



According to the etiquette section in the USGA Rules of Golf, players are responsible for repairing any damage they make to the green. Photo by Joel Jackson

By Joel Jackson

According to a recent National Golf Foundation survey on the attitudes and expectations of avid golfers, a couple of the top-20 bothersome complaints about course conditioning was the existence of unrepaired ball marks and divots and the condition of teeing areas, which I took to mean more divots and less turf. These complaints had somewhat of a rankling effect on this old retired superintendent, given that ball-mark and divot repairs are the responsibility of the golfers themselves and not the superintendent and his staff. If you don't believe me, look in the USGA's "The Rules of Golf for 2002-2003," Section 1, page 2, Etiquette, the sub-section titled, Care of the Course.

In addition to talking about carefully filling up and smoothing over all holes and footprints made in a bunker, and not damaging greens with flagsticks, shoes, golf bags and putters and following local golf cart traffic regulations and not taking divots during practices swings the section says and I quote,

A player should ensure that any divot hole made by him and any damage to the putting green made by a ball is carefully repaired. On completion of the hole by all players in the group, damage to the putting green caused by golf shoe spikes should be repaired.

The USGA just made one small error. They should have put that section somewhere on page 13 or beyond and attached some stroke penalties to the flagrant violations of these "rules" of etiquette. Maybe people playing golf

would have paid more attention to fixing up these blemishes if they had to add a stroke to their score for each ball mark or divot that went unrepaired. Since the courtesy and etiquette guidelines don't fall under the penal sections, people blow them off and then have the gall to complain about them, and the buck gets passed on to golf course maintenance to spend labor dollars to clean up after the players.

We can discuss the history, traditions, and state of the game and golfer etiquette till the cows or the night water-man comes home, or we can visit with five FGCSA members who talk about how they deal with ball marks and divots at their golf courses, remembering that the buck always eventually stops with maintenance.

Grasslands C.C. Education is Job One



"We provide a ball repair tool and an information card to our golfing guests." - Roy Wilshire, CGCS.

When it comes to ball marks, our number-one focus is always on education. We take extra care to share with outside groups that have special events at the Grasslands C.C. about

the importance of properly repairing ball marks on the greens. We provide a ball-repair tool and an information card to our golfing guests. For our members, we put reminders in our newsletters whenever the problem seems to be getting out of hand. We don't have a formal maintenance routine for ball-mark repairs, since we rely on our members to police themselves.

As far as divots go, I'm pretty proud of how well versed the members are at leaving a level, filled divot and not a pile of sand. We have buckets of green dyed sand on our carts and for our small group of walkers we have small lightweight containers that fit on their pull carts. Overall they do a pretty good job of keeping up the divots and they understand the importance to the appearance and enjoyment of the round for everyone.

Royal Poinciana Club Greens Mowers Do Double Duty



"We just schedule the manpower to get it done." - Matt Taylor, GCS

In our operating plan, ball-mark repairs are a staff responsibility first thing in the morning. Using the ball-mark-repair tool by Standard, our greens

Ball Marks - The Magnitude of the Problem

Editors Note: The following is an article and photo from "Black Diamond Happenings," the club newsletter from the Black Diamond Ranch in Lecanto. Superintendent John Cunningham was frankly amazed by the sheer number of ball marks. It took four or five workers several trips to the range to get enough golf balls to place on the visible ball marks in various stages of recovery or disrepair.



No. 4 Green Quarry Course at Black Diamond Ranch. Each golf ball represents one ball mark. There were approximately 1,200 identifiable marks on this green on Jan. 7. We continually try to fix and sand ball marks during our morning tasks. Topdressing will also help fill some of those blemishes. If you are already fixing ball marks, please make sure your playing partners are also.

"From The Green..."

What actually happens when a ball mark is not properly repaired?

1. Soil is exposed, so the area immediately surrounding the ball dries up faster than it would if the ball marks were repaired and thus a blemish is left on the green.
2. There is also a change that the raised turf caused by the ball will dry quickly and may die out.
3. The open soil invites weed invasion, such as crabgrass or Poa annua.
4. The unrepaired ball mark will leave a "bumpy" spot in the green. When a ball mark is neglected by a golfer it then is scalped the next morning by a mower which remains for many days.

From an agronomic viewpoint, a ball mark bruises the grass plant and severely damages

the growing point of the plant. Turf recovery must then take place from the perimeter of the damaged area, which will take a considerable amount of time.

The correct way to repair a ball mark is to stretch the turf back over the bruised area from the edges. After the mark has been repaired "pat" the area down with your putter. What takes 15 seconds to fix, could take 30 days to heal if not fixed properly.

Proper etiquette demands that each golfer repair his/her own ball marks before walking off the green. The damage caused by unrepaired ball marks is no small matter. Ball marks must be repaired almost immediately in order for them to heal properly.

See you on the course,

John P. Cunningham, GCS

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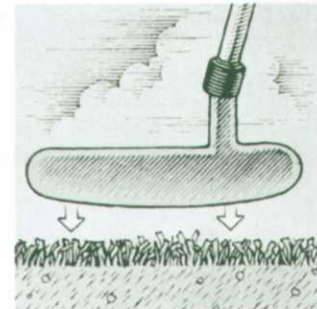
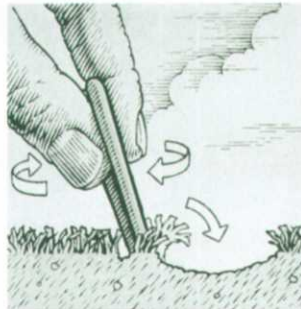
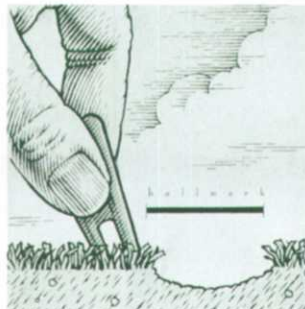
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The Proper Way to Repair a Ball Mark



- 1** Use a prolonged ball mark repair tool (preferably), knife, key or tee.
- 2** Insert at the edges of the mark—not the middle of the depression.
- 3** Bring the edges together with a gentle twisting motion, but don't lift the center. Try not to tear the grass.
- 4** Smooth the surface with a club or foot. You're done when it's a surface that you would putt over.



Source: Golf Course Superintendents Association of America

This high-resolution ball-mark-repair guide can be downloaded from the GCSAA Web site.

mowers walk the greens, repairing ball marks before they mow the greens. We do promote golfer etiquette in the club newsletter, and post notices and put announcements on carts and some golfers do a great job of following through, but others don't. Instead of standing around complaining about ball marks, we just schedule the manpower to get it done. Most members may not be aware that we take the extra time to do this, but we think it's important to make sure the greens are ready to go first thing.

Our course set-up man takes care of filling divots on the course as he moves the tee blocks to the new positions for the day. We have sand buckets available on the Par 3 tees so the golfers can help fill divots on the tee tops. The set-up man also checks and repairs divots on short par-4 holes and the third shot areas on par 5s where short irons are frequently used. These chronic spots can have some unfilled divots, especially when we have lots of play during the season. We double-check par-3 tees on Friday to clean them up as much as possible for the weekend.

We have sand buckets on all the golf carts and sand bottles that fit in special brackets that fit on pull carts for our fairly large number of walking golfers.

WCI Communities' Venetian Golf & River Club

Ball Marks Aren't a Problem



"With no heavy organic layer, the greens aren't marking up." - Mike Miles, GCS

Actually we don't have any real bad ball marks on our new greens. The only thing I can think of is the straight sand construction with only porous

ceramic amendments and no organics. We don't have a soft organic layer to gash like I've seen on former courses. I know there are tradeoffs using straight sand profiles, but with 40 inches of rain this summer, it hasn't been a bad thing.

As far as divots go, we use green sand. We don't put out sand buckets on the par-3 tees. With five sets of tees on every hole, it doesn't make too much sense. The golf carts have sand buckets for golfers to use on fairway divots, and I have to say that they get the majority of them. The rangers also help with divots, which is a big help too. We backfill and topdress tee divots on non-mow days and do the practice tee every other day.

Waterlefe G.C.

No Room on the Practice Tee

"I wish golfers wouldn't use the sod cutter method." - David Williamson, GCS

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We don't have a formal program to deal with ball marks, and quite frankly, in the seven months I've been here, we haven't had a real ball-mark problem in that area. I have seen clubs that have lower numbers of rounds than we do and have more ball marks than we do. I don't know why the difference: age, thatch, construction, golfer awareness? If it does become an issue, the greens mowers would be assigned to repair any ball marks before mowing the greens in the morning.

My chief concern is the divots on the practice tee. Every superintendent will tell you that the practice tee is never big enough to manage the damage from the use and abuse the turf takes. I wish golfers wouldn't use the sod cutter approach to taking divots. They end up leaving a great big hole that can only be repaired by laying in pieces of sod. If they would leave more turf strips between divots, the grass could regenerate and cover faster.

Out on the golf course we have pretty good participation by our members in repairing their fairway divots. We provide a green sand divot mix in the buckets on the golf carts. A couple of areas on short holes take a beating sometimes and we have to react to those areas when the golfers haven't stayed on top of their etiquette. We have a tee and a green set-up person, which has been very effective in providing those extra pair of hands in the morning to get tee div-

ots filled before play hits the course. We don't have sand buckets on the tees. We fill tee divots seven days a week.

Champions Gate G.C.

There's a universal responsibility for all golfers



"I often see a major difference in etiquette between daily-fee golfers and club members." - Bobby Ellis, GCS

As a rule our maintenance staff does not repair ball marks. Player assistants from golf operations like rangers and marshals are encouraged to repair ball marks as they ride the course and they all carry repair tools with them. My stance has always been - there are golf courtesy standards out there and they're pretty straightforward and simple: repair your ball mark, fill your divot and rake out your footprints. That's the universal responsibility for all golfers.

I often see a major difference in etiquette between daily-fee golfers and club members. I think club members will tend to fix their

ball marks more often and remind others to do so as well. Daily-fee players run hot and cold some do and many don't. Whenever we have a high-profile tournament like a mini-tour event or qualifier, those guys clean up those greens and keep that way during the event. I guess that's the caliber of golfer and respect for the playing conditions.

Our guests at Champions Gate are given an introductory spiel that includes a ball-mark repair tool and a card with instructions on how to do it properly. The GCSAA has a pretty good one that I have used before. But you have to be careful with information overload. With scorecards, pin sheets, promotions and menus, before you know it you have more litter on the golf course than useful tools.

We do have a very aggressive routine for maintenance to address divots, especially on our practice tees and the Leadbetter tees at the Golf Academy. We blow or sweep up the divots every day on the practice tees, and we are very strict and disciplined on how and where we move the tee blocks to get good wear rotation on the tees. That schedule is even more critical in winter with heavier play. We topdress the divot strip by hand and smooth out with levelers. Then we fertilize that strip only to help promote recovery. We topdress our par-3 tees on the course every Wednesday. Since we are also on a very aggressive Primo management plan, we mow our tees

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on Mondays and Thursdays on one course and Tuesdays and Fridays on the other, which makes Wednesdays our project day.

We use the green sand, but I have tried other mixes including a charcoal sand mix, but the Pro Shop likes the green color for aesthetics. If you are using green dyed sand, my advice is to use it up fast or keep it dry. The rain and sun will make the dye fade.

San Jose C.C.

Peer Pressure Works on Divots



"We run an article and diagram on ball mark repairs in the club newsletter every year." - Clayton Estes, CGCS

At San Jose the greens mowers are responsible for making sure any unrepaired ball marks are fixed before mowing the greens. They

use either the Standard Golf ball-mark-repair punch tool or the small divot tool that golfers use. We encourage players to follow standard golf courtesy by running a ball mark repair article complete with the GCSAA diagram for the proper way to fix ball marks each year during peak playing season. If the situation gets out of hand we run reminders as needed.

As far as divot repairs go, the staff takes care of the divots on tees and the golfers are responsible for their divots in the fairways. We have a big push by members to police themselves and there's often tremendous peer pressure for everyone to fill their divots. We make an exception during cart-path-only situations, and then we will check and fill fairway divots as needed. Our morning set-up man fills the divots on the tees, including the practice tee, every morning. We have a noise ordinance in effect and so he works by headlight on the range tee moving the hitting stations and filling in the divots before venturing out on to the rest of the course.

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We supply buckets and bottles of sand on the golf carts and in the winter we have a sand refill station out near the 5th and 15th tees. In the summer it is used as a water cooler refill station. We use our regular white-sand greens topdressing as our divot mix.



Tools for repairing ballmarks are simple, free for the asking at most courses, and ubiquitous.



Green sand is one of the most popular mediums for filling divots on the course. Photo by Joel Jackson.