



STRI

Monkstown Golf Club

Advisory Report on the Golf Course

Report Date: 18th September 2015
Consultant: Conor Nolan



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Date of Visit: 28th August 2015

Visit Objective: To review overall course condition and to provide maintenance advice on issues found throughout the course.

Present: Mr H Madden – Secretary Manager
Mr M O’ Sullivan – Course Committee
Mr M Travers – Head Greenkeeper
Mr C Nolan – Turfgrass Agronomist, STRI Ltd

Weather: Dry - 16°C

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Executive Summary

- The playing surfaces are reported to have offered excellent playing quality over the main season which was evident on the day of the visit. Furthermore the creeping bentgrass component seemed to have increased. Enhancement of the finer grasses is due through appropriate overseeding in September.
- Overseeding to improve the uniformity and durability of the aprons had already occurred twice this year. In September formation of “plant pots” are likely to have a greater impact on seed strike and seedling uniformity than the dimple seeding carried out.
- The quality of the sward and firmness of the teeing surfaces was very good indeed. That quality would benefit the fairways were they similarly presented.
- The fairways were somewhat leafy and open in nature when a better body of support would offer improved playing conditions similarly to the red 18th tee. To assist the development of the fairways additional sand will need to be required to those fairways that are somewhat softer underfoot and more vulnerable to earthworm casting so that eventually fescue overseeding can begin. Higher rates of nitrogen fertiliser are appropriate also to enhance the body of grass.
- In order to achieve the standard expected an additional member of staff is required during the main playing season. Then the frequencies of cut on the aprons, tees and fairways can increase for example which will give more consistent presentation.

Key Observations

Greens

There was very good consistency and playing quality between the greens. They offered very good pace at the 3.2 mm height of cut while trueness and smoothness were very good indeed. In fact it was reported that they have been performing exceptionally well over the last few months.

The vigour as presented by the nitrogen status on the visit was slightly higher than desired but at the same time within the normal range expected. Nitrogen inputs had not dropped over last year over concerns of anthracnose disease activity. There was no anthracnose disease on the day rather there was some take all patch seen on occasion (e.g. 5th, 10th and 17th). It was not active on the day. At the lower end of the ideal nitrogen status the bentgrass will spread even better whilst the establishment of new seedlings from overseeding will have a chance. The existing sward was a little bit too competitive from that point of view. The density of the sward was as it should be to support good smoothness but it is the volume of grass that needs to drop back somewhat.

The percentage of bentgrass present from overseeding a good number of years ago was in the order of 30-35% (e.g. 1st, 6th, 15th and 16th). On occasion it reached 40-45% (i.e. 9th) while at other times it was only 10% (e.g. 8th and 10th). Some browner coloured annual meadow grass was noted on the 2nd. It may be possible to reduce this condition through overseeding. The smallness of the green together with the design causes doubt over possible successful overseeding.

Of the blemishes the odd Type 2 fairy ring was noted as was the odd pearlwort weed (e.g. 8th). A light triplex ring was noted to all greens from the added mechanical disturbance that brings.

Firmness underfoot was good thanks to restricted aeration since the February visit. Sarel rolling has been common place at time of each sanding while no solid tine aeration had occurred unlike in previous years where it was much more intense. It was only to the 12th green that an unacceptable level of softness was present due to the inherent drainage of the green and because of its shaded nature limiting drying of the surface. Intervening with solid tine aeration will help improve dryness to some degree.

Below ground the regulation of organic matter was good but could be even better where the nitrogen status reduced somewhat for the same amount of sand applied. It was possible to squeeze a very small amount of water out of the tops of the profile (e.g. 1st).

Root depth remained at a quite shallow depth typically of 45-55 mm to the annual meadow-grass component while the bentgrass was generally deeper at 65 mm or so.



Good blend of bentgrass and annual meadow-grass noted to the 16th green which was quite typical of most greens. Note the reduced amount of bentgrass to the perimeter due to mechanical disturbance from the additional mowing it receives.



Small patches of take all patch disease scarring noted on the 3rd

Aprons, Approaches & Green Surrounds

Efforts to improve the uniformity of the aprons and increase the percentage of dwarf perennial ryegrass were made through two overseeding treatments since the spring. This is a commendable effort. A Blec dimple seeder was hired in to carry out the works to speed up the operation given the current labour resources. While faster in operation than other alternatives it is more suited to swards that are thin or weak. They did not appear to have been much significant change in the botanical composition at this point. A change in technique is advised. It should be acknowledged that establishment of ryegrass is made that bit more difficult due to the very sandy nature of some of the profiles.

At times the sward density was good while for others it was affected by the spotty rye (e.g. 18th), ragged edges (e.g. 1st, 10th and 12th) or indeed some bare patches (1st, 10th and 17th). Overseeding effectively should address these issues.

The approaches didn't stand out from the fairways on the day of the visit due to the frequency of cut being only twice per week. There is simply that bit too much growth in between cuts. Labour restrictions are inhibiting the delivery of necessary three times weekly mowing frequency during the main growing season.



Blurred edge and spotty ryegrass noted to the apron on the 10th which was common to a number of green complexes.

Tees

The vigour and grass cover to the tees was very good indeed. The two applications of controlled release fertiliser since the spring are delivering good results in that regard. The body of grass and indeed the texture were of the highest order with tees such as the ladies 18th tee the aim for other short cut surfaces given the percentage of finer grasses together with a good complement of ryegrass.

There was a low percentage of divot scarring with repair keeping up well with usage levels.

Below ground the regulation of organic matter continued to be very good through regular sanding.



High quality surface presented to the red 18th tee.



Excellent regulation of organic matter noted to the 12th tee which was typical of all tees

Fairways

The quality of the fairways hadn't moved on from the good quality delivered for the time of year in the spring. The body of grass was generally the same as in the spring to those fairways that are more shaded (e.g. 16th and 17th). Worm casting on the day wasn't helping either as it causes a reduction in grass cover. In essence the body of grass would be on the light side when better ball support would allow a lower height of cut also for added presentation.

The spring sand top dressing was carried out with a further one due in the autumn. Because of earthworm activity it wasn't quite having enough effect on the surface firmness and dryness to quite a number of fairways particularly those located to the higher part of the course. They were slightly soft underfoot. Promotion of finer fescues at the moment is not feasible with such profiles when a good complement of fescue would reduce earthworm casting and enhance the body of grass. The body of grass can be improved however over the existing level with an increase in nitrogen input. During the main growing season application of urea is made on a 4-5 week cycle at a rate of 10 kg/ha with added iron sulphate for colour. It would need to double at least but that would increase the demand for mowing even with your current application of growth regulator.

Overseeding of the elevated portion of the 10th fairway was carried out with good success using the dimple seeder hired in. It seemed to have worked because of the general dampness of good parts of the summer but also because of the reduced competition for emerging seedlings.



A more defined fairway is possible on the 18th with an increase in mowing frequency together with a lower height of cut and enhanced body of grass.

Key Recommendations

Greens

- I would encourage that the nitrogen level drop back by 15% or so in line with that recommended during the initial visit in February. Doing so will slow down the rate of accumulation of organic matter, allow for a slightly higher height of cut without loss of speed and favour the finer grasses.
- Overseeding of the greens should follow in September using the “plant pot” formation method as set out during the February report, and is agreed.
- Any overseeding of take all patch diseases should they emerge during the course of the year (growing part) is recommended using straight fescue of Chewings fescue and slender creeping red fescue. These species are generally resistant and overtime will establish in these scars which tend to occur in the same places each and every year. Overseeding locally to these scars is best carried out using a hand fork to prepare multiple holes before scattering seed and lightly dressing with sand together with brushing in.
- Solid tine aeration using 8 mm diameter tines was due to all greens but particularly to the 12th. In general solid tine aeration is appropriate approximately every eight to ten weeks years round to assist infiltration and to prevent surfaces becoming too firm.

- The current approach to sand top dressing and regulation of organic matter is in order. It can be reviewed next year after a year of slightly lower nitrogen inputs.
- Judging by the phosphate and potassium levels from the spring soil analysis application of nitrogen as ammonium sulphate is appropriate alone during the off season. Apply at rates of 25-50 kg/ha on occasion. The higher rate is only recommended at closer intervals should significant fusarium patch disease scarring occur.
- The off season height of cut from the middle of October or so should be elevated to 5 mm to help seedlings establish and survive from the September overseeding. Next summer hopefully with a lower nitrogen input level a height of cut of 3.5 mm on the triplex mower should be sufficient to deliver the same level of speed as that presented this past summer.
- Plug out the odd spot of pearlwort during the off season taking fresh turf from the side.
- I would encourage next summer during the second visit that objective measurement of smoothness and trueness should be undertaken using the STRI Trueness Meter™ in order to demonstrate the quality of the greens, observe the trend over time and benchmark against the STRI target ranges. Similar measurements using objective tools should be taken for moisture and hardness at the time.
- The procurement of the moisture meter as recommended in the spring report would be timely for next season to help with root development as well as ensuring that greens do not become too firm. With use it will also help avoid droughty conditions that bring on type 11 fairy ring. Maintain the moisture in the upper 60mm between 15-25% during the watering phases.

Aprons, Approaches & Green Surrounds

- Overseeding of the aprons as soon as possible after the visit using solid tines to prepare “plant pots” with a Toro Procore 648 punch type aerator is strongly encouraged. This machine will need to be hired in. In preparing the plant pots use larger 18 mm diameter solid tines with the tips removed. Overseed using a pedestrian fertiliser spreading with 50% Lolium perenne, 25% Chewings fescue and 25% slender creeping red fescue. It would be wise to budget for two to three treatments next summer with an April and September treatment the priorities.
- In order to deliver a three time weekly mowing frequency of the aprons and indeed the approaches then an increase in labour is required for next summer.
- Any removal of trees that enhance sunlight penetration on green complexes such as the 5th and 12th are welcome during the late autumn/winter works. Even removal of the pine trees to the rear of the 5th would help air flow through the green.

Tees

- Maintaining the current level of vigour is the main objective for tees management over the coming months and in the off season. This can be achieved by application of ammonium sulphate at rates of 50-75 kg/ha in 400 litres of water. Repeat as and when needed.
- The current approach to sand top dressing is in order.
- Should the decision be made to enhance the design of the tees by performing multiple tees per hole that would require the adjournment of a specialist contractor with a laser guided box grader.

At the moment a few tees are more in need of regrading with the possibility of doing so in house (e.g. 15th).

Fairways

- Enhancement of the body of grass and indeed the texture is possible by increasing the nitrogen inputs during the main growing season. In that regard monthly application of urea at rates of 25-30 kg of product per ha is appropriate in 300-400 litres of water. Urea is preferred over ammonium sulphate as it has a lower scorch index and is therefore much less likely to cause any leaf burn at higher rates of ammonium sulphate during the main growing season. In the off season application rates of ammonium sulphate are appropriate as for tees, i.e. at rates of 50-75 kg/ha and 400 litres of water.
- Growth regulator on a 4-5 weekly cycle can be increased next year by 10-15% or so to help keep down top growth. It is common that the rate increases each year while overcast conditions tend to require slightly higher rates for the same effect.
- In order to progress the firmness and dryness of fairways then a doubling of the sand input is required to some fairway. In that regard 100-120 tonnes/ha would be preferred and should be split into lighter applications, i.e. approximately three treatments. The focus should primarily be on those fairways that are prone to earthworm casting as they reflect the damper conditions and they are the ones that need drier conditions to eventually promote a compliment of fescue. The stronger vigour advocated will favour quicker integration of applied sand.
- With a better body of grass delivered during the main season then the height of cut can be lowered to 13 mm without any fear of complaints from golfers. It will result in balls trundling on further at the lower height, improve the texture and provide better ball support.

Signed



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The STRI Programme provides golf courses with measurements and data that help to monitor and assess golf course performance. The R&A has recently developed CourseTracker (www.coursetracker.org), a free, online business management tool for golf courses, to record, review and analyse golf club performance across many areas of your business, including the golf course. STRI believes The R&A CourseTracker combined with the STRI Programme provides the tools you need to objectively monitor and assess your golf course performance.