

BOWLS SOUTH AFRICA GREENS STANDING COMMITTEE

GRASS CLIPPINGS 5

December 2005

Let's start with a topical subject – RUGBY. We have all heard Jake White bemoan the fact that his players need a rest and that as things are at present they will be going into the next season still nursing the bruises and other injuries from the previous season. He goes on to say that if this tendency persists the deterioration in their general condition will become more obvious with each passing year.

Now let us translate all that into bowls language. Instead of “Jake White” put in the word “Mr Green Keeper”. Take out the word “players” and replace it with “greens “ - that is the story of the GKP's annual appeal to his committee to allow him to take the greens out for their annual renovation in order to re-create the environment which allowed the grass to grow vigorously in the previous season.

In “Grass Clippings 4 “ we discussed the changes taking place on our greens every year and emphasized the fact that if left untended there would, inevitably, be a gradual deterioration in the playing surface and the health of the grass.

We classified the changes and mentioned the remedial procedures which would be needed to start the next season with a rejuvenated green – ready for the new season:

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| - Wear and Tear (incl. Weak and bare patches) | - Rest (incl. replant or re-sod) |
| - Proliferation of the mat | - Removal of last year's growth |
| - Compaction | - Create new air passages |
| - Bumps and Hollows | - Top Dressing |

All these procedures can be performed singly but for obvious practical reason if the green is going to be taken out for one procedure the GKP might as well go the whole hog and do all of them at the same time – this whole operation is called “Annual Renovation “or “Spring Treatment “

In “G C 4 “ we discussed the time factor and indicated that there are two distinct phases in “renovation” – the active phase and the passive phase. The length of the “active” phase depends on whether the facilities for carrying out these procedures are available to the club. The length of the “passive” phase depends wholly on the time of the year when the operation is carried out.

What we have established is that **ANNUAL RENOVATION IS NON-NEGOTIABLE**. The only thing that is negotiable would be **WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO DO RENOVATION AND WHETHER ALL THE GREENS SHOULD BE TAKEN OUT AT THE SAME TIME**.

To answer this question it is necessary to present you with all the evidence so that your club can make an educated assessment on when would be the best time to renovate.

1 TRADITIONAL

Lawn Bowls originated in the UK. and when the first green was laid down in the RSA in Port Elizabeth in 1888 the GKP's who prepared those greens followed the teachings of the GKP's in the UK.

In the UK lawn bowls was only played outdoors in the summer months and early autumn after which the weather put a stop to outdoor bowls. The GKP then closed up his greens for the winter. With the first intimation of spring he returned to his greens and prepared them for the new season by carrying out those procedures I have mentioned above. By the time play was possible outdoors he was ready with a “new” green.

This tradition was continued in this country and it became an established fact that greens had to be renovated in the “spring”.

One must query this because, apart from some parts Cape Town where the winter rainfall causes a cessation of bowls, we can play bowls throughout the year and there is no “forced closure” which compels us to renovate in the “spring”

Our clubs therefore enjoy the luxury of being able to make their own decisions regarding renovation. The fact remains that although we are not wedded to spring many of our GKP's and Districts still adhere to that tradition

2 MUNICIPAL ASSISTANCE

Many clubs in the major cities of the highveld had, for many years, the advantage of substantial Municipal assistance. This assistance often took the form of a team from the Parks Department coming round to carry out “renovation” for the club. They had the necessary equipment to do it all very quickly and in many instances also leveled the greens

The greens were well renovated and started the next season in as good a condition as anybody would wish. The only drawback to all this was the fact that **all** the greens were done at the same time and because the operation started early in August there was no bowls for up to 11 weeks. One can appreciate the fact that the Parks Department chose August because that was the quiet time for their staff.

With all the Municipal Clubs closed from August the private clubs followed suit and did their renovations at the same time. The District calendar also fell in line with this arrangement

Comment This system worked very well until the Municipalities discontinued this service.

A few clubs bought their own equipment and went on their own. New contractors appeared on the scene and were available - at a price. Some contractors cut corners to give the Clubs a lesser renovation at a lower price.

As the Municipalities no longer determine the date for renovation it is now up to the clubs to determine the dates. This "free for all" has not always been in the best interests of the greens because club Committees are now allowing their own agenda's to influence their decisions

To-day some clubs are restricting their renovation because of costs and member demands to shorten the period that the greens are out of commission. Some clubs have even gone so far that they only engage a contractor every alternate year.

One must also not forget the GKP who did not have to learn about renovation when the municipalities were doing it – his work started when the municipality handed over a green which had been completely renovated and the GKP could maintain it comfortably right through to the winter.

Now suddenly he either has to renovate his own greens – for which he is ill-equipped , **or**, supervise a contractor who might not do as good a job as the Municipalities leaving the GKP with a problem green even before the season has started - **none of this bodes well for the greens in those areas previously managed by the Municipalities.**

The deterioration in the general condition of many of our greens mentioned in G. C. 2 can be ascribed to the fact that to-day many of our greens are incompletely renovated.

I know I have digressed a bit but I intend using every opportunity I can to instill in clubs the importance of complete renovations every year.

3 THE ANNUAL CYCLE OF THE GRASS PLANT

Perhaps the most important consideration is the grass plant itself. There are definite periods of maximum growth when the grass plant would respond quickest to renovation and then there are also periods in it's annual growth cycle when the grass plant is under enough stress already not to have the added trauma of the renovation procedures thrust on it.

There is no doubt that the club committee should study this cycle before deciding on a suitable renovation date.

3.1 End of October / Early November – Ground temperature below 18 degrees C

There is some leaf growth but the roots are still dormant and the leaves are dependant on stored carbo-hydrates for their energy requirements

3.2 November Ground temperature above 18 degrees C

Massive root development – root hairs can grow at 10mm /day in this period - Leaf growth responds. This is the period of maximum growth of the grass plant.

P.S. This year ground warming was the latest in about 30 years and occurred on 27th November.

3.3 December / January / February - Ground temperature above 22 Degrees. The roots are

established and do not expand at these temperature. The grass is growing vigorously although some degree of wilting can occur if the temperatures are too high or if the roots are very shallow.

3.4 March - Ground temperature dropping to 22 degrees and below – Root activity resumed as in November and whatever damage was done in the warm months is now repaired. Sustained leaf growth

3.5 April / May - Root expansion stops as ground temperatures drop below 18 degrees although the roots are still active absorbing water and nutrients. Leaf growth slowing down slightly.

3.6 June / July - Ground temperature no longer significant. Leaf growth virtually stopped but still producing carbo-hydrates - roots still active.

In frosted areas all the chlorophyll would have been taken out of the leaves. The leaves are yellow and to all intents the plant is "dead" although the roots are still alive.

3.7 August - Vertical leaf growth is resumed. The roots are still active - carbohydrate is still being produced and being stored in the stems and bulbous roots.

3.8 September - In the third week of September the roots suddenly retract.(Called Root Die Back) No hair roots - root system is in-active. Vertical leaf growth is increasing. Even in the frosted areas leaf growth can be observed as long as there is no more frost. No carbo-hydrate being produced. The growth of the leaves is wholly dependent on the stored carbo-hydrates

3.9 October – The ground temperature becomes significant again and might, in some years, reach 18 degrees towards the end of October. Roots remain dormant until the ground temperature

reaches 18 degrees. Leaf growth increasing slowly and some lateral growth might be observed depending on the amount of stored carbo-hydrate still available to the grass plant. **If for some or other reason the stored carbo-hydrate has been interfered with and depleted as a result of action by the GKP then leaf growth will be retarded.**

Comment : From the above summary certain facts have emerged –

- The period of maximum growth and therefore the periods in which one could expect the quickest response after renovation would be November and March.
- With the grass plant relying heavily on the stored carbo-hydrates in the stems and bulbous roots to make leaf growth possible while the roots are dormant it is not advisable to deplete these reserves by scarifying during that period.

4 DISTRICT INFLUENCE

District Policy and the District Calendar can have a considerable influence on when a club can take it's greens out for renovation.

Almost all the Districts allow for a "rest" period when no District events are scheduled. This should be the obvious time for clubs to renovate.

They differ as to precisely when this rest period should be with some adhering to the "Spring" concept propagated by the Municipalities while others with the health of the grass in mind have their "rest" period in November/December

Then, again, some Districts insist the clubs must have all their greens available for District events while others are more flexible and allow clubs to take out their greens according to their own agendas.

5 CLUB COMMITMENTS

Where clubs are not required to abide by the District Calendar they are in a position to determine their own timetable bearing in mind the fact that clubs all have their own "Special" days on which they require all the greens to be available.

Another factor which might influence a club would be, **when can the club best afford to close a greens.** A survey amongst many clubs in the RSA revealed the fact that most clubs have their lowest usage between mid-December and mid-January.

One of the drawbacks of leaving it to the clubs to decide when they are going to take some of their greens out of commission is that there will always be groups in the club hierarchy pressurizing the committee either to postpone renovation altogether or restrict the time the green will be out of commission

While leaving the decision to the Club Committee can be commended it's success largely depends on there being complete co-operation between the GKP and his Club Committee. I have seen too many instances where a new Committee will suddenly curtail the amount of time set aside for the GKP to renovate his greens.

6 WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

There are two main issues here –

- Should all the greens be taken out for renovation at the same time?
- When would be the best time to undertake renovation?

In this issue of "GC 5" we have considered all the possible factors which should come into the reckoning before a club decides on a suitable date for annual renovation

Whatever the outcome of these deliberations **the one thing which is not negotiable is the fact that renovation must be included in the calendar of any club**

In the next issue of "Grass Clippings 6" we will discuss the various options.