

Is your golf course **SUMMER READY?**

Alastair Higgs, at Rain Bird Europe, **encourages General Managers to prioritise efficient irrigation** in 2021



North Hants Golf Club

Why is summer-ready irrigation so important?

At this time of year, golf clubs across the UK are starting up their irrigation systems after a wet winter in hibernation and, for many, with reduced staff teams and working routines altered significantly by the Covid-19 pandemic. As spring



weather begins warming up the ground and lockdown restrictions ease, this is the time when looking ahead to summer irrigation needs to be a priority. Making sure that your irrigation system is in the best shape now will mean operational reliability and water efficiency come summer.

Alastair Higgs highlights the 2019 BIGGA survey that found 74% of irrigation systems were over 20 years old.

“Many of these systems are unreliable and will eventually fail. The hydraulics, pipes and electrics have aged, deteriorated and there are frequent leaks. Every General Manager needs to be 100% confident their course is maintained in the best condition and can be played for as long as possible. Hot, dry periods over summer can mean finding funds for additional mains water and long periods of drought can devastate turf. Any club is vulnerable just relying on seasonal rainfall and mains water”.

General Manager Rob Climas, at North Hants Golf Club in Fleet, understands just how fundamental paying attention to irrigation is in ensuring the club maintains and improves its top-quality playing surfaces. Rob and Course Manager Sam Evans MG have the same view. Sam joined the club a year ago and explains: “Having good communication with your GM means the GM is properly informed about irrigation and what’s needed, so it gets discussed at board level. North Hants Golf Club is a UK Top 100 championship course, so we have to stay one step ahead. What my team and I need most is time. An irrigation system is only ever going to be as good as the time we can invest in it and that means paying close attention all year round. Having a GM that is very supportive and understands

that great turf needs investment is essential. It’s understanding that bridges the gap between the GM and the Course Manager”.

Rob adds: “Sam and I work closely together on both short and long-term course investment. At present we’re working on plans for a significant irrigation upgrade which we hope will happen in the next few years and will completely overhaul our system. However, this is only half of the story. Making the most of what you’ve already got in the short-term is crucial. Since Sam joined us, we’ve seen our existing system perform much more efficiently due to the ongoing detailed audits and repairs carried out by Sam and the team, delivering improvements to playing surfaces and, in turn, increasing member satisfaction”.

A Spring Routine

The spring routine at North Hants Golf Club begins with a full irrigation audit which Sam believes takes a good 2 to 3 weeks to carry out properly. The greenkeeping team invests time, focussing on the turf, by keeping information up to date on the software and the club’s keen focus on training and development makes sure staff have the right skills and knowledge.

Rob Schofield is designated Irrigation Technician, who ensures ownership and responsibility for the irrigation system and in recent months, he’s made a great many improvements.

Sam adds: “We’re always out on the course, looking at what’s happening. We’ve a team of ten here and we visit every head, checking every arc and every nozzle, monitoring its condition, performance and age. All that data is relayed back to the Rain Bird Stratus II™ Central Control system



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North Hants course manager Sam Evans

so we're constantly looking to raise the bar, improve coverage and irrigation efficiency. Of course, it takes a little longer the first time you complete an audit but it gets quicker each time after that.

"Created and developed over a number of years, what we have currently is a solid fairway system made up of Rain Bird 950 Series rotors. Several green and approach rotors are Rain Bird 751 Series with a number of Rain Bird 8005 Series rotors on tees. The arc adjustment and general usability makes auditing a lot easier.

To ensure irrigation is efficient and accurate, we're irrigating in millimetres rather than minutes, identifying and repairing faults quickly (in-house where possible), and utilising what we have to maximise our water source to produce uniform and consistent playing surfaces.

It is also important we understand what the current system can do and with Alastair's help, we're using Cycle & Soak™ times on playing surfaces which prevents run-off and allows water to reach the rootzone. By irrigating

for a period, then having a rest period, prior to continuing the programme cycle to finish, just the right amount is applied which minimises wastage and allows the system to water other areas during the soak time, meaning we're using these available time windows to our advantage".

Agree Priorities - one green at a time

Around 50% of golf facilities surveyed by BIGGA in 2019 relied on mains potable water supply for irrigation so it's crucial that every



club measures and monitors water efficiency as it's an expensive and increasingly scarce resource.

Having an irrigation strategy, tackling water usage and efficiency and upgrading irrigation systems and rotors with agreed priorities is key. What's to be avoided is having a piecemeal approach.

Replacing all the damaged rotors on one green, all at the same time, swapping out any that can be used elsewhere, will give better results and uniformity of irrigation coverage.

Rob and Sam have a similar

approach to upgrades. They both know that having the best playing surfaces means them having agreed priorities – in the right order – green, tees, approaches and finally fairways.

General Managers and Course Managers across the UK are acutely aware of the work that spring usually brings into focus.

With extra pressures ahead post-lockdown, post-furlough and with members keen to get back on courses, it's high time for a smarter approach to irrigation ahead of summer 2021. 🌧️

Where to start - 5 key questions for General Managers:

1. What does it cost to run our irrigation system on a daily basis?
2. How much does irrigation cost our club each year?
3. What's spent on preventative maintenance and upgrades?
4. How do we measure water usage and electricity for course irrigation?
5. What's our approach to irrigation risk management and disaster planning?

Alastair Higgs



A keen golfer, Alastair started his career as a greenkeeper at Calcot Park in 2000, joined American Golf UK Golf in 2004, becoming head greenkeeper at Donnington Valley Golf Club in 2008 and course manager, Windlesham Golf Club in 2012. He joined Rain Bird in 2016.

Full UK GCMA members considering improvements to their water infrastructure can benefit from an irrigation evaluation from Strategic Partner Rain Bird. Find out more at www.gcma.org.uk/rainbird/ www.northhantsgolf.co.uk

