

# Abridge over troubled water

**Like almost every course in southern England this summer, The Abridge Golf Club in Essex faced a difficult time due to drought-like conditions. Fortunately, the club, which experiences high rainfall in winter, constructed a lake during a Covid lockdown, which now receives its water via drainage from the course's very wet areas**



*Abridge is seeded with R9*



*The greenkeeping team at the PDC PGA EuroPro Tour*



*The R013 seed mixture ensures superb putting surfaces*

**T**he Abridge 18-hole, par 72 championship golf course is set in 240 acres of beautiful parkland with some of the finest views over the Essex countryside. The club is recognised as one of the best in the county, having hosted Open qualifiers and this July the prestigious PDC Championship PGA EuroPro Tour event for the first time.

For the past 16 years, after a two-year spell at London Golf Club, Geoff Smith has been the course manager. Following a previous successful career in financial services, he joined the club 23 years ago as assistant greenkeeper, then deputy head greenkeeper. Upon taking up the course manager's post, he immediately set about instigating a new regime of turf management programmes with targeted use of fertiliser and to reduce thatch levels

The Abridge Golf Club has push-up greens on solid clay and Geoff with his team of eight full time greenkeepers, a summer greenkeeper and a part-time mechanic work well together. On his staff, Geoff comments: "A team working together harmoniously is so important, this to me has been endorsed during the recent PGA EuroPro Tour event. I knew I had a great team but I realised during this period how great they really

are! They all just get on with the job and want to do the best they can each day."

Geoff adopts a mechanical cultural programme that includes spike aeration followed by verticutting at two weekly intervals. Pure sand topdressing is applied within the aeration programme using just 80-100 tonnes over the year.

Given the nature of the soil, the selection of grass seed is key. "We use R9, 100 percent ultra-fine dwarf perennial ryegrass blend on tees, fairways and high wear areas and R013 for greens," states Geoff.

"R9 has been our 'go-to' mixture for a number of years as it is very fast establishing, recovers well from close mowing with high shoot and root density, it also has excellent tolerance to turf diseases. Our greens also experience a high degree of wear so the choice of the ultra fine rye and fescue mixture provides an attractive, dense, sustainable sward and a perfect putting surface."

One of Geoff's many challenges is the management of water as the course gets very wet in the winter and very dry during the summer months. To help offset these issues an irrigation lake was constructed during Covid with drainage

from the very wet areas being directed into the lake, which has a capacity of 32,000 cu/m. Harvesting water this way, comments Geoff, "allows us to irrigate the course during dry periods over the summer without taking water from the mains. The new irrigation lake provides me with an immediately accessible water source that I can call upon at any time. If required we can apply 450 cu/m of water per night which equates to an application of 2mls approximately on all surfaces."

Geoff Smith is very open to new ideas and practices that he sees, which complement tried and proven traditional agronomic practices. To this end, with water management very much on his mind, he was one of the first UK course managers to invest in a POGO Pro digital soil and turf management meter / probe.

"I saw immediately the benefits of POGO Pro as it measures the most influential variables governing turf performance – moisture, salinity, canopy temperature, nutrition and conditions that influence turf stress and diseases. It provides me with an accurate insight into the current state of the surfaces, as well as enables me to build a true history of exactly what's going on beneath the top layer."



*Mark Keysell (Rigby Taylor) and Geoff discuss the readings provided by the POGO digital probe*

From the information he obtains from the POGO, Geoff is able to monitor the moisture availability to the rootzone and instigates a monthly application programme of wetting agents, using Breaker Dynamic on greens throughout the main golf season and three applications of Breaker Fairway No. 3 on fairways, approaches and tees.

Another aspect of turf management that Geoff has embraced is the introduction of biological products into his turf management programme, something that had always interested him but he had never been convinced

enough to try it. With a nudge and encouragement by his deputy course manager Ben Scrivenor, who has always had an interest in biological products, plus the persistence of Symbio's Laura Prior for three years, who convinced him of the massive benefits before trying a few products, he is now using many Symbio products.

"I was not convinced at first," comments Geoff, "but we were introduced to their features and benefits and we can see the benefits that have been gained by introducing, among others, such Symbio products as Cavier 10.0.4, an organic with fulvic and amino acids for new turf areas and construction projects, and Phytgro 0.0.18, which stimulates the plant's immune system and encourages faster recovery from scarring and ball mark damage. Fish Hydroslate, Vermi Extract and CMS are also used." Due to the dry nature of the course in the summer, Geoff has also incorporated Aquecept to break down waxy layers that cause hydrophobicity and allows improved water penetration of the turf surface.

Benefits of the Symbio programme includes increased root depth and mass and a significant decrease in thatch levels.

Geoff is also a great believer in being able to control his turf nutritional inputs. "We always apply a Magnet Dynamic Lite in December to harden up the leaf and improve grass colour and follow up in February / March with Rigby Taylor's Cold Start Boost-R 11-5-5 fertiliser to kick off the season. However, Geoff states, "we adopt a four weekly cycle of Nutri-Link liquid supplements throughout the year; Nutri-Link and Nutri-Link Leaf in the early season, the Base and Revive formulations in the summer high stress months and then turn to the Green and Base products



*Laura Prior (Symbio) and Geoff noting the benefits of Phytgro 0.0.18 and rapid healing of ball marks on greens*

late season. Such a programme provides me with the ability to be in control of plant growth, adding more or less as is required by the plant without problems from any excess growth flushes which may lead to problems later on."

This combination of non-biological and biological products, he believes, complement each other very well and the two suppliers, Rigby Taylor and Symbio, work together with him to ensure the very best outcome. "I love the fact that we have introduced programmes that complement each other," comments Geoff. "Not only do I personally get excellent support and advice from Laura and Rigby Taylor's area manager Mark Keysell, but it is a welcome change to see competing suppliers working together with me for the overall benefit of the golf course. To be able to sit with Laura and Mark and together discuss the benefits of each other's products is a massive compliment to them both. This is one of the reasons I purchase from these two suppliers as it is people I buy into, not products."

**Rigby Taylor and Symbio, along with Headland Amenity and TurfKeeper, work together under the Origin Amenity Solutions brand. For more information, visit [www.originamenity.com](http://www.originamenity.com)**

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