

Course Report 2009

Weather Summary

We had the coldest January since 2001. After a dry, cold start to the month, the weather became unsettled from the 10th onwards with heavy rain and strong winds at times. It was the wettest January since 1974 and towards the end of January we had falls of sleet and snow.

Spring rainfall was up to 143% of normal with heaviest falls in April and mid May. During the spring the total number of wet days (rainfall in excess of 1mm) recorded on the east coast were between 35 and 43. Summer rainfall has been above normal for the third successive year with twice the average rainfall being the highest since 1866. There were in excess of 43 wet days during this period. The autumn gave us some relief with September being a dry month and October close to normal. November rainfall was the highest for the month on record. In summary it has been one of the wettest years on record.

Course Maintenance

Despite the bad weather we managed to have excellent greens throughout the year. Members have expressed the view that they have never seen the greens as good particularly during the latter part of the year. The improvement can be attributed to an improved winter program started last year of verti draining and pencil tining of greens every two weeks. This is now our standard winter program. Despite the bad weather we have been pencil tining but cannot verti drain because of the conditions and as soon as possible we will recommence. This program in conjunction with a fungicide preventative program to control the spread of Fusarium has added greatly to the improvement in the quality of our greens. Staff have serviced all course machinery while we have been closed.

Course staff refer on a daily basis to a website called "Greencast" to monitor weather and get early warning of disease attacks. Fungicide treatments are very expensive and during 2009 costs were € 18345. We hope to see a reduction in the cost of product during the coming year. Fusarium thrives during wet conditions and attacks have been very frequent during this year. Failure to treat will result in large bare areas of dead grass on greens.

A course policy document has been submitted to the Committee of Management for approval and it is hoped this policy will be adopted in early January. This document sets out responsibilities and standards of maintenance for the golf course. We are aware that fairways and green surrounds need better definition, it was planned to complete this work during this year but it had to be deferred due to difficulties relating adverse weather and machine availability, this issue is one of the items prioritised for

2010. Another member of the course staff will have completed his greenkeeper qualification this coming year and I hope to have further staff training during 2010.

The very heavy rains we have experienced during November have highlighted the need for us all to be more attentive to our drains and to ensure the regular clearing of ditches and removal of debris. On a daily basis the crew has been busy clearing leaves, fallen branches and mud from our many ditches ensuring that water is kept moving. A number of trees have been damaged during the recent storms and these have had to be removed.

Course Closure

To protect the course it has been necessary for it to remain closed for quite a long period during the month of November. This has not been an easy decision to make and hold to. There is little comfort hearing that other clubs are closed and worse still somewhere else is open. We have to focus on our own situation and make decisions that are for the long term benefit of Skerries Golf Club. The bad weather has again highlighted some of the major drainage problems that exist. Many members will have seen some of the pictures showing lakes on the 11th hole left and right, many bunkers flooded, flooding on 9th, 10th, 13th, 14th 16th and many other areas. The ground has been very soft in the vicinity of greens and greens themselves have softened. Hand mowers have had to be used to cut green surrounds too keep the grass under control while we have been closed. Any traffic in these areas would cause serious damage to the golf course.

The Course Superintendent has regularly inspected the course to see if it could be opened throughout the month and considered moving temporary greens back to try and get some holes open for members. The ground has been too soft to do so and cutting grass on the fairways to greens height too quickly would give temporary greens a scalped look and create a mucky surface. We have reviewed the course on a regular basis to see if we can provide the members with some golf even 9 holes.

When the course is re-opened members will find that the grass in the rough and on the fairways has lengthened as we have been unable to cut these areas for almost 4 weeks. We will have to raise the height of cut on our machines temporarily and gradually reduce the height over a period to avoid damaging the grass.

Course works – drainage etc

The drainage of the 6th & 7th was a major project carried out in March/April of this year and this area has performed very well so far during the recent spell of very heavy rain. The remodeled bunkers have remained dry despite the wet conditions. The new open drain across the 3rd fairway is coping well with the huge volumes of water coming from the new open drain at the left side of the 5th green and the new piped drain across the 17th fairway.

This current drainage project is part a major piece of work which is also remodeling and draining bunkers on holes 3, 4, 5, 8, and 17. All new bunkers and a new swale on the approach to the 5th green have worked well and members can look forward to a further 10 bunkers that are not subjected to flooding. The drain through the lower section of the 8th green is satisfactory so far however the drain at the left side centre 17th green is not working as efficiently as was hoped and has not solved the problem, other options will have to be considered. Members must be aware that such works on the greens as we have completed in these areas are to some degree patch work and we cannot expect our greens to drain as efficiently as sand based greens. Nevertheless, our mission is to make them as good as they can be.

Works on these holes commenced in early October and progressed well until the heavy rain started at the end of October. Staff worked very hard on this project The bad weather has prevented us from finishing off the middle bunker on the 4th, completing the drain from the 8th green, putting a drain on the back of the 8th hole, extending the tee box on the 3rd hole, leveling the Ladies tee box on the 3rd hole, and getting sand into the new bunkers. Outstanding project work will recommence as soon as possible after the ground conditions allow but only after the staff have had time to get all general cutting and maintenance completed to allow the course get back to a playable condition which is the priority at this point.

In summary, 2009 has been a very difficult year for the golf course. Many areas in need of drainage have been identified and these will have to be tackled ASAP over the next few years. Some areas worked on during the year will improve course playability but there are still many other areas needing further attention. Course staff given support and depending on finance available will be capable of completing the majority of these tasks from within our own resources. It is hoped that we can open the golf course in the short term for members and to generate income we badly need. We carry out regular inspections and are actively striving to get the course opened for members.

Padraig Faughnan
General Manager
3rd December 2009