



Course Report – July 2023

Course Update

I started the last Course Report by stating how much I wanted some rain to relieve some of the drought stress we had been facing and luckily about a week after writing that report, we finally got a couple of really good downpours of rain. I also said that greenkeepers were never happy and despite the course bouncing back really well after some much-needed moisture, I would like the summer weather to return to let the course dry out and firm up again – vicious cycle I think they call it.

In all seriousness, the rain we have had has been a huge help to rewet the rootzone and give all areas a much-needed boost after a stressful period. With the rain, eventually came the flush of growth that I have been expecting since April which has provided some challenges. We have had to lightly Verti-Cut, brush, groom and double cut greens just to stay on top of the flush of growth and unlike last year, we have not used a regular application of growth regulator to limit the turf's ability to grow.

I appreciate how frustrating it has been for golfers to play on greens that were not running smoothly for longer than they would have liked, but unfortunately until the weather plays ball, we are limited to what we can do to counteract this. If we look at the Growth Potential (GP), the numbers were not consistently in the right threshold for growing turf until the 10th of June where GP was between 0.75 and 1.0 (1.0 = maximum growth), as indicated by the red circle below.

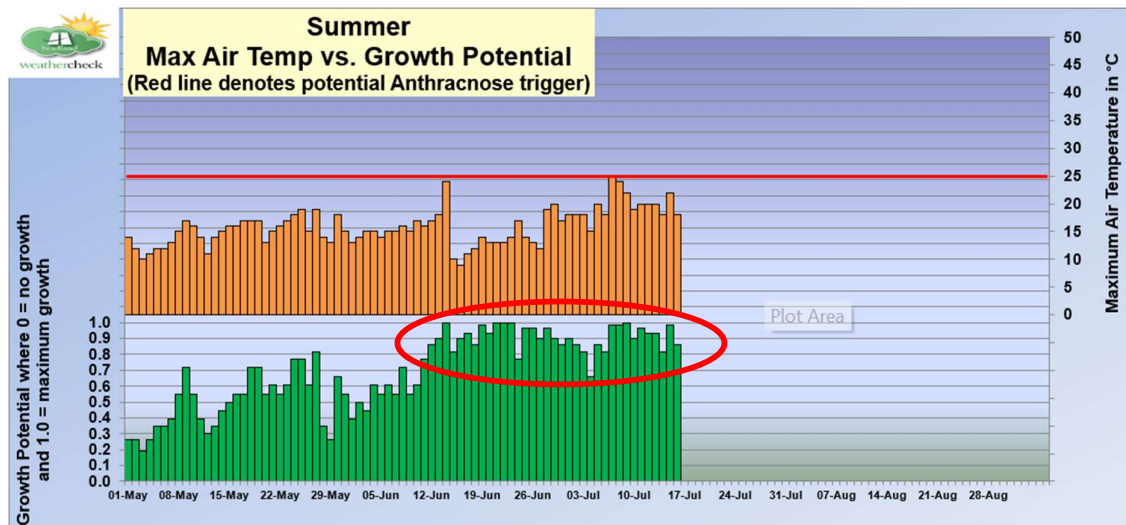


Figure 1: Red circle showing when growth really started consistently coinciding with some much-needed rainfall.

The other challenge that comes with warm and wet weather is the threat of fungal diseases such as anthracnose and dollar spot.

- Anthracnose – can come in two forms, foliar blight or basal rot. Foliar blight will turn the grass a tan-yellow colour and occurs in irregular patches. Can be mistaken for drought stress. Basal rot begins as yellowing of older leaves on individual plants. The plant will easily pull from the turf and a black rot is visible. As you can see in the chart above, our models help to predict when Anthracnose can trigger.



Figure 2: The effect of Anthracnose on turf

- Dollar Spot – lesions on leaves are pale, bleached colour bound by a darker reddish-brown colour. Smaller spots the size of a pound coin appear but can coalesce together to form a larger patch. Mycelium (a cottony or spider web like mass of fungal growth) may be present on affected areas.



Figure 3: Dollar Spot on turf.

As we are in a position of optimum growth, we will treat these pathogens using fertility and applying fertiliser when required to grow these disease pressures out instead of reaching for a chemical solution.

It has been great to receive great feedback from members and visitors on the course conditions through the last month and it has been quite surreal to see some of the world's top Professional Golfers taking to the links during Scottish Open week. It is very unusual for the course down the road to take any attention away from a tournament venue, but it just goes to show how lucky we are to call the West Links home and how revered around the world it really is.

Looking ahead, we will be looking to get an overseed on the greens when conditions allow using the Blec dimple-seeder with fescue seed and the Greentek Dyna-Seeders with bent seed. with continued refinement on all surfaces

Turf Nursery

Work on the turf nursery began on the 11th of July with Alex Dunbar coming on site to start clearing the site, putting all of the material that was in the compound into a big pile ready for screening. He has made an instant impact tidying up the compound. He will spend approx. 5 days to screen all the material before digging out irrigation channels, before spreading the screened rootzone back over the site. Greentech will then come in to prepare the site for seeding in mid-August.



Figure 4: Before work started on the Turf Nursery



Figure 5: A few days into the clearance works – a stark difference already.

Bulk Materials Building

The damaged Bulk Material Building has now been demolished with most of the remaining rubble disposed of with the groundworks taking place to prepare for the foundations to be laid. The programme is slightly behind schedule by a couple of days, but the contractors are confident they will make that time up quickly once they start building the new building.



Figure 6: The Bulk Material Building before demolition.



Figure 7: The Bulk Material Building during site clearance.

Staff Volunteering

We have been delighted to support both the Scottish Open at The Renaissance Club and the Open Championship at Royal Liverpool Golf Club. Graeme Nisbet has been at the Scottish Open hand-mowing greens for the tournament and Daniel Taylor will be helping the team at the Open. Tournament support is a fantastic way for greenkeepers to advance their skills and increase their knowledge base by seeing how Tour events are set up and the expectations required from the greenkeepers to get the course ready for professional tournament play.



Figure 8: The 13th green cut by Graeme Nisbet – no photos of him in action unfortunately



Figure 9: Daniel Taylor bunker faces at Hoylake.

Daniel also successfully passed his Pesticide Application 2 (Boom Spraying) test at the beginning of July. He was grilled for three and a half hours before being told he had passed. We are delighted for Daniel, and we are looking forward to supporting other members of the team on achieving their Pesticide Application qualifications in the near future.

Hot Topic – Surface Refinement

I have talked about how important surface refinement is and how much we have to do on the West Links. There are many tools or pieces of equipment that help us to refine the surfaces but, all we are looking to do is remove or weaken the coarser grasses and promote the finer grasses such as the fescues and bents. Recently with the warmer temperatures and the added moisture, the ryegrass stalks have been really prominent on greens and fairways. Although our cutting fleet is so much better since the arrival of the new machinery, but there is only so much it can do. Below are some of the pieces of equipment we use to refine the surfaces.



Figure 10: Lateral growing ryegrass stalks which are thick and undesirable.

Verti-Cutting - Instead of a normal cutting unit where the blades twist horizontally, a Verti-Cutting unit has blades that sit vertically. The blades can be set either above the ground level (even), above ground level (plus) or below ground level (minus). This means we can refine the surface a little by have it above ground but equal to or lower than the height of cut and this will cut any leggy or uneven growth, or we can have the blades set into the ground which will target the organic material layer and will take out a lot more material.



Figure 11: Fairways after being Verti-Cut which really help to stand a lot of the lateral growing grasses upright.

Groomers - Like smaller versions of Verti-Cutting units but they fit onto a normal cutting unit. This helps to cut any leggy growth whilst cutting but is not meant to be too invasive. It helps to increase the smoothness and trueness in the surfaces and can help to hit those lateral growing ryegrass stalks.

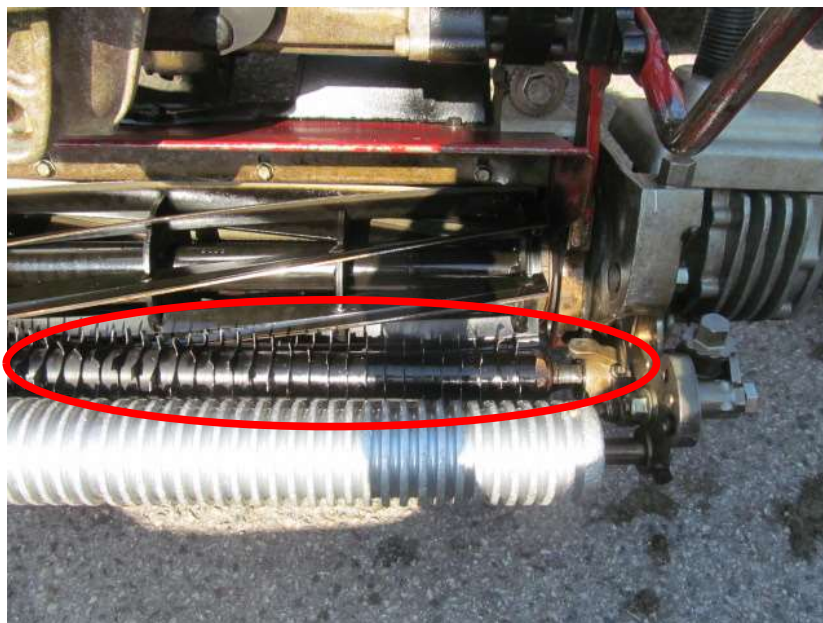


Figure 12: The groomers circled in red, that cut any leggy growth before normal cutting.

Brushing - There are several types of brush that could be used but we use a trailed brush that either be used at a width of 1.8 metres or extended to 3.6 metres with the side brushes down. All the

brush heads are set at different angles, so it is able to pull grass upright before being cut with the normal cutting units. We use this brush on greens, approaches and fairways and it has definitely made a difference.



Figure 13: The Greentek Greens groomer brush which can be used on greens, approaches and fairways.

As I said earlier, we have not been using a Growth Regulator this year so it is important that we undertake these refinement practices but with a busy tee sheet most days, it limits how much refinement on certain areas we can actually do. Ideally, we need dry conditions to be able to get the most out of these refinement processes but sometimes we just have to go ahead even though the end result is not as good as we would like it to be. We started verti-cutting fairways doing the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th but with damp conditions, we haven't been able to do any more.

Kyle Cruickshank
Course Manager