



Knighton Heath Golf Club

Greens Report

January 2024

Graham Hastie
Course Manager

Greens

Maintenance carried out-

Greens cutting height raised to 6mm for winter
Hand mowers in use to reduce weight of machinery over greens through winter period
Greens cut once per week through January
Greens rolled once this month after slit tine aeration
Greens brushed to clear dew on days of no cutting or rolling
Winter turf hardening applications (non pesticidal) to prevent disease occurrence
Applications of penetrant wetting agent to move moisture deeper into rootzone, keeping surface firmer
Holes changed twice per week
Greens blown of leaves and debris every morning
Switching and blowing of worm casts everyday
Disease monitoring daily

Course

Daily monitoring of roped areas
Daily course inspections to check on course status
Divoting of all tees including animal damage and wear areas
Tees cut twice through January
Approaches dry enough to cut twice this month
Daily bunker raking
Full rotavate and distribution of sand in bunkers when weather allowed
Strimming of bunker edges as and when required
Strimming of yardage markers as and when required
Rough cut as required
Fairways cut twice this month
Semi rough cut twice, some steep banks and slopes left through winter months
Blowing of all areas, greens, tees and areas on fairways
Storm clear up on pathways and clearance of tree debris after storms
Winter mats brushed and blown once a week through the month
Tee holders in mats cleaned out once per week
Drainage works completed on putting green and 1st green, including approach
New 1st tee sign electric duct installed
Long rough cut down and collected around the course

Data for January 2024-

Rainfall recorded:- 95mm

Max temp:- 13°C (2/1/24) **Low temp:-** -3.4 (16/1/24)

Course closures:- Full day:- 3 Part day:- 1

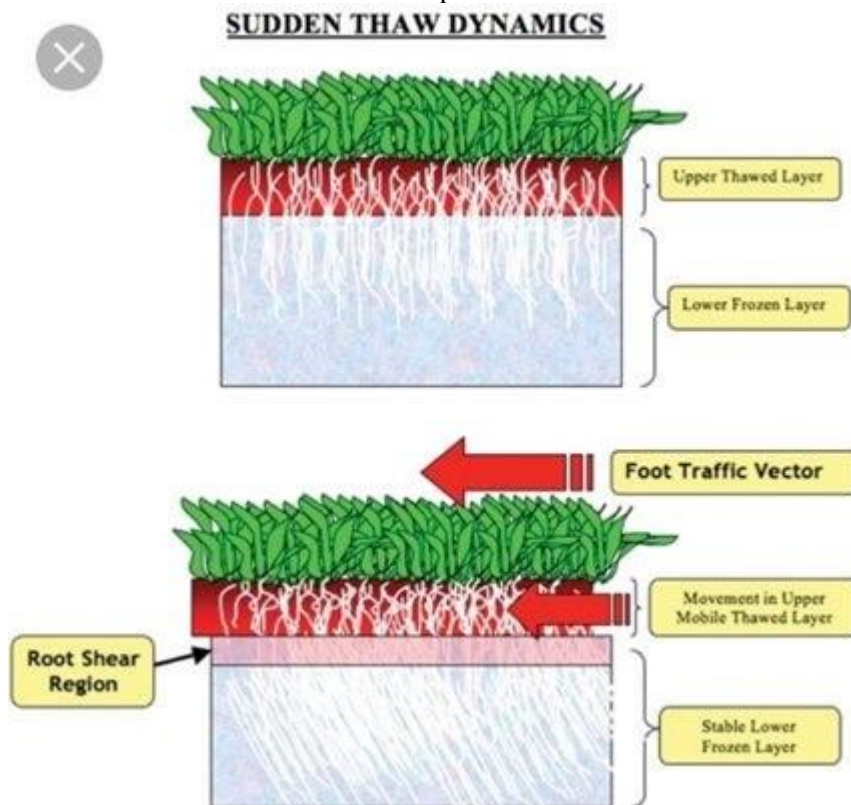
Weather update

So, the weather through January actually turned out pretty well after the previous 3 months rain fest. A lull in the rain gave us a chance to get the course back to looking somewhere close to its best again. We feel we have protected the course well when necessary through the winter so far, whether that is the ropes which we put out to control traffic or something which is always the last resort-course closures.

We take many factors into account when making the decision to close the course, including upcoming forecasts (looking days ahead as well as the present day), events due to take place on the day or close after, numbers of golfers potentially playing the course, we assess the potential damage to the playing surfaces and have to make a decision based on all factors above. Through these winter months we cannot recover severe damage, growth is not strong enough which means any damage our turf suffers now will be obvious and unsightly as well as potentially dangerous until growth returns in spring.

One of the course closures through January was due to the quick thaw which was occurring on a Sunday morning. During the week leading up to weekend of 20th and 21st we saw low temps of below 0°C for 5 days straight with a low of -3.4°C. This left the ground frozen from the surface down to around 4 inches deep, in these 4 inches our grass roots live.

On the Saturday following this cold week, our temperatures ranged from 4.9°C to 7°C and the Sunday's temperatures ranged from 5.8°C to 11.8°C, this fast rise in temperature caused a fast thaw which is the most dangerous conditions for our turf and so the decision was made to protect the course. If the course is allowed to be played on during these conditions, every footstep, anywhere on the course is likely to cause 'root shear' and result in dead or severely bruised turf. I know our Professional Andy always posts some great visual information regarding root shear, its cause and its effects. Below is a simple reminder of this issue.



We know that closing on a dry Sunday is not a popular decision but I can assure you we would not be in the current condition we are in if the course was open and played on in these conditions.

In general, January was a good month for us, weather more associated with winter meant the ground firmed up allowing us to get out and get some project work completed as well as getting the mowers back out and getting some definition back out on the fairways during the days we had no frost or we picked up a few areas in the afternoon once the frost had thawed. Keeping our heavy machinery off our turf and restricting play during periods of either saturated ground or frozen ground has paid dividends and allowed us to wait for the right time to mow. Once we managed a couple of mows out on the course everything looked great again.

Seeding completed

We have now completed the seeding of fairways for this winter. We have sown 500kg of Fescue seed on our fairways which we look forward to seeing germinate over the next couple of months. If we could keep some of the rain when temperatures begin to rise, we should see some seed lines in the fairways which would be very encouraging. This will be an ongoing process over the next few years as we try to improve the grass coverage we have on our fairways. One overseed will fill in some bare areas but it will take some time to completely cover some of those larger bare or sparse areas.

We are actually using less fertilizer on the fairways now to encourage the hardier and more drought tolerant grasses (Fescue mainly and some naturally occurring bent grass too) this will also discourage the ingress of weaker and hungrier grasses like Poa Annua and Rye grass types. These weaker grasses only like mild, damp conditions with plenty of fertilizer thrown in, to thrive. As soon as the temperature rises and the rain stops these grasses quickly become unsightly. They lose their colour and can very quickly (if high temps and lack of moisture lasts more than a week or two) become dormant and possibly tip past the point of recovery if the conditions continue. What we are trying to achieve is to have grass coverage on our fairways which can withstand the dry conditions which we inevitably get here at Knighton Heath. With the sandy/gravelly soil we have (which I wouldn't change for the world) we do dry down very quickly-as I'm sure you are all well aware of.

Once we have a good amount of Fescue in our fairways they will still brown off during periods of excessive heat or lack of moisture, but they will not die, they will respond to any rainfall better than the previously mentioned grass types too. They don't grow as fast resulting in less mowing and better presentation too.

Divot Bags

Leading on nicely from the fairway seeding our greenstaff have been doing through the winter, it has been great to see just how much divot mix is going out on the fairways from our members with the use of your new divot bags.

A great idea from our General Manger Kevin.

So impressive that another 300 bags as well as a second divot mix bin should be with us in the near future after the demand for them caught us by surprise.

At the moment you may find in the afternoons or later in the day the divot mix bins are empty, not that we want to leave anyone wishing to help the course without any divot mix, we think it best that the boxes are emptied as often as possible to prevent any seed germinating in the bottom of the bins or worse still, beginning to rot, which wouldn't be a welcoming smell. As mentioned above we do have another bin on order and so hopefully there will be no shortage before long.

We have been filling the divot mix bins up each and everyday since they were introduced, meaning the number of divots being filled will bear some impressive fruits in the spring.

Again, this is Fescue seed which is in the divot mix along with a soil which includes a small amount of compost which should hold a little more moisture to aid with seed germination as well as release a very small amount of nutrient which should help with the establishment of the seeds once they germinate.

A big thank you too all members who are filling their divots and any others they see, it will make a huge difference in the season and is definitely noticed by the greenstaff.

Rytec (long rough cutting and management)

Our Rytec machine (picture on the last page) has been out cutting and collecting our long roughs. We understand some of these areas are quite thick during the playing season, especially last year due to the good growing conditions. During hot and dry summers, we should see some of these areas a little thinner as they get burnt off in the heat. Our aim is (similar to the fairways) to reduce the number of weak grasses in these areas as these are fast growing and can become very thick at the base of the grass plant. The finer grasses of Fescue and Bent grass are much sparser in density and therefor offer a much fairer and playable rough for a golf course. This process is well underway with the last two years having seen us allow the rough to grow and only cutting it once or twice per year. We aim to cut these areas as low as possible during this time to clear out as many undesirable species as possible.

One afternoon towards the end of last year I was out at Upton Country Park with my family when I noticed a sign which is great to see and helps explain some of what we are trying to achieve here with our rough or 'Grasslands' as the sign calls them.

As popular as I am with my interests, I took a picture of the sign and have included it on the next page, hopefully you can read it clearly enough.



There are some differences in that we will not produce wildflowers in our grasslands but we should see some heather and other native species begin to return. These native species will be our wildflowers in that they will be what encourages a greater variety of wildlife to our course.

We feel this is a great project to be a part of, as the sign above states there are so many benefits to managing the rough on the course. Not only are they a large part of the course, the responsible management of these areas can gain us some help and the possibility of some grants to help us achieve our aims.

Our plans on the rough as well as tree management and Heather regeneration has been discussed with the Forestry Commission, we have a meeting set for the week of 19/2/24 to talk through some options and discuss plans. We are hoping a representative from Natural England will be able to attend this meeting as they are extremely interested in any protection or enhancement of England's declining Heath. More on this next month.

Drainage

At the end of January, we completed the drainage sump for the putting green. After being left open for quite a while due to the excessive wet weather we finally had the chance to get the greens drainage finished on both the putting green and the 1st green. We have drained these greens into soakaway's, we didn't want to have to trench extremely long drains to outfalls without first trying a soakaway on each area, with the naturally draining soil Knighton Heath sits upon we don't see these becoming an issue. These are dug to a depth of just under 2 meters deep by two meters square and so provide plenty of space for the greens to drain into. They are filled with gravel and topped with 200mm of topsoil. Each has a drain cover over the top of the inspection chamber which we can use if there is an issue or simply to monitor water levels.

With the soakaways being dug to such a depth we couldn't risk doing this work during the wet periods we have experienced as the chance of collapse was not something we wanted to take a chance on.

Completed at the beginning of February, was the drainage on the 1st approach. While we were installing the soakaway for the greens drainage we took the opportunity to add a couple of lateral drain lines to the approach to help carry some excess water away. A very tidy job completed but one which will only show its potential next winter as the ground around this is already saturated. As the ground becomes wet towards the end of 2024 this drainage should aid in carrying some excess water away before it becomes an issue.

Hopefully two more months of this weather (not really winter as its not cold but just grey, damp and grim) and we will be into some true golfing weather. Tees back on the grass, greens mown regularly, the chance to push some performance in the surfaces and of course some sunshine and warmth.

Thanks as always for the positive comments on the course conditions and the support shown to the Greenkeeping team through the winter, it really does make a difference.

See you all on the course soon

Graham Hastie
Course Manager



