help promote growth.

Our main aim this season is to increase the plant density of the sward. We have sown three bags of grass seed this off season, usually just one bag, and have planned extra fertiliser, This should result in an increase in plant density, but will require more verticutting and mowing. You could say we have completed phase one and am now starting on phase two. This will be a balancing act as it will be very easy to apply too much of certain fertilisers and that will lead to formation of more thatch... back on that roundabout, no thank you.

So we will continue to try to increase green speed as well as the 'trueness' of your green. Time will tell if we meet these targets.

I will however stick to my principles and **work with nature not against nature**