

'Ben on the Course'..... May 2022

Dear Member,

A common pattern is emerging here whenever I deliver our course updates. While writing February's report we were enjoying a good period of dry weather and on the day I was writing the report we experienced sideways rain falling and very strong winds !

This latest update is proving very similar weather conditions, having recorded a very dry March and April, but whilst writing this update we have experienced over 30mm of rain in two days, I can't complain though, keeps the irrigation reservoir topped up nicely !

Because of a home draw in the Essex Golf Union's Leslie Wood Team competition (congratulations on the result) we delayed our renovations planned for that week but in fact it worked out fantastic for us. The weather was perfect, temperatures had started to pick up and a slightly earlier than normal priming of our irrigation system completed the week before, gave us the perfect conditions to get more sand and ultrafine ryegrass seed into the greens.

I hope you agree but I think the recovery of the greens have been great and with some further TLC, performed very well in time for the PGA Essex Open.



The Essex Open proved not only a tough test for all of the competitors on the day but created its own challenges for my department leading up to the event. Such prolonged dry periods in March and April, with mostly low overnight temperatures (apart from renovation week), meant limited growth and recovery from winter stresses.

So, choosing the right agronomic products to stimulate growth, monitoring water applications and timing to change of heights of cut were all key factors in achieving great playing surfaces so early in the season. Some short-mown areas had to be turfed, to enable us to cut and get them back into play quicker than seeding them and we will continue to review this through the season, highlighting any other areas of concern or visual look to further improve.

I hope you will agree that my team have done a good job improving the course over the past few months, especially as over half of the team only joined us late last year and March this year, so they are still getting use to the 380 acres of land.

Our newest members of the team include Marcus, Brandon, and Richard. They all have backgrounds in greenkeeping and are enjoying their first few months with us. Another new member of the team is Sam. He is helping to look after the garden and landscape area around the clubhouse. He is very new to the world of golf and greenkeeping but through the Government Kick start scheme, we have given him the opportunity to get into work and teach him new skills, potentially helping him find a new career at a later stage.



In early March we took delivery of a new sprayer, which has certainly improved the efficiency of applications of fungicides and pesticides that all need to be done at the beginning of the season.

Our new unit is a great piece of equipment and offers us consistency in spraying rates and overall cover and is a very 'state of the art' machine when it comes to spraying!
Unfortunately, our other machinery which was programmed for delivery in early April has been delayed, due to shortages of components in the Europe and America. Later dates have been agreed.



However, an exciting and what will be a very beneficial piece of equipment for our department will be taking delivery of two BERNARD grinding machines. These are the 'Rolls Royce' of cutting blade grinders and have many benefits going forward.

To sustain a healthy plant and keep presentation at its best, after every use of a mower the cutting blades need to be checked and reset.

After prolonged use or in the event a mower blade catches a stone or similar the cut quality can be affected, so a regrind of the bed-knife blade and cylinder would be required.

At present we have to send the entire units for grinding and setting up to an off-course facility which is not only expensive but is time consuming and inconvenient.

Our current and past years programme has been to only grind once possibly twice a year. The arrival of these specialised machines will give us the opportunity to increase the frequency of the grinding process making sure our blades are razor

sharp and in tip top condition.

This regular process will also reduce wear on the cylinder bearings and motors, be more fuel efficient and again as I have said provide a much better and consistent quality of cut. We are looking to even better presentation and from an agronomical standpoint a healthier plant.

On the course I hope you have noticed there have been a few mowing line changes this year with the new run offs areas around greens with tighter turf conditions creating that more 'linksy' feel. This together with the stripe-less mowing patterns, that are more normally found on a links course.

We have now put out new cups and pins that I believe are easier to see from a distance and again fit in with the traditional 'links' look.

More new bins have certainly helped reduce litter on the course, so please continue to use them. I also hope that you like the newly constructed warm up practice nets so you can hit a few balls before you go out to play. So far they have been very popular.



So, what are you to expect in the coming months? Firstly, and lets be hopeful here, some lovely warm sunny weather! We have had some nice weather recently and has been good to see some familiar and new faces out enjoying the course.

The grass sward density and population on all areas is something I am striving to further improve, with one area being the East course greens. This past week we have been overseeding them with 'Browntop Bent' grass seed. This mix has a rapid establishment and works well with our dwarf rye surfaces. Bent grass colonise in weaker areas and have a great summer cover when established.

The North 9 greens have been overseeded with Browntop Bent grass over the past two years and this has improved the overall sward density, which coming out of winter period was noticeable over the East 9 greens. We intend to continue with this overseeding program so that both sets of greens have similar cover, colour, and density.

After this overseeding has been done, the overall blend of our 18 greens will comprise of Fescue, Ultrafine Ryegrass, Browntop Bent and Poa Annua. A good mix in my opinion that addresses the ever-changing climate conditions, the increase in number of rounds being played and, very importantly the reduction in the amount of chemicals available to control turf grass diseases.

With the recent rainfall we have had you will notice the wispy grass areas are starting to grow. We feel that this is part of the seasonal growth that is expected on virtually all golf courses and wisp adds both texture and colour to the course. We appreciate that lost golf balls and speed of play are affected by longer grass so we have mown out additional areas this year to offer more margin.



You are all aware that our 'tees of the day' locations will be changing shortly. Our new Black, Yellow and White markers offer every golfer the choice to play the course at a length where they feel they can have the most enjoyable round, suited to their handicap.

All major competitions will be played from the "Black" tees (full length course) with society days and visitors encouraged to use the forward yellow or even white tees, to assist with speed of play and to enjoy their round. Each tee has its own Course Rating and Slope Index.

So to close I just want to say a 'thank you' to all of our members, who continue to support me and my greenkeeping team - we really appreciate your feedback and praise and really gives us great pride in what we do for you.

Please continue to help by repairing those pitch marks and replace those divots please. A big "thank you" from us all goes to Ronnie and his team, who continue to do a fantastic job marshalling the course and all the divotting they do on a daily basis.



Finally, I am sure you would all want join me with your thanks to my team, for all their hard work they do out on the course. We have a great team, who get on really well together and can see and share what I believe is a golf club and course with amazing potential!

Until the next report, which maybe soon if I need some rain based on the pattern emerging at the time I write these reports !!!

*Thank you from Ben and the
Greenkeeping Team.....*