

Golf Course Maintenance Department 2009 Review

2009 has been a hugely successful year for the golf course maintenance department. We have continued to develop our course into a fantastic test of golf which we can all be proud of. We thought it was appropriate to provide our Members and regular visitors with a short recap on major milestones achieved through the year and highlight some of the key issues that continue to challenge us moving into 2010.

Update on winter dormancy

Last year the golf course entered early dormancy in December 2008 after a great deal of stress was placed on the turf to present the golf course to a high standard for the Riffa Views Invitational. A lot of surface rolling was completed to consolidate unestablished areas prior to this event and the fairways in particular were extremely hard (compacted). Once temperatures decreased the entire course went dormant and our Members and guests found the course hard to play.

Through 2010 our team has completed a significant amount of decompaction work and further turf establishment to set us up for a delayed dormancy onset and ensure our playing surface is much more forgiving (softer).

March renovation

Initial course renovation was completed last March to reduce significant rootzone compaction and to 'wake up' our dormant turfgrass. Overall, the process of recovery was a little slower than anticipated but by mid April the course had fully recovered and some of the younger holes had finally achieved full turf cover.

At this stage it is important to remember that a number of holes were only planted in August/September 2008. Greens 16 and 17 only had a three month grow-in period before play started and fairways 6, 11, 16 and 17 never had a grow-in period at all. With this in mind, we are extremely satisfied with results to date. Most new golf developments allow for a full 12 month period for grow-in with **no** play.

Summer course modifications

As with any new golf course we found some aspects of the course design were not quite in line with what we expected. After careful consideration and dialogue with some of our respected members and golfing professionals we embarked on a course modification project in our peak summer month of July to minimise disruption to play.

A number of changes were made to holes 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 of the championship course and holes 2, 5, 7 and 8 on the Wee Monty. The work was completed well ahead of schedule and to a very high standard. The changes to green 15 and the greens approach and surrounds on hole 13 have been well received by our golfing community and have meant the course now continues to play fairer all year round.

For more information on the 2009 summer course rectifications, a full report has been provided in the Members' Lounge.

August course renovation

Using the heat and humidity of summer (peak growing conditions for our turfgrass) and the opportunity of having fewer players on the golf course in August and the early part of Ramadan, our team embarked on a second round of hollow tine coring and scarifying to further improve conditions for plant growth and course development.

August renovation was completed in less than a week and the course recovered within 10 days. The resulting growth flush and renewed vigour improved both fairway/rough and green/surround definition that we had been striving for.

Unrivalled Memories



Photographs of the 18th and 6th fairways, October 2009

Golf events on the course

Working closely with the golf events team, we prepared the course for the quarter 4 fixture list. This was a busy period for us as players sought the benefit of playing the course in the best standard it has ever been in. A gross 69 from junior golfer Daniel Owen on his way to victory in the Faldo Junior Series was a fantastic achievement and really inspired fellow low handicap players to break par. We have been delighted with the accolades the course has received from hosting events such as the Gulf Air PGA Pro Captain Challenge and the King Hamad Trophy and are fast developing a reputation as one of the leading courses in the region.



Photograph of the 2009 Gulf Air Pro Am participants in front of the 18th green

Over-seeding roughs this winter

We originally planned to overseed the roughs this November. However, after further assessing conditions of our course at the beginning of November we decided we had not yet reached full turfgrass maturity and are not ready for overseeding this year. In addition, we were conscious of that fact that overseeding the course would cause further disruption to play (scalping of rough and course closure in November) which would only stall what continues to be a busy period for golf here in Bahrain. Therefore, we will allow the course another full growing season in 2010 to further establish and look to plan-out and overseed cool season ryegrass in November 2010.

Although it is easy to compare our operations and activity against golf courses in the Emirates, one should remember that Bahrain is significantly cooler than Dubai (approx 4 degrees Celsius cooler on average!). We therefore enter dormancy faster and for a longer period of time.

As we have all the tools already on site (seed and overseeding machinery) we have taken the initiative to complete a seeding trial on our turf nursery. This has provided us with valuable data in terms of seeding methodology and rates, establishment timing, sowing times and period of establishment.

Whilst some golfers may feel that overseeding was necessary to provide a green, lush playing surface through the winter months, others will recognise that overseeding requires course closure to allow the seed to be sown and become established. These issues are all very important considerations.



Overseeding trial on the turf nursery behind the 15th green

Traffic management and course etiquette

In coordination with the hard working Golf Events team and the Golf Services Rangers we have initiated a number of course care campaigns in 2009. These campaigns will continue throughout 2010 and we are hopeful that heightened awareness and results from these initiatives will champion success moving forward. For your interest we have provided some statistics below of course care tasks completed by Royal Golf Club staff members in the month of November 2009 only.

- Number of divots filled with sand = 4281
- Number of broken tees picked up off teeing areas = 3475
- Number of pitch marks repaired on greens = 568
- Extensive and daily raking of footmarks out of bunkers

These numbers are significant. We are challenged by the lack of etiquette shown by some golfers and we challenge our members and regular guests to take ownership and have some pride in this wonderful facility. All our staff, including Starter Rangers and Golf Professionals support and endorse the need to look after the course.

Through the winter months last year we received a number of comments that the course was too hard and balls were rolling into the desert and bunkers due to a lack of grass. This year the grass will go dormant but the course will be easier for the following reasons:

- We have considerably more turf cover and density this year
- We have renovated the course and decompacted the rootzone after the extensive rolling through the grow-in
- The turf grass has had the opportunity to develop a layer of organic matter (thatch) which provides some cushioning
- We have some definition between fairway mowing (12mm) and rough (50mm). Although we recognise we still have some way to go

To help further develop our definition between rough and fairways we have roped off some critical holes (3, 8 and 18) over the past month to restrict buggy traffic. The observant among you will have noticed the significant difference in colour and growth of the paspalum adjacent to the ropes on these holes (see photograph below). These areas have been roped to enhance turf growth on the side of fairways (not everyone hits the ball straight!). In addition, a number of greens have been roped to prevent buggies entering these zones. The shorter grass around the greens needs to be protected so people have an excellent surface to chip from, should they miss our huge greens!



Photograph of rough roping on the 18th fairway illustrating the effect of buggy wear on the paspalum turf (to the right of the rope)

To help us protect the course over the winter months we request that you make a conscious effort to restrict wear on the course and think about the following:

- Stick to the buggy paths on the course as much as you can. Remember, the roped areas don't represent no play areas – they **do** represent no traffic or parking areas!
- Use the recommended 90 degree rule whereby you only enter the fairway to hit your ball and then you drive back off the fairway
- Follow the roping and signage directions on the course
- Take care when braking (do not skid as this burns the turf)
- Try not to make sharp turns – turn buggies on a wide arc

All of the above recommendations will help protect the course through the winter, minimise damage and maintain good playing conditions.

Looking ahead – 2010

Our entire team are collectively working together on a strategy so that we can prepare the course around events and vice versa. We hope to significantly reduce course renovation in March 2010 concentrating mainly on greens and only carry out major (full course) renovation through the summer months when growth (and recovery) is strong and play and major events are limited.

We will likely embark on a number of additional small course modification projects over the summer months in 2010. In all likelihood a number of bunkers will be modified and there is still a lot of golf course boundary work to do in coordination with Riffa Views.

We will look to over-seed cool season turf (ryegrass) in early November 2010. This will be a major milestone for The Royal Golf Club as it will be the first time overseeding has ever taken place in Bahrain and will allow us to align ourselves with a select few high profile courses in the region who undertake this process.

We understand that many of you will have additional questions or require some clarification on issues covered in the above report. If this is the case, I would be more than happy to meet any of you for dialogue. Alternatively, I can be contacted on the details below:

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Until next month, we wish you all a very Merry Christmas and look forward to seeing you all out on the course in the New Year!

Best regards
Mark Hooker
Director of Agronomy