



David Snowdon, of Agronomic Services, is one of the longest standing and most familiar figures within the sports turf fraternity and he took time out to chat with Turf Matters about lockdown, the turf grass sector and his work with Floratine



David in conversation with Real Madrid Head Groundsman, Paul Burgess

We are slowly coming out of lockdown and a sort of normality has begun to take shape. How have you spent the last five months?

I have provided more agronomic advice to our customers via Zoom and over the telephone than ever before! This has included guidance on how they can maintain their courses with reduced staff and budgets.

We have made use of the furlough scheme for several employees. However, as a business, we have enjoyed our busiest six months in 14 years. This is mainly due to the diversity of customers and the types of products and advice we provide, both nationally and internationally.

Golf seems to be confounding predictions with many clubs seeing record numbers of new members. Have you found signs of positivity among your clients?

We have seen positivity among many clubs. We have also been very excited to welcome new clients to our portfolio, which has been fantastic for the future of the business.

I do think many clubs were caught out with the high volume of people deciding to play golf. Given very little notice gave them limited time to prepare their courses.

They had to review their entire way of working with their teams and safety being one of the main factors. One of the ways this was achieved, was by teams splitting in to two groups and adapting their working practices, for example using one piece of machinery per one person.

One of the adopted methods used by many of our clients was to change their plans for renovation and we assisted by providing them with Ninja Tines as a viable alternative to aggressive aeration and top dressing. We were also able to supply chemical thatch management.

I know having a non-played golf course tends to defeat the purpose but will golf courses have benefited from not being played for an entire spring, or do they need play to keep them match fit?

The wildlife will have certainly enjoyed

lockdown and the unoccupied greens, but that is really where it ends!

It has been extremely difficult to maintain course quality with skeleton staff and reduced budgets. Of the many clubs we deal with, those that have retained a high proportion of their employees have certainly regained routine much faster, which has resulted in less stress to the turf during the lockdown as well as a more contented work place. Producing quality playing surfaces is a never-ending process, with certain procedures carried out every day of every week. Water management, nutrition, thatch management and aeration are no exception as this is where our expertise lies.

I know you have a strong relationship with Floratine. Can you describe how this came about and the benefits it has created for Agronomic Services?

I joined Floratine's agronomic team as European Technical Director in 1999 and thought I knew a reasonable amount about soil science and plant nutrition! Over the next ten years, I gained an enormous amount of knowledge about plant physiology and soil science from a true genius, Travis Jones, who very sadly is no longer with us. Under his expert guidance, Floratine designed and engineered a range of true foliar applied products and soil conditioners, specifically for turf. There is no other company in the world who does this.

Our industry is flooded with companies selling products from the agricultural and horticultural world. The big difference is that the Floratine Products Group are pioneers and market leaders in their field. They are continually pushing the boundaries on how to maintain sports turf. They are not in the business of producing and using fungicides, but specifically supporting and promoting plant strength and health. I equate them to Formula 1 – they are so advanced when it comes to the innovation and quality of the raw materials that go

into their products and they are always striving to stay ahead of the rest.

The latest new product created by the white coats at Floratine is X Factor. I know there is a great deal of excitement about it. Can you explain why?

Travis's legacy lives on, with a team of formulators and chemists, who have taken Foliar Applied NPK nutrition to a completely new level.

There is simply nothing like the X Factor range on the market and there probably won't be for some time! The technology that has been incorporated into these products will dramatically benefit turf and turf managers.

How will it assist turf managers with their maintenance programmes going forward?

As you know, there are far less fungicides available to turf managers and this will only continue to diminish. However, plants will remain under even more stress.

Floratine have always focused on plant strength and health and they have now added six important elements to the new range of foliar NPK products.

X Factor is just one of several Floratine products you work with at Agronomic Services. Can you tell me a little about some of the others?

Non-intrusive thatch management products, such as Thatch Buster and water management and soil conditioning products such as Retain and Pervade, have played a major role in supporting turf managers in increasing the efficiency of the rootzones.

What are your expectations and hopes for the next 12 months?

We have been so touched by the loyalty of our customers. It will be wonderful to be able to do more field visits as restrictions are lifted. We have learnt a great deal from Covid-19. We will continue to build the business both in the UK and internationally.