

Take a look at the **DARK SIDE**

As the dust settles on an outstanding US Open, will the 'Augusta syndrome' mean darker grasses catch on in the UK?

GOLF course and pitch presentation is quite a personal thing. Thick stripes, thin stripes, diamonds, blocks, geometric patterns – everyone prepares their surface in their own way, but with one universal aim; when tournament or match day arrives, the grass looks the very best it can.

So what about colour? All grass varieties are rated for 'visual merit', among other desirable characteristics, but just how important is the shade of green in the preparation of sports surfaces?

When Scotts launched its brand new seed range at Harrogate Week in January, they brought a new element to the mix when it comes to selecting grasses - ryegrasses bred the American way. We're all aware of the so-called 'Augusta Syndrome' – members bemoaning the state of their own course after the Masters tournament, having been dazzled by the startling emerald surfaces tackled by golf's elite.

The rich, dark green colour of grass varieties is undoubtedly what the market demands in the States and also in

Mediterranean countries, while northern Europe has traditionally opted for lighter varieties. Scotts Professional has over 90 hectares of turfgrass trials at four research centres around the world, located in different climatic zones allowing both warm and cool season grasses to be tested, screened and evaluated. They cooperate with Pure-Seed Testing Inc., a pioneer in turfgrass breeding and one of the most productive and respective breeding companies in the world.

Crystal Fricker is President and



“The height of cut on the ryegrass green surrounds would have made the greens stand out, but the darker grasses gave us greater intensity and contrast.”

Agronomist Julian Mooney of Turfgrass Consultancy talks about his work at Castlemartyr, pictured below.

Director of Research. She explains why breeding of darker grasses has been so popular: “When we started improving turf grasses in the US, we started with forage types which were yellow or light green and tall, aggressive growing types.

“To make advancements we selected the lower growing, darker types. Also when the National Turfgrass Evaluation Programme (NTEP) started in the US in the early 80s, colour was rated like turf quality on a scale of 1-9, with 9 being best and darkest, so everyone strived for the darkest, thickest, lower-growing

types. In terms of future developments, we’re looking for varieties that have performance traits such as drought tolerance, salt tolerance and better disease resistance so colour is not the primary factor,” she continues. “Even so, most of the American germplasm is now so dark that I think there will still be a prevailing darker colour in the US compared to Europe.”

So could darker grasses catch on here? Scotts’ Field Sales Manager for Golf and Sports Nick Martin certainly thinks so: “There’s definitely a place for them.

Aesthetics are important and definition and contrast are all key considerations for match preparation, particularly at premium golf venues and sports stadia. Turf managers would all like to have rich colour without huge inputs, and these grasses make that possible. Darker ryegrasses have been used with stunning effect at Irish golf courses on tees, fairways and green surrounds and they’re particularly popular with parkland courses where darker fairways are often preferred.” We take a closer look at one such course on page 24.

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CASE STUDY: Castlemartyr Resort, East Cork

CASTLEMARTYRE Resort in East Cork, is an 18-hole, Championship, inland links-style course set into a 220-acre wooded estate.

The challenging Par 72, designed by international golf architect Ron Kirby, has been under the stewardship of Course Superintendent Trevor Norris since it was grown-in back in 2006.

The course was sown with a number of Scotts' grasses – Penn A4 and G6 creeping bentgrass on the greens, Roadrunner and Brightstar SLT in the ryegrass mixture on the collars and fairways, Seabreeze and Florentine (now Florensate) creeping red fescues on the tee tops and surrounds and Aurora Gold hard fescue on the mounds, all supplied by Irish distributor Goldcrop.

Trevor explained how the grass selection has helped create the links-style vision at an inland location: "Fescues have a naturally lighter colour and go into a natural dormancy during the colder months, so the use of darker ryegrasses on the fairways means that, even in winter when little fertilizer is applied, we have superb definition. They give us a hardier, thicker



Agronomist Julian Mooney of Turfgrass Consultancy Ltd worked closely with the architect at Castlemartyr. "The height of cut on the ryegrass green surrounds would have made the greens stand out, but the darker grasses gave us greater intensity and contrast."

sward that presents the ball to the golfer superbly. We overseed with 100% ryegrass around the greens at a very high rate. Not only does it complement the lighter grasses on the greens, pronouncing the shape and contour, but the dense, healthy sward helps prevent Poa infestation on the putting surface."

"In real contrast, the tall, wispy dune-effect mounds were sown with Aurora Gold tall fescue which is maintained

at knee-height and harvested once a year, giving a fantastic colour/texture contrast from June to October. It's low maintenance and has created the perfect habitat for our increasing hare population."

He explained how he selects the right seed for his situation: "Superintendents in Ireland take their lead from the States, where all the grasses are darker. I look at the American NTEP data on cool season grasses, and I'm happy to make my choice on that basis."

'We selected for function'

AGRONOMIST Julian Mooney of Turfgrass Consultancy Ltd. drew up the seed specification for Castlemartyr. "Working closely with the architect, we selected the grasses for function rather than colour in this situation.

"The darker grasses are not preferred on all courses, however they can be very effective in a traditional parkland setting. When golfers visit courses in Ireland from overseas and the US in particular, they don't necessarily want the courses to look the same as in the US, but they expect them to play the same. I feel the grassing plan and, more importantly, the management of the turf at Castlemartyr does just that, presenting extra definition and impact."

He also offers some sound advice on their maintenance: "Superintendents must not assume that because these grasses have a rich colour, they don't need feeding. In order to get the very best from the colour and texture and to minimise the risk of disease, they must have a well balanced fertiliser programme in place."

More info: www.scottsproseed.co.uk



A Greenkeeper's view...an independent opinion from someone in the know

"WE get all sorts of information fired at us by the seed companies" says David Wyborn, Course Manager at Foxhills Golf Club and Resort in Surrey. "But in the end I make the decision based on experience and what suits the course.

"On the fairways we tend to use dwarf rye and fescues for aesthetic reasons and for wear and tear. We use a dwarf rye on the tees and in a few years I think the trend will be towards using rye grasses

New cultivars are part of selection process...

across the course and on greens, because they're excellent at maintaining a good look while surviving close-cutting."

He keeps the tees and greens at 10mm and the fairways at 15mm and has two courses under his management – the American-style Bernard Hunt and the tree-lined

Longcross. "We're constantly striving for excellent appearance and reduction of the use of products. New grass cultivars are part of that process," says David.

● *Turf Pro would like to point out that David's opinion is not part of the above feature on Scotts cultivars and he is not a user of Scotts grass seed.*



The first team training pitch at Coventry City FC's Sky Blue Lodge training complex.

Sports pitches benefit from 'fantastic rooting'

SO WHAT about sports pitches? When your playing surface is under the constant glare of the media, with TV cameras high in the stands scrutinising the presentation, surely the greener the better when it comes to grass?

Michael Finch, Grounds Manager at Coventry City Football Club has been trialling a two rye blend of Roadrunner and Brightstar, now known as a mixture as ProSelect 1, on his first team pitch at the club's Sky Blue Lodge training complex.

"After taking the existing vegetation off with a Koro, the seed was sown onto the sandy loam construction pitch during the first week of May last year, taking one pass with a disc seeder and three with a star seeder at a rate of 46g per square metre. It germinated in eight days," he explains.

"The colour is impressive, very dark green – even the players have commented on it! But that's not the only benefit we've observed. The rooting has been fantastic, 5in to 6in, which we're delighted with.

"We've got a good strong surface with a dense sward that plays well and stands up to the daily wear and tear. There are very few divots, and we're maintaining a steady supply of nutrients to the plant with slow-release fertiliser. What we've really reduced right down is iron – I hardly use the stuff now.

I've just pencilled in the Scotts mixture for a new Under 18s academy match pitch as a result."

So are dark ryes right for the Ricoh? "If we were having a new pitch at the stadium and I could establish them from scratch, I'd like to give them a go in there," he adds. "As far as I'm concerned they've proved themselves here as high-quality cultivars."

Eager to see whether the mixture would perform with less intensive maintenance, Michael instigated trials at two smaller local venues at the same time, one of which was at The Oval, home to Midlands Division One side Bedworth United. Groundsman Mark Welch has a troublesome area in the centre of his pitch where he has drainage problems. Because the ground's often waterlogged, maintaining grass coverage has been difficult but he has seen a definite improvement this season.

"We overseeded with the Scotts mixture and the pitch has been more resilient this season than in previous years, despite the fact that we had a wetter winter. We maintain it on an annual budget of around £6,000 and have applied four standard fertiliser applications since it was sown. We've not treated it any differently than before, and we've seen a definite improvement."

Headway is 'double action' turf fungicide

A NEW systemic turf fungicide from Syngenta offers cost-effective 'double-action' control of key foliar and soil-borne fungal diseases.

Headway is a new, easy-to-use combination of azoxystrobin and propiconazole. The complimentary power of two actives in one product is claimed to give improved performance and control of key foliar and soil-borne turf diseases, including fusarium patch, take-all, anthracnose, dollar spot and leaf spots. Trials have also shown effects on fairy ring (basidiomycetes), red thread, rust and brown patch.

Syngenta turf & amenity technical manager, Dr Simon Watson, says that in independent trials, Headway



achieved virtually 100% control of fusarium eight weeks after application. The new fungicide was still giving better disease control after 12 weeks than iprodione or myclobutanil had achieved at four weeks.

Headway is distributed in the UK and Ireland by Scotts Professional, and available exclusively from Sheriff Amenity in the UK. Information: www.greencast.co.uk



TURFSAVER, from DJ Turfcare, is a new machine from the US that de-thatches and overseeds (or fertilises) in one compact unit. It's ideal for contractors, greenkeepers and groundsman, it comes fitted with blades to verti-cut and covers a 22-inch wide swathe in a single pass. Turfsaver is manufactured by SourceOne, designers of the Plugger aerator.

- Also new is the 'Elephant's Trunk', claimed to eliminate back, shoulder, neck and arm strain and said to reduce the weight of any hedgetrimmer to just one kilo. The Elephant's Trunk is from Green Technology of Belgium and exclusive to DJ Turfcare in the UK.

- From the Viano organic range of fertilisers Recovery is a granulated product that restores damaged turf that has suffered stress through drought or waterlogging

Information: 01483 200976

www.djturfcare.co.uk