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# COUNTY LOUTH GOLF CLUB

## Report on the agronomic condition of the golf course

Report Date: Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020  
Consultant: Ian McClements



Date of Visit: Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Visit Objective: To review current conditions whilst discussing management objectives.

Present: Mr Paul Reilly – Green Chairman  
Mr Wayne Murray – Course Superintendent  
Mr Aiden Murray  
Mr Barry Mulholland  
Dr Ian McClements – STRI Ltd

Weather conditions: Overcast 17-19°C, north to north-easterly breeze 6mph

### Headlines

- This season has proven to have been challenging on many fronts, environmentally due to a dry spring following a wet autumn and from a management perspective in relation to the Covid 19 pandemic. Despite this, the course is probably the best presented that I have yet seen at this time of the year and is credit to the commitment of the green staff and all those involved in helping to raise standards.
- Despite the graminicide application to six greens in August 2019, there has been a regeneration of bentgrass but of more concern are the resurgent crowns of ryegrass through the 6<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. Bentgrass is currently well integrated within the sward canopy given the active growth of all sward components and the challenge is to minimise the development of bentgrass leafiness that can arise over the autumn to spring period.
- There remains a marginal discrepancy between the front and rear tiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> but overall, the green continues to improve.
- The new 17<sup>th</sup> green was acceptable as a putting surface and has improved on the autumn of 2019 with a build-up of organic materials in the upper profile. It is envisaged that we will need at least another four to five seasons before we are likely to achieve something much more akin to the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Annual meadow-grass ingress and its suppression remains challenging whilst the underlying conditions remain somewhat unforgiving.
- We also need to be cognisant of any adverse impact that mechanical treatments can have on surface quality and presentation such as the Triplex ringing prevalent around green perimeters as well as the abrasion and damage to the fescue content of collars and aprons when turning either Triplex mowers or hand mowers when cutting.
- Collars and aprons continue to improve with graminicide treatment now extended further away from the putting surfaces to develop the wonderful run offs that exist at Baltray. Species composition is improving, if not almost amongst the best that we would see in Ireland.
- Standard of tee presentation has improved considerably over the past three to four seasons with an emphasis on hand cutting and overseeding. Several tee tops were resurfaced over the autumn to spring period and still need to bed in with additional top dressing to develop surface levels.
- New grass pathways have been introduced at several locations including the walkways at the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> tees. Grass pathways will be much easier to maintain with the installation of a new irrigation system but is the way forward in terms of elevating and maintaining better standards.
- Despite the challenging spring conditions and the drought of 2018, there has been considerable efforts and input into the weaker fairways such as the 6<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>. This has delivered improvements beyond expectation. Vulnerabilities, however, remain and the need for investment in a new course irrigation system, I trust are still accepted.
- Ongoing investments and upgrading of older machinery as it approaches the end of its working life is important so that the greenkeeping team can complete the maintenance operations efficiently and effectively. Items that have been highlighted include the replacement of the existing sprayer and the acquisition of a new fairway mower to supplement the existing unit retained as back up, and in the medium and longer term a fairway top dresser.

## Key Actions

- Localised spot treatment of ryegrass crowns on for example greens 6 and 14<sup>th</sup> would be a priority before growth tails off this autumn.
- Devise a policy for winter play that creates opportunities to periodically rest putting surfaces that would help to ensure better conditions are presented for the resumption of play in the spring.
- Organic dressings for the new 17<sup>th</sup> green will help build a slightly richer profile whilst closer monitoring and more overseeding with desirable species is the way forward to sustain improvements in the quality of the surface. A policy of resting this green over the winter would be advocated to avoid thinning and weakening the fragile fescue component.
- Reinstatement of the natural dune landscape to the rear of the 8<sup>th</sup> green would improve the aesthetic backdrop of this green complex and could be included in the winter work programme.
- Introduction of alternative tees on several holes also creates opportunities for resting summer routes from green to tee, as well as creating opportunities to bring alternative landing zones into play on the fairways.
- Newer tees require a more aggressive top dressing programme to help improve surface levels.
- Elevating the low-lying area on the 16<sup>th</sup> represents an opportunity to improve drainage and playability in the winter months.

## Photo Observations and Comments



Figure 1: Rooting was generally excellent and to depth

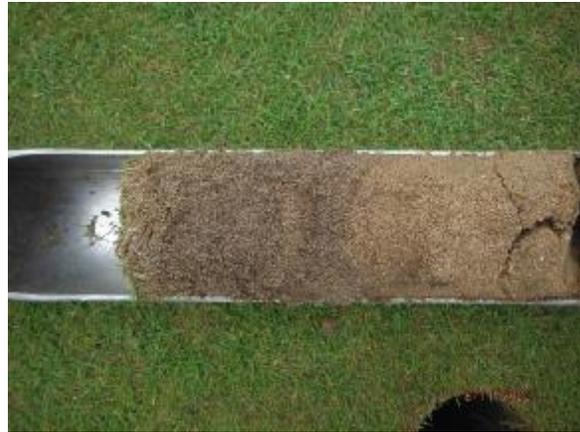


Figure 2: The new 17<sup>th</sup> green profile is somewhat sandier and more difficult to maintain



Figure 3: Triplex ringing was beginning to show up because of triplex mowing (here on the 7<sup>th</sup> green)



Figure 4: The new 17<sup>th</sup> green surface was thinner than desired in places

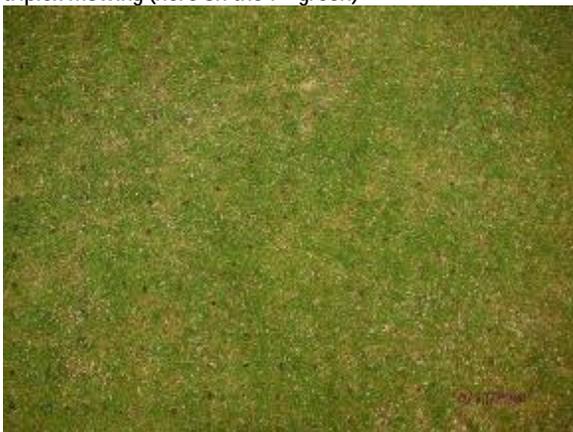


Figure 5: Tee tops had been seeded but tine holes had been closed in some instances making it more difficult to work the seed in to the surface



Figure 6: New tee rootzone materials should have a little more body to be more forgiving to manage

## Photo Observations and Comments (continued)



Figure 7: The surrounds/run off to the 14<sup>th</sup> green complex are a joy to behold but growth is richer than desired where naturalised rough abuts close mown turf



Figure 8: Heavy growth immediately adjacent to cut turf could be adversely penal or result in a lost ball within several green complexes



Figure 9: Grass pathways and naturalised rough either side are a great addition but the rough requires thinning after years of maintenance



Figure 10: Pathways are a little rich at the turf base and require top dressing



Figure 11: The transformation of the 6<sup>th</sup> fairway was excellent given the challenging growing conditions and condition following the drought of 2018



Figure 12: The low-lying section of the 16<sup>th</sup> fairway has been earmarked for lifting, note organic rich material over the clean dune sand

## Recommendations

### Greens

- Plan to keep the bentgrass element refined through the autumn period whilst all sward components are actively growing. Brushing and grooming treatments can be used to good effect. If the bentgrass becomes a little stalky or organic matter starts to build at the sward base, then intervention with a set of verticutting reels would be necessary. Verticutting would only be applied on an ad hoc and very infrequent basis. Periodic brushing over the winter will help to elevate some of the leafy growth into a more upright position where it can be presented to the cutting reels and help to limit lateral growth.
- Ryegrass crowns can be carefully spot treated with graminicide or whilst they are small plugged out to the green perimeter and treated there or replaced with plugs from a practice green. When plugging ensure that material is comparable to the quality of the main greens otherwise plug from the perimeter to the body of the green. Ensure that graminicide treatment occurs early enough to allow for overseeding and recovery of any area that might thin because of the graminicide application.
- Revert to hand cutting at the earliest opportunity to eliminate the Triplex ringing that was beginning to appear on several surfaces. Hand cutting also helps to protect green collars and aprons that are vulnerable from mechanical damage but in all instances ensure that any turning is undertaken in wide arcs as the fescue content of surrounds is easily damaged.
- Slightly weaker greens centres such as the 6<sup>th</sup> have improved immensely with a much stronger botanical composition than would have been seen six to seven years ago. The centre of the 4<sup>th</sup> was regarded as being marginally weaker and given its size, pin locations can be moved out on to the perimeter to allow desired species to establish, particularly over the autumn to spring period.
- Whilst an overall seeding is not planned for the autumn period there is merit in some localised seed treatments to the slightly weaker areas or as a follow up to any graminicide treatment.
- Green profiles are very consistent and uniform to depth with good rooting noted. The main requirement is to loosen and open these up in the winter months to encourage water to penetrate freely to depth. The proposed verti-draining in January with a 9-10 mm diameter tine to around 200-250 mm depth is appropriate.
- Hydrojecting through the summer months helps to keep the surfaces open and uniformly moistened and would be of merit in the case of the new 17<sup>th</sup> where rooting development is regarded as being weak. Variations in moisture content and nutrient status make for a difficult and challenging management of this green. In this respect the build up of a slightly richer organic profile would be preferred, include a small amount of Fendress or finely screened compost blended with your links sand over a straight sand dressing. Avoid peat which tends to dry out and become hydrophobic.
- The new 17<sup>th</sup> green should be rested over the winter months once growth has all but ceased. Repeat oversowing, i.e. monthly with a dimple seeder from May through to September would be appropriate to continue the process of introducing desirable species. The height of cut should be elevated to 4.25 or even 4.5 if possible, to confer more protection to the fescue plant. It is envisaged that this will have limited impact on playing quality as the green is somewhat leaner and naturally drier and faster. Use an organic granular feed as a base feed and top up with liquids to maintain the fescue content in a healthy and stronger condition. In time this will blend with the other surfaces, but this could take five to seven seasons.

## Green Surrounds & Approaches

- Immediate collars and aprons have improved significantly in recent years and benefit immensely from the inputs from a maintenance programme reflective of the putting surfaces themselves. This policy is being extended with areas reportedly treated with graminicide some two weeks in advance of my visit and its effects were clearly visible. One pot seeding had already been undertaken with a further to follow. Botanical improvement of these areas will be driven by the number of times and quantity of seed that can be injected into these areas and full advantage should be taken of the growing season to progress this work.
- The next stage in the process of improvement is to develop a small 1.5 m or so band of fringing rough as an interface between the close mown surfaces and the natural links vegetation beyond. In some instances this is rank, thick and not in keeping with the natural links vegetation and in some instances can be overly penal as well as resulting in a lost ball just feet off the green, particularly where shots are blind into a green complex from the fairway, such as the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>.
- The reinstatement of the terrain to the rear of the 8<sup>th</sup> green to a natural dune scape in keeping with the low mounding and natural featuring of this area would form a much stronger backdrop to the green.

## Tees

- The standard of tee presentation was generally good although its worth reminding staff of the importance in maintaining crisp mowing patterns to deliver a high standard in keeping with the current ethos of Baltray.
- The 9<sup>th</sup> tee had been resurfaced and around 20 mm of sand dressing had been accumulated on top of the imported organic turf layer. Surface levels on some of the new tees have yet to be perfected and there would be merit in coring these with rolling and top-dressing following core collection. Use a large lute in tandem with the top dressing to help perfect surface levels.
- The policy of liquid feeding was working well in terms of favouring the desired species and avoiding excessive flushes of growth however the 18<sup>th</sup> tee had lower than ideal vigour and in this instance would benefit from a granular base feed.
- Worm casting activity was prevalent around the 1<sup>st</sup> tee complex so when top dressing the teeing surface extend top dressings to the pathways and access route to help dilute the organic rich growing medium and to reduce the impact of the worm casting activity.

## Pathways

- New grass pathways and the introduction of mown carries helps to improve the standards of presentation off the tee. Do not neglect the need for top dressing, these can become mushy in time and aeration is also useful in helping to prevent surface sealing and a deterioration in turf quality.
- Where carries have been introduced on previously mown traffic routes there will be a requirement to mow and scarify as part of the rough management programme to reduce their density.
- When introducing carries in front of tees, be aware of the challenges of both lady members and less accomplished male golfers. The R&A analysis of amateur driving data report which compares driving distances between 1996 and 2018 show that the average mean distance for all male handicap category golfers is 194-217 yds, the minimum mean distance for category four golfers is only 159 yds and it is also worth noting that the mean driving distance for women across all categories is 161 yds and for category four women golfers only 150 yds.

## Fairways

- There has been a noted improvement in the condition of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> fairways on my autumn 2019 visit with improvements attributed to both the wetting agent programme and intensive seeding to encourage recovery. That said, there have been efforts made to apply irrigation with the efficacy of this improved through the wetting agent treatments. Wetting agent applications therefore remain an integral part of the maintenance programme and do need to be sustained.
- The proposal to lift the low lying section of the 16<sup>th</sup> fairway was discussed and here there would be a requirement to strip off the existing turf through the lowest lying area, remove the upper rootzone and build up in clean dune sand before replacing the rootzone material. The rootzone material is a little richer in the lowest lying area and could be diluted with clean dune sand by adding approximately 30-40% sand to the existing material before replacing to a uniform depth that marries through with the adjacent undisturbed ground and preserved turf. A clean sand could be taken from a nearby borrow pit without the need to haul considerable distances across the course from the existing sand pit.

## Resources

- It is appreciated that the Club have reviewed current machinery resources with an upgrading plan in place and the need to sustain this as highlighted, particularly given the problems encountered with the current spraying equipment which is an integral and essential part of the pool of equipment for the application of pesticides and fertilisers, etc.
- It is understood that the Club have also included for a replacement fairway mower, retaining the existing unit as backup and to allow the mowing of fairways more quickly when required.
- There is an aspiration to top dress the fairways with sand and the need to in the longer term to improve playing quality. To complete in-house this would require the acquisition of a bulk top dresser to allow the quantity of sand to be applied on two occasions each year. The benefit of having your own machine would be to reduce your dependence on contractors and allow work to be undertaken at a time that is best suited to weather conditions, staff availability and levels of play and traffic.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian McClements', written over a horizontal line.

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