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Firethorn Greens Update

Dear Member,

In newsletters over the past weeks, we have reported back to members about the state of the Firethorn greens. We have since been very busy finding the cause, as well as concentrating on remediating the damage.

It is still not clear what exactly caused the damage to the greens. We have taken samples to laboratories for analysis, and we hope to have their report by the end of this week. What is baffling is that the damage is localised in spots, and that even the kikuyu grass near the greens seems to have been affected. Once we had sprayed the fungicide on the greens, the hot and dry weather conditions, and the impact of load shedding on our ability to water the greens may have had a negative impact. This does not, however, explain why the chipping green and putting green, which were treated immediately before the Firethorn greens, have not shown any stress.

Several members have voiced opinions that the damage may have been caused by sabotage. While we can't rule that out, it should be appreciated that it is impossible to reach that conclusion without a clear understanding of what caused the damage. If that may have been the cause of the damage, then we can also not at this stage identify who may have been responsible without a clear link between the cause of the damage, and the possible perpetrators.

All the indications so far are that the steps taken by our greenkeepers and their staff were in keeping with their normal practice, and that there was no malfeasance. So, while we are very concerned about how this could have happened, we should be careful to pass judgement and blame. Most of our course staff have been doing their jobs effectively for years, and they are as distressed about the condition of the greens as members are, if not more so.

Our greenkeepers and their staff are in the meantime focusing on getting the greens back to standard. We have found that there is a layer of anaerobic material that has built up below the surface of the damaged portions of the greens. This is preventing the grass to grow. To get more oxygen back into that layer, we have been spiking and hollow-tining the greens, as well as treating those areas with an oxygenating solution. The current wet conditions may seem welcome for the growth of the grass, but it is, unfortunately, making it difficult to get enough air into the upper layers of the greens, compounding the difficulty of the process.

With the holiday season now upon us, we will concentrate on getting the areas where we cannot get the grass to reinstate itself, reseeded and plugged from more healthy areas. Reducing the traffic on the greens may help, but we are very aware that we need to find a balance between the need for protecting the greens and the needs of players who will want to play. To thus assist the process, we will be closing Firethorn from next Monday 17 December for three days, opening it again on Thursday 16

Monday, 13 December for three days, opening it again on Thursday, 16 December. We are also trying to reduce traffic on Firethorn by moving tee times to available spots on Bushwillow until we close Firethorn next week. Our treatment of the greens will also include sanding and replanting, which we know will negatively affect playability.

We sincerely apologise for this situation, and we ask again for patience and support while we do all that we can to get our greens back to the high standards that we are used to. We will continue to report back to members on progress.

Kind regards,
Gerrit Sandrock
Club President

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