

# centre. point

With the Wimbledon Championships in full swing Turf Professional gives you a flavour of the pressures facing head groundsman **EDDIE SEAWARD**.

In the weeks before the Tournament he spent a day with **MIKE BEARDALL**.

Here is his exclusive report

**F**IVE minutes into my meeting with Eddie Seaward his mobile phone rings. It's raining and his deputy, Mark Sheather, has given the order to all staff at Wimbledon "Keep off the courts".

This is the same All England Lawn Tennis and

Croquet Club that will host Wimbledon Fortnight in less than five weeks - and it looks like a giant building site with splashes of immaculate grass amongst scaffolding, welding equipment, tower cranes and stacks of building materials.

Until today there have

been six tower cranes hovering over Wimbledon. Today there is only one - and that will be going before the Tournament begins on June 25.

"Health and safety is the major concern we have," says Eddie, probably the most influential

head groundsman in the country - and definitely the most widely-recognised.

"As well as damage to the courts we have to think of slipping. You would have thought that health and safety regulations would have levelled out by now, but we still



Centre Court dominated by a construction tower crane before the Championships

seem to be swamped by new rules. We keep on top of everything with strict records and regular training for all the staff."

Health and safety signs are everywhere at Wimbledon as it undergoes constant development, with a sliding roof going on Centre Court for 2009, and a new Number One Court to seat 4,000 - the current one becoming Number Two.

This is a typical Monday for Eddie (63) who has been at Wimbledon since 1990.

His 21 staff (including two mechanics and an irrigation engineer) have had their orders and groundstaff are out across the 41-acre site working on the grass courts that were used for the first time this year the day before by club members.

Meanwhile marquees and seating blocks are starting to be erected in time for the Championships starting the last week of June.

And today Stuart Covers are coming in to ensure all the court covers are in full working order.

Shortly Eddie is to meet with the Long Term Plan Department, an almost daily requirement as hundreds of contract workers are on site.

THE phone rings again.

This is the fifth time in half an hour.

This is a request for Eddie to visit a lawn tennis club in Slough to dispense some advice.

"I may be able to help them over the phone," he says after saying he will call them back. "At other times of the year I pay a visit."

"Time is short now. We are a month away from the championships and I have only one free weekend before they start - and I may have to go to Milton Keynes on that Saturday for the IOG annual general meeting."

Because Eddie was once general secretary of the IOG and chairman of the Education Committee, and is still branch secretary of London South West Branch (with 160 members), he feels it is vital to keep a finger on the pulse.

"There is a lot going on with merger proposals with BIGGA under discussion and the new direction of the IOG," says Eddie, who is on the steering committee looking at the possible merger.

"A lot of discussion has to take place on the future and we have to ensure the members of both organisations know exactly what is going on. The decision will eventually be theirs as it has to be a

“The trouble with using the roof is that the environment will change within and we have systems in place to deal with that”

**Eddie Seaward, Head Groundsman, All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club**

75 per cent-in-favour vote with both organisations before anything can move in the direction of a merger."

THE phone rings again.

It is one of the Long Term Plan Department project managers. Could Eddie be at a meeting next to Number 14 Court at 2.30?

"I'll be meeting three of the team," says Eddie. "We have a few things that have to be clarified and the best way to do it is face to face."

"This is probably the biggest team operation in sport, and every member of the Wimbledon team is totally dedicated to success - from the groundstaff to the electricians and plumbers."

The phone rings again.

It is Rob Austen, the irrigation engineer. Could Eddie meet him on Centre Court to see if he is happy with the new nozzles?

Eddie says he will be there at 12.30.

Every one of the 41 grass courts is equipped with computer-controlled irrigation. And any of the systems can be activated by one remote controller in Rob's hand - the size of a mobile phone. The code is punched in and time, quantity of water and duration of spray is set for a court that may be out of sight.

Then Health and Safety comes in.

"We have to notify everyone working in that area to stay clear for the duration of irrigation - just to be on the safe side," says Eddie. "If it's when the public are around we keep them away to keep them dry."

EDDIE's day has started at 7.30am with a three-mile walk to work from Raynes Park.

"It's a deliberate health routine to keep me fit," says Eddie. "I do it at least three times a week. The problem with this job is that as a manager I spend more time sitting in meetings and at the

## Eddie Seaward FactFile

- As a teenager started in Petersfield, Hampshire, at Bedales School.
- At 24 moved to Portsmouth Civil Service Club.
- Then to St. Benedicts School, Brent, Berkshire.
- Then to Aldermaston Sports Complex. Head groundsman for 11 years.
- 1990 joined Wimbledon before taking over from retiring head groundsman Jim Thorne.
- Has seen 23 Grand Slams
- Married to Chris for 31 years (a lifelong tennis fan) who acted as IOG branch secretary for a time.
- Former IOG national secretary and chairman of the training committee. Now on steering committee looking at merger proposals with BIGGA. Secretary of the London South West region with 160 members.

computer than I used to."

By **8am** he is looking at the budgets for the Davis Cup in September.

At **8.30** he meets the staff. It's a morale-boosting meeting as the pressures are on in the lead-up to the Championships. But he can safely leave the jobs allocation to deputy head groundsman Mark Sheather, who has been at Wimbledon for 30 years.

Groundstaff devote long professional lives to Wimbledon. It's all part of the team spirit that is clearly evident among the cheerful chaps going about their work around the courts.

Two staff recently retired. One after 42 years and the other 36 years. "We have staff in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s," says Eddie. "Many make this a long-term career and I have a close working relationship with them all. I rely on them and it's a big operation."

"Since I have been able to hand over the day-to-day running to Mark I have been able to concentrate on all the dif-

ferent aspects of this job - the budgeting, the reports, the technical information, the research findings, the meetings, the daily decisions."

At **9am** Eddie meets his line manager Martin Guntrip, the Club Secretary, himself a pretty decent tennis player who was in the members' tournament played on 22 of the grass courts the day before.

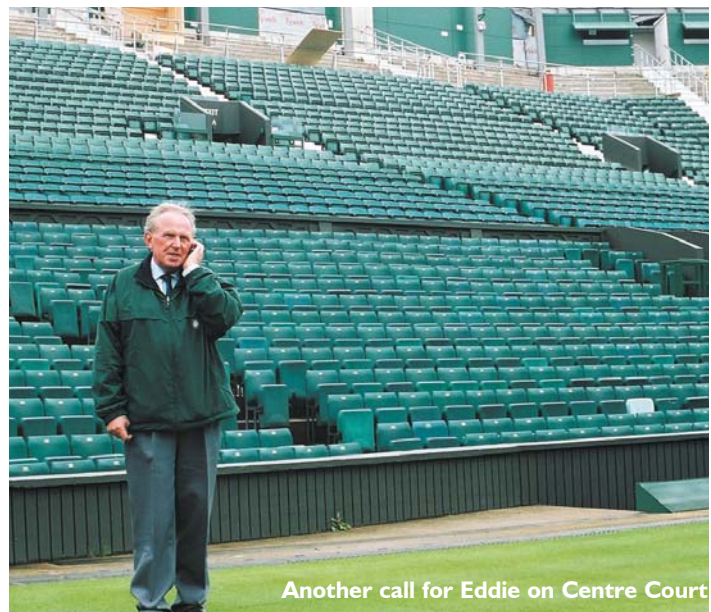
These courts become the practice courts for the professionals during the Championships and Martin gives the player's view, which is a very favourable one.

The meeting lasts just five minutes, but can run to 20.

"It's a daily briefing so we both know what's going on," says Eddie. "Sometimes we meet again during the day to catch up on developments."

As well as the 41 grass courts there are 10 hard courts which become marquee areas during the Championships. Today the base work for the marquees starts.

There are also five indoor surfaces and one European



Another call for Eddie on Centre Court

clay court which is to become an American fast dry surface (part of the development plans).

By **9.30** Eddie is walking some of the courts to check conditions.

"Despite all the scientific instruments and the computerised readings of moisture content and hardness, it's still down to human judgement and experience," says Eddie. "We know when a surface needs treatment by look and feel. There is no substitute for skill and training."

At **10am** Eddie is in a Long Term Plan meeting with project heads and managers.

At **11am** it's time for a coffee and another call comes in about the rain and keeping off the grass. But Eddie, unsurprisingly, has known about the rain five minutes before it arrived.

The Weathercast service had alerted him. Their satellite reports prove invaluable during the Championships when covers have to be made ready.

# WHOLE AERATION

The SISIS AER-AID System injects air directly into the root zone, speeding up the aeration process and delivering the benefits of reduced compaction and healthier growth faster than conventional aerators, with minimal surface disturbance

Send for free DVD



# NOT HOLE AERATION

The SISIS AER-AID moves air uniformly throughout the root zone for complete aeration of the entire area - not just where the tines have penetrated

[www.sisis.com](http://www.sisis.com)

**sisis**  
AER-AID  
SYSTEM

SISIS EQUIPMENT (Macclesfield) LTD., Hurdsfield, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK10 2LZ Phone: 01625 503030 Fax: 427426 Email: [info@sisis.com](mailto:info@sisis.com)

At **12noon** Eddie is examining schedules, staff levels and training plans.

"All the paperwork is done for the Championships," says Eddie. "We are going through all the checks now." Stuart Covers are due in shortly to start running through all the court covers, making sure that air blowers are working and runners are moving smoothly.

At **12.30** Eddie is out on Centre Court again to check the irrigation.

This is the court that will have a sliding roof by 2009 - and construction work is already starting around the top walls.

It's a massive operation. Not only will the roof have to be a flexible membrane but the side panels will be solid to keep spectators cool.

The court will have its own air-conditioning and moisture removal system to cope with people coming in with wet coats.

"The trouble with using the roof is that the environment will change within and we have to have systems in place to deal with that," says Eddie. "The research and development has been intense and testing of light-levels and the effect on the grass has been our major consideration. At all stages those involved in making decisions have realised that the playing surface and the grass is the number one priority."

At **2.30** Eddie is on court 14 for a meeting with Graham Gibbs, Project director for Galliford, Les Denman, court coordinator, and Gary Mayle, Long Term Plan Department project manager for the club.

Good-humoured banter covers the seriousness of their meeting as they decide the strategy for the next few days - areas that will be off limits to staff, machinery that will be on site, what areas might be

affected by disruption and other issues that major site developments bring with them.

More than 100 people work at Wimbledon normally. Contractors add another 500 to that figure. During the championships there will be 6,500 extra people working throughout the complex - handling everything from catering to security.

These include 170 students on duty to pull covers. They are on the site four days before for training from George Spring from Cleanevent who is due to arrive this week from Australia to begin the build-up to the Championships.

"We have had a lot of staff from Australia over the years as part of their training and I can be assured that whenever I go over there one of the old team will be there to me at the airport," says Eddie.

THE phone rings.

It's Steve Welch, the Wembley Stadium grounds manager, thanking Eddie for his good wishes for the Cup Final played two days before.

"When you are in charge of a ground during a big event you need the support of colleagues, and that is what we are - all supporting each other through challenging times," says Eddie.

It is the close-knit team of groundstaff at Wimbledon who will be on duty from dawn to dusk during the Championships.

On a Tournament day Eddie will leave home at 6am and pick up Mark Sheather on the way. The staff will be due in at 8am but most will arrive soon after seven and be out preparing the courts by 7.45am.

The courts will be immaculate and the wear on them will become apparent during the fortnight.

During the first two or three days one box of clip-

plumbers who had been on site all day returned from 50 miles away to fix the leak. "They thought nothing of it and never complained."

And a young groundsman



Eddie on Centre Court with irrigation engineer Rob Austen

pings will come off each court.

By the middle of the Championships only one box of clippings will come off an entire three courts.

Only two types of ryegrass are in the current mixture used on all courts - Aberelf and Aberimp.

The rootzone is a special Surrey Loams mixture of 22 per cent clay with sand and silt making up the rest.

Eddie orders in between five and six hundred tonnes each year and removes 150 tonnes from the courts at Wimbledon.

At **4pm** Eddie drops in for a brief meeting with club secretary Martin Guntrip to appraise him of the day's progress and update him on developments over the next few weeks.

At **4.30** he looks at the schedule over the coming weeks and decides he will have to miss the IOG AGM in Milton Keynes. His last free weekend before the Championships - and he will be working.

"You have to be prepared to be flexible if the job demands it," says Eddie.

"All of the staff have tremendous dedication to the job and will tackle any problem if it comes up - even if it means returning to work in the evening during the Championships."

He recalls a pipe burst 12 years ago at 2am when

abandoned his broken-down vehicle on the side of the A3 and came in by taxi so he would not be late for work during Wimbledon Fortnight.

## Wimbledon FactFile

- Grass courts: 41
- Hard courts: 10
- Indoor courts: 5 (One European clay)
- Groundstaff and mechanics: 21 (7 part-time)
- Groundstaff during Fortnight: 28
- Club employees: 100
- Contractors on site 500
- Employees during Fortnight: 6,500
- Visitors during Fortnight: 480,000
- Mowers: 15 Toro 1000s
- Vital tool: Clegg Hammer (for testing court hardness)
- Grass on courts: Rye mixture of Aberelf and Aberimp
- Rootzone: Surrey Loam mix 22 per cent clay, rest sand and silt.
- STRI present during the Championships for advice.
- Sliding roof to be on Centre Court by 2009.
- Olympics tennis centre for 2012



Centre Court ready for the fray

"In the evening he casually mentioned that he hoped his car would still be there," said Eddie.

At 5pm Eddie decides to have another look at Centre Court to see progress on the construction work.

The sliding roof will not be in place until 2009 but other innovations are ready. The Hawkeye system will monitor line calls using a system of cameras at fixed points.

"There is no arguing with technology," says Eddie. "We have to take advantage of all the new equipment. It's a constant striving to get the best performance out

of everything at our disposal."

At 5.30 Eddie has a brief chat with some of the security staff, waves to a man up a ladder wearing a hard hat and yellow jacket, and decides to call it a day.

And this is only Monday.

Does Eddie have sleepless nights before or during Wimbledon fortnight?

"No I don't. I learned a long time ago that you can drive yourself mad worrying about tiny details. If you do they become big details."

"The planning is done. The staff are in place. We all trust in the great team spirit that exists between us all."



Testing the covers on Court Two

# Wimbledon - The long term plan

THE All England Club's Long Term Plan, unveiled in 1993, set out to enhance Wimbledon's widely acknowledged reputation as the world premier tennis event by substantially improving the whole quality of the Wimbledon experience for all the main audiences - players, spectators, media, officials, members and those who work at the event.

Since then, guided by a blend of tradition and innovation, the Club's grounds and facilities have been transformed, including:

- **1997:** New No. 1 Court, permanent Broadcast Centre, tunnel linking Church Road with Somerset Road and new Courts 18 and 19, the popular Aorangi Terrace and large screen TV.
- **2000:** Millennium Building (new facilities for players, press and photographers, officials, ballboys/girls, Club members and LTA councillors).
- **2001:** Important repairs and improvements to the front of the Centre Court.
- **2002:** Major refurbishment of Clubhouse and Royal Box area.
- **2005:** New boundary wall and hard courts at Southern Apex; resurfacing of Car Parks 2 and 3.
- **2006:** Redevelopment of the turnstile area, together with a new museum, Wimbledon Shop (open 2005), ticket office and the Club's new offices.

And scheduled to include:

- **2009:** Improved Centre Court

## CENTRE COURT OF THE FUTURE

IN January 2004, the Club unveiled the latest chapter in the Long Term Plan with its plans for its jewel in the crown - the Centre Court.

The Centre Court of the future will offer a larger 15,000 capacity, more comfortable seats and a retractable roof over the court (see artist's impression right).

### Retractable Roof on Centre Court

Centre Court will gain a new, modern retractable roof, which will enable all weather play during The Championships and complement the original 1920's stadium.

The roof will provide a first-class, consistent and safe (non-slippery) playing environment in both open and closed positions.

Of translucent construction to allow natural light to reach the grass, the roof will offer protection to the grass under all adverse weather conditions and, with the roof open, will improve growing conditions throughout the year, particularly at the southern end where the benefit of extra light will be achieved.

The roof has been designed to close/open in under 10 minutes and will be closed primarily to protect play from inclement (and, if necessary, extremely hot) weather during The Championships.

Play will be suspended while the roof closes/opens, before being resumed once both the court surface and bowl have attained the optimum condi-

tions for players and spectators. This process will take between 10-30 minutes depending on the prevailing climatic conditions.

### Greater Capacity in Greater Comfort

The Centre Court's capacity will be increased from 13,800 spectators to 15,000 by the addition of six rows of seating to the upper tier on three (east, north and west) sides.

Greater spectator comfort, including ease of access to the court, will be assured through the installation of new, wider seats, as well as extra stairs and lifts.

To allow for the new seating, new media facilities and commentary boxes will be built to replace those currently in the upper tier.

### OUTLINE TIMESCALE

- **2007 Championships:** No roof  
Extra six rows of terracing completed  
Centre Court Debenture facilities relocated
- **July 2007 onwards to include 2008 Championships**  
East Stand building finished and useable for 2008 Championships  
New fixed roof in place  
Centre Court Debenture Rooms reconstructed
- **July 2008 onwards**  
Completion of moving roof trusses  
Erection and completion of moving roof  
Fit fabric covering to sliding roof



- Commissioning and testing of roof and environment of Centre Court
- Hard landscaping, including Tea Lawn
- Construction of new Gatehouses at Gates 4 and 5
- **2009 Championships**  
All works finished and ready

### HOW THE ROOF WORKS

The retractable roof over Wimbledon's Centre Court is a type of 'folding fabric concertina'.

The folding fabric concertina allows the roof to be folded into a highly compressed area when not in use over the court, as well as being translucent enough to provide an 'open' feel when the roof is closed over the court. The fabric is a special waterproof structural material that is very strong, highly flexible and translucent. Approximately 5,200 square metres of fabric will be used.

A key element of the design has been to allow natural light to reach the grass, while an air-flow system removes condensation from within the bowl to provide the optimum internal environment for the comfort of spectators and players when the roof is closed.