

Well what a season!!The driest summer on record since 1984 so the experts say. It has taken too long for me to present another “Presidents Bit” and I apologise for the delay. I must admit though this season really has kept us all on our toes, what with World Bowls in Adelaide and various clubs hosting nations it has been an enjoyable experience for all. A special congratulations to Brad Porter and his team at Lockleys Bowling Club and Kevin Lewis along with Max Kleinig and Colin at the Holdfast bowling Club on their immaculately presented surfaces. Being involved on the greens advisory committee formed by Geoff Nethercott personally for me was a learning experience and to see how these guys prepare and maintain their greens was a real treat. It is clear to me though basic principles for bowling green preparation remain constant, there is no doubt each of our sites(clubs) is different whether it be soil, position, location, available resources etc. and techniques will always vary according to each clubs individual demands and challenges which the turf manager must assess and base their decisions upon. Either way there is always some hard yards to do in this caper which often if committed to will pay the rewards. It always makes me laugh (almost anyway) how a member/bowls director can and will come up to a greenkeeper and request a similar track to that of the club they are playing at on the Saturday!!!??In my opinion the beauty of the game is playing in the different conditions and using your nous to get over the line and as soon as bowlers start going on about unrealistic requests they are defeated before they even step out on the green, just think what the challenges will be for the bowler on the green for the next World Bowls in Scotland!

So in my last “bit” I was mentioning the opportunities to renovate whilst the World Bowls tournament was on which many of us “took the bull by the horns” so to speak to do including the use of a laser level. Speaking to my peers I have come to the conclusion that one must be very open to committees as to the desired intention and shortcomings of this procedure because it is a *real* challenge and a lot of extra work to bring your green back (especially if facing time constraints) after committing to this task particularly if your green after being surveyed has some large variances.

There is one thing that is certain.... A greenkeeper/turf manager does **not** do this procedure to get a 15-17 second green; it is done to attain a true surface

and not a fast surface. In my opinion with the narrow style bowl there is less forgiveness/tolerance on the green for discrepancies in levels and therefore more pressure to provide a true surface. But you “can’t have your cake and eat it too” so to speak and pace *will* be sacrificed as it will to any major renovation i.e. coring & filling holes, verti draining etc. The more “major” the renovation the more likely more time will be needed for the green to re consolidate especially when you are applying top dressing material in many different areas over 1500m<sup>2</sup> at different depths varying from 5mm and up to 25mm-40mm in some cases. Patience is imperative in this case and in the peak growing season leaf will quickly start to come through these areas and this can also be encouraged in thicker soil areas by use of a verti drain 2-3 weeks after laser levelling has occurred. But to develop the density of thatch required to work the green and get pace is a lengthy process and in some cases this work is futile and can remove the knit of your crowns leading to the destabilization of the surface.

“Sustainability”.....You will hear and see this word a lot in my ramblings but I believe it truly needs to be considered for the sake of maintaining greens that can withstand the daily pressure of greens loadings and harsh weather conditions which directly affects your clubs profitability and reputation. In other words I believe the excuse of not laser levelling a green because of a lack of pace isn’t justified and I ask you now as a greenkeeper and bowler, what is wrong with a 13-14second true green? If a manager consistently chooses not to level using the latest technology (and I don’t mean dust or top dress as after all, all you are doing is building your high spots and making your plinths lower) then I feel the greens will eventually reach breaking point and as fast as they might be the draw will be impossible to read and or inconsistent, and that’s a fact.

In discussions with another greenkeeper of many years experience maybe we as greenkeepers have been guilty of not doing enough levelling over the last 20 years but with the older style bowl there was a lot more resistance to level discrepancies and now in this modern age it has become apparent that many of our greens need attention and we most certainly need the support of members and committees. It can be done and done well!

So we've talked about the negative of major renovation- lack of pace. What about the positives? ; better drainage, new fresh root system which means less disease and less expenditure on chemicals ,better ability for gas exchange crucial for healthy turf, an improved true surface and improved coverage, improved soil structure from adding amendments etc. So yes you will lose pace for 6-12 months depending on the amount of soil that has been used in the "major" operation but there are too many benefits to ignore. I might also add the more the times you can commit to the laser levelling process the less soil that will be required each time, but please be aware a 25mm area of soil is most likely going to sink eventually up to 10mm (watering, compaction via rolling, cutting, bowler traffic etc) but that still means you are 15mm better off and closer to attaining the true surface you need for..... you guessed sustainability.

By now we are all well and truly into our SDS (spring dead spot) prevention programmes which along with some late thatch management (i.e. light scarifying) practices are of course the use of propiconazole and various other systemic fungicides by way of soil drench to treat that root system thoroughly. This practice is imperative for hybrid couches such as tift dwarf and in my opinion at least two applications should be made a month apart with even an ERI preventative such as "Dedicate" or "Headway Maxx" a month after that. In other words keep your plant as healthy and free from disease as much as possible before entering dormancy, even though it may look healthy as most greens should after the growing season it is hard to see what's going on under the surface where disease symptoms will generally begin. So it is best practice to commit to these applications, think of it like taking out comprehensive insurance. Every green will at some stage have disease it's a matter of getting onto it early and minimizing the damage. Contact fungicides such as thiram, mancozeb and clorothalonil are generally protectants that can in my opinion be used regularly as the weather conditions become more favourable for leaf diseases i.e. late autumn, winter and early spring. Hopefully you don't have to pull out the big guns in the Spring because you have done all your preventative spraying but if you do there are some good fungicides available but it always comes at a cost. Generally I am of the opinion that if you have practised a

sound prevention programme then your curative spraying treatments will be much more effective.

If I may I will briefly speak on the use of the shaving reel otherwise known as the “fat boy”. These reels/implements need to be used with caution it is my belief they defy every principle of keeping a sharp cutting blade as they absolutely will tear your leaf on your plant to shreds which can in turn send your plant into shock and or encourage the onset of disease. Yes they can be used to get a bit more pace into the green but I am not convinced that the draw of the bowls is necessarily improved proportionally to the pace after all it is the new soft leaf that is generated from grooming/scarifying which the bowl will respond too and not stork. I know a few of the boys will use them very lightly but I am of the opinion the “fat boy” is not the silver bullet and scarifying/grooming should not be ignored along with a good nutrition programme to assist with a quick recovery. Probably the best new implement I have seen this season is a 30” queen set up with a powerful 3kW electric motor with large pulleys for a fast spin to throw matter well into the catcher with 2mm saw blades  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch apart. A scarifier which throws directly into the catcher saving pick up time which could be utilized more frequently to control thatch which also prevents disease whilst encouraging pace sounds great to me!! And thanks to Ruedy for letting me have a look in his shed.

Any way fellas I wish you all well on the completion of the season and trust that you will all have a nice relaxing break after this busy dry one thus far. Remember don't hesitate in talking to your peers regarding bowling green management especially if they are fellow members and please encourage the association if they aren't. Good Luck.

Nigel Ryan.