THE PUTTING GREEN

THE STIMPMETER - A USER-FRIENDLY KEY TO BETTER GREENS

Harold Swash with John Nelson

This is the fourth in a series of articles in which Harold Swash, Britain's Putting Doctor, engages in dialogue with members of BIGSA on "What golfers want from putting green surfaces." The title of our previous article, "Doing the Simple Things Well - The First lesson from Augusta", was chosen deliberately to show that it is possible to learn from Augusta National, and to counter the view that all we over here can do is sit back and admire the (unattainable) playing conditions we see there.

Of course we must be selective in what we learn and try to apply. But to argue that the so-called 'Augusta image' is inappropriate elsewhere carries the risk of "throwing the baby out with the bathwater", and it would be a tragedy if this applied to the Stimpmeter.

Augusta and the Stimpmeter

So, for starters, let's put the record straight about the link between the Stimpmeter and Augusta. It is true that the Stimpmeter is "Augusta's right arm". Without it Augusta could not have got its lightning - fast greens accepted for the US Masters.

But it was the ability to accurately measure green speed which the Stimpmeter provided for Augusta. Then, of course, it became possible to control and vary green speed. Augusta then elected (quite separately) to create very fast greens - and even then it had to replace its former Bermuda Rye grass and clay sub-soil with a new sand base and a different type of grass - Bent grass (actually Penncrea).

Augusta had the perspicacity to realise that the Stimpmeter could enable them to measure green speed, and that this then made possible controlled variations in that speed. Ever since, the Stimpmeter has been used daily.

Mr Hord Hardin, Chairman of Augusta National GC, told me during the 1989 US Masters that the Stimpmeter had become an invaluable and indispensable tool to them. "It proves", he said, "that my Board Directors knows what it is doing. We no longer need to rely on hunch and guesswork". He went on to add, "One reason why it's so popular with us is because it's so simple. Nothing can go wrong with it."

So, the Stimpmeter has become Augusta's right arm". But Augusta didn't invent it. It didn't start at Augusta although it has come to be associated with Augusta and its lightning fast greens (together with the US Masters and it's Green Jackets).

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