

Course Report

July 2021

Club Championship Preparations

I am fortunate to have a fantastic team with me, who go above and beyond for the golf club. Thank you, Harvey, Paul, Graeme, Will and Dave for all your effort over club championship week. Everyone put in the extra hours and all with a positive attitude, striving to present the course as well as we could.

I am pleased the week went well for everyone, we dodged some nasty weather for the competitions, however, we were not so fortunate in the course preparations. Some long, cold, and wet days out there this year.

The greens were verti-cut and top dressed to help smooth out the surfaces. The target is always to get smooth surfaces over quick surfaces. The stimp-meter was invented for consistent surfaces across the course, not for faster greens as it did become. I am glad to say golfers are educated enough now, not to worry about numbers on a stimp-meter. Our greens at Rowlands are a nightmare anyway, the majority it seems are sloped back to front. If you are under a hole putting up hill, they seem sluggish and disproportionately quicker on a downhill putt! For a little insight to this, I placed a ball in the stimp meter and ran it up hill on the 10th, it rolled 7 feet up hill. Downhill it rolled 20 feet! If we were to take these numbers, we could say our greens are rolling at 14 feet on the stimp meter and we know this is not true!

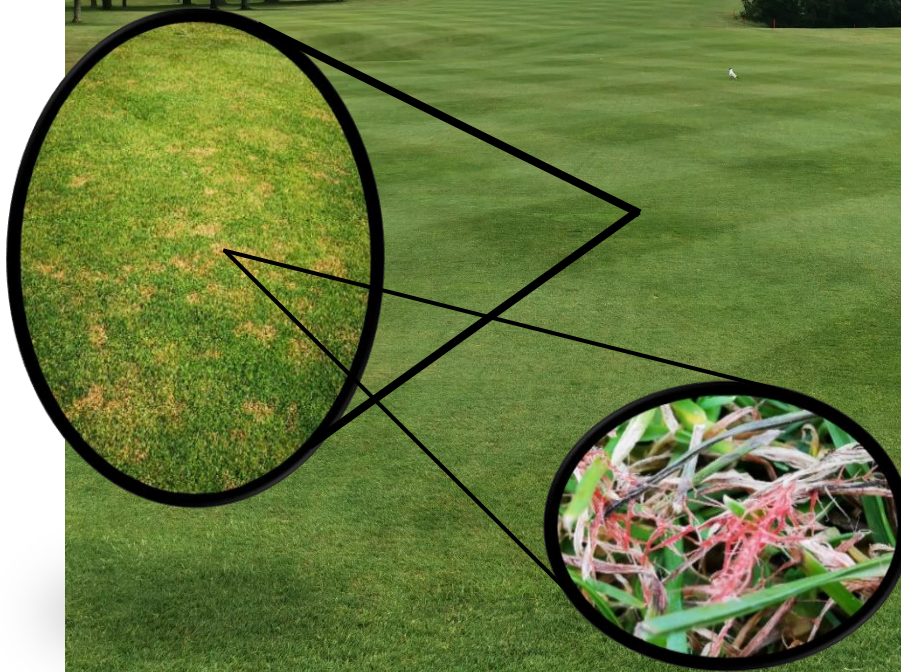
I took readings from the same flat position on the 12th green after set up. I did this before the ladies Wednesday, Seniors Thursday and the club championship, Saturday, and Sunday.

Sunday, we had overnight rain and a mechanical issue, the greens lost over a foot in speed for the final day, but fortunately it did not seem to affect the play too much.

The greens take a lot of stress from us over that week so inevitably some disease crept in. I will try and mitigate this by reducing the cutting and raising the height of cut. We need to aerate the greens more and add topdressings. We aim to do this over the next few weeks.

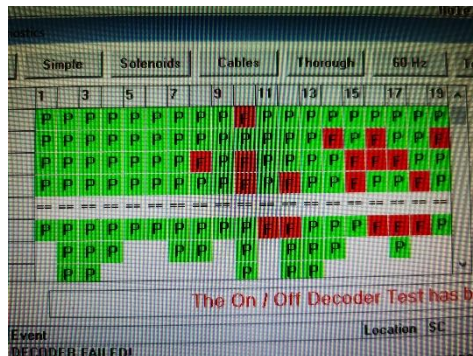
The fairways looked great from the tee but up close you could see they were covered in disease. The disease is Red Thread, *Laetisaria fuciformis*. It is quite common and usually I would not be worried about it. It comes in when conditions are favourable, mild, and damp, low fertility and is spread by water, wind, and equipment.

After the competition week, we were due to spray the fairways with wetting agent, so I added some ammonium sulphate and ferrous sulphate (iron) to acidify the surface. Hopefully, this will check out the Red Thread. The grass went a little dark from the iron, which I was trying to avoid this year to give a more natural look to the golf course, the dark colour will eventually grow out.



Irrigation update

I hesitate to include a section on an irrigation system when we have had the unseasonable wet weather. However, after checking the computer for electrical faults on the 8th of June I was stunned to find this –



Pages of failed decoders, it was the worst I had ever seen. Usually, if a decoder goes awry, it has the potential to knock out the whole system. The red “failure” signs will be in one zone. We can isolate this zone and still use the other two.

Not the case here, and credit to the contractor Abbotts, they had a technician here the next day to find the problem.



It turned out to be a couple of cable breaks. He suspected the sharp flint we have in the ground may have caused this over time.

On the 22nd of June, the day the course was closed for club championship preparations, we had booked in a couple of irrigation technicians to tackle the numerous little faults and leaks we had. It was a successful day, having finished the list we gave them. The leak on the 17th fairway remains a mystery though. We have had random leaks around the course over the years and we can never find the source. One suspects ground water may be

finding its way out of the ground at irrigation points as it is the easiest route. If you remember, we had the left-hand side bunker on 15 closed all last year because of a 'leak'. It has stopped, but we did nothing to fix it.

Leather Jacket update

Some of the greens were showing signs of leather jacket damage. With all the prep work and competitions, we were unable to use the sheet method to help reduce the numbers. I thought the leather Jackets would have gone deep underground by now and would not be causing us issues. It was not the case and uneven putting surfaces were a concern throughout the week.

As soon as the championship week was over, we were able to sheet the worst hit green, the 2nd, and no surprise when we took our largest harvest of all. That was until we sheeted the 2nd tee, we took a staggering four kilogrammes of leather jackets off there!

On a side note, to the leather jackets we discovered these:



Tiny little worms, thousands upon thousands of them. All stuck to the black sheet. Under a microscope we found them not to be nematodes as first thought but our best guess would be enchytraeids, or more commonly known as pot worms.

Nematode experiment

The putting green had two applications of nematodes as prescribed. We left a small section on the back of the green untreated. We wanted to see if we put a black sheet over the whole green, would there be a difference in numbers from the two sections, with nematodes and without.

To my surprise, there was a marked difference in numbers between the treated area and the untreated area. It was not a complete one hundred percent clear green, far from it, but it is an option should we decide to go for it. To do this work mid playing season, having to keep the moisture levels above a safe level for disease, thatch and playing quality would need serious weighing up.

Additional Work

We had to keep the path by the 15th tee closed due to an unsafe tree. The high winds knocked out a big branch from the top. It seemed to be leaning over the teeing area and path, so we decided to remove it.



In clearing the scrub in front of the 15th tee, we exposed the end of the ditch which runs from the other side of the 15th fairway. It was deep and hidden, enough for us to consider it was a danger to members of the public, or golfers who are not familiar with the course. A fence was installed to keep people safe.



Machinery trials

Turf iron

The Salsco roller. An enormous turf iron/roller. It is proving extremely popular amongst some big-name clubs. The speeds the roller can achieve is incredible. To roll all our greens, it took me (with flags out) 1hr 45 minutes. Although there is no doubt it is a great machine, I do not think it was suitable for our site.



We trialled two other machines, another like our old iron but from Toro, and another – an electric powered roller from Tru-Turf. The electric roller proved popular amongst the team and those members who saw it, easy to use and the finish was exceptional. We decided on this electric powered machine, it will hopefully make a positive impact, without impacting the environment!



Electric utility vehicle



We will be trialling this one for the next few days. We hope to start moving towards electric powered machinery. It is inevitably going to go this way and with diesel fuel going up in price it may be a good time to start.

Fairway mower

We have trialled the Baroness mower and Toro. We could not dismiss the Baroness as they are making inroads in many clubs with great feedback. It would be a complete change for us as we have been used to the Toro brand for years.

The Toro machine was a lightweight version, smaller drive unit, like our semi rough machine, but with the same cutting width as our current machines.

The Toro came out on top in our tests. I can see all the good things about Baroness machines and can see why clubs have moved over to them. Good, sturdy, easy to use and stay sharp for a long time. The Toro had the advantage of reel speed adjustment along with fewer blades making the cut of 18mm achievable. The Baroness had 9 blades with no variable reel speed, so it just seemed to run over our long fairways. The mower from Toro had the other advantage of lightweight power and cutting units, and slick tyres reducing the wear and compaction on the course.

Sprayer

The Sprayer we have is brilliant for what we need but unfortunately Hardi do not make them anymore. This has led us to look around at other makes and models.

It is difficult to get demonstrator models on site, so we are limited to asking around and seeing what feedback we get. Toro promote their dedicated sprayer, but the price is well above what we have in the budget, it is full of electronic controls and basically does everything for you. 'Gambetti' are another well-known brand and I have got a quote for one of them. 'Team' are a British make and have various models. Wellow golf course has one and I intend to go and see this to help decide on what is best for us.

Greens Mower

Full electric options are now available from Toro and would be a great statement to make for Rowlands Castle Golf Club. It would be a positive offering to our neighbours who do not like the noise of diesel engines. Red Diesel is losing its tax benefits from 2022 if what I have read is true. However, the machines we use now are fantastic and if an electric machine were not possible this time, another machine the same we have now would serve us well.

Long grass and wildflowers

I would like to thank all those who have said many positive words about the course. In particular, the areas of long grass and wildflower. I would like to take all the credit, but the impact this year is down to the golf course architects of Swan Design.

On a visit to the club, they were astonished that we cut all the banks and mounds by hand. I have suggested in the past to leave the tee banks, but I had never thought of allowing the mounds to grow long. They suggested it would look good and save time, and they were correct on both counts!





With the time saved we can keep up with cutting the areas of rough we have increased this year –

- Left of the 1st hole
- In front of the 2nd tee
- Left of the 4th hole
- Left of the 5th hole
- In front of the 7th tee
- In front of the 8th tee
- Behind the 8th green and right of the 11th hole
- In front of the 15th tee
- Left of the 17th hole

We also can cut the swales and hollows in the rough (e.g., 11th, 12th) with the small machine which leaves a better finish than the larger machine.

We are also able to keep up with the extra approach shaping which we introduced this year.



Apart from saving time, the long rough serves the golf course in three other areas. These points were discussed with Swan golf design -

1. Golfing - It serves as a good penalty for wayward shots. The objective is to challenge the better players but not to be overly punishing for the less good players.
2. Visual - it looks amazing and really helps to frame the golf holes. RCGC has a genuinely nice woodland structure around the course, but the long rough helps link this to the playing areas. It is important to have a suitable transition from the tall trees down to the close-mown areas, and that is the role that the long rough plays.



3. Ecological - there are a wonderful variety of grasses and fantastic colour of the wildflowers. This will only improve over time, all of which acting as valuable habitat for insects, birds, and small mammals.



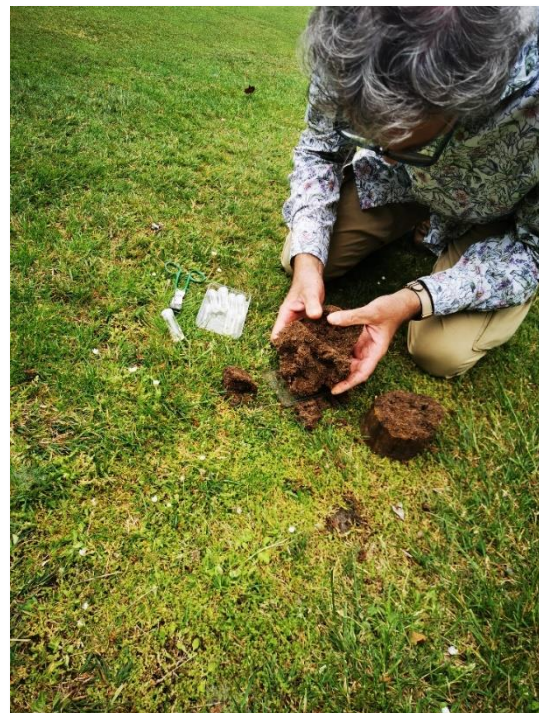
With the extreme growing conditions observed this year, the long grasses are lush and thick. Work in these areas during the autumn will include a cut, collect, and scarify to help produce a thinner sward.

We may also try a selective herbicide designed to eradicate unwanted coarse grasses.



Microscolex phosphoreus

Like the potworms discussed earlier, this another accidental discovery. While digging around for leather jackets earlier this year I discovered what looked like a baby earthworm. It was pointed out to me that this worm could in fact be *Microscolex*, a non-native species recently found in the UK. They produce small worm casts any time of day. These are often in clusters. The worm itself is



is

bioluminescent, but I have not tested if it does glow in the dark! I found out that there was a 'worm expert' in the Natural History Museum and he was trying to map these little creatures. I contacted him and he was keen to come and have a look. Dr David Jones arrived and took some samples. He will confirm their identity and keep us posted on the paper he is writing.

Ongoing work

- Aeration
- Topdressing
- Spraying fertiliser/plant growth regulator
- Herbicide treatment
- Presentation work
- Clear designated ditches of long growth