

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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PGA vice president of agronomy Jon Scott and architect Mike DeVries debate whether green speed thrills or kills.

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COUNTERPOINT

Bayer ES to retain Chipco product line

By ANDREW OVERBECK

MONTVALE, N.J. — Bayer ES has reached an agreement with regulatory officials and BASF AG on the divestiture of its key insecticide active ingredient fipronil. The deal includes back-licenses that allow Bayer ES to continue to market fipronil products, including the Chipco Choice line, to the turf and ornamental markets worldwide. BASF, which bought fipronil, will have rights to the active ingredient in the global professional pest control and agricultural markets.

The divestiture of fipronil and other fungicides was required by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and European Commission as part of Bayer CropScience's acquisition Aventis CropScience. The planned divestiture was announced in late October and negotiations between Bayer ES and BASF finally wrapped up after the European Commission approved the deal March 24.

Retaining rights to market the Chipco products in the turf and ornamental market gives Bayer ES a solid insecticide lineup.

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MUNICIPAL GOLF UNDER SIEGE



Sassamon Trace Golf Course in Natick, Mass., is one of several municipal courses nationwide experiencing financial hardship.

By DEREK RICE

NATICK, Mass. — In March, the executive-length Sassamon Trace Golf Course became the focal point of an election for town selectman when a candidate proposed closing or selling the course, which was projected to lose \$300,000 in its fiscal year ending June 30.

While this case took place on a small scale — an executive course in a small town — it illustrates the challenges facing municipalities across the country. In a down economy, towns and cities look to improve their fiscal bottom line. And with course revenues

and rounds played numbers either flat or falling nationwide (see story below), municipal golf courses can be seen as good targets for cutting costs.

"It's the towns, cities and golf courses that lose out," said Pat Berger, business manager for Boston-based Sterling Golf Management, which operates Sassamon Trace.

The town of Natick also considered terminating its agreement with Sterling. The town's finance committee has approved the course's \$400,000 budget, which will carry operations through December, or until the Sterling

contract runs out. At press time, the budget still needed to be approved at an April town meeting.

Beyond December, the course's future is uncertain. Before that time, the town will consider whether to renew the contract

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Rounds dip, revenues flat

By DEREK RICE

JUPITER, Fla. — According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), two out of every three golf facilities in the United States reported a decrease in rounds played in 2002. In addition, the NGF said, revenues at facilities were flat, thus creating a potentially dangerous mix for the golf industry.

The research study, conducted in conjunction with several industry organizations, showed rounds played dropped three percent from 2001 levels. Revenues increased, but only by 0.9 percent, according to the NGF. These numbers came from a January 2003 survey of 2,191 golf

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Editorial Focus: Putting Green Management

Morris' Stimpmeter study reveals optimum speed

By ANDREW OVERBECK

FRANKFORT, Mich. — The Stimpmeter has never been a superintendent's best friend, but here at Crystal Downs Country Club, Mike Morris has changed all that. After an exhaustive two-year study that included Stimping two greens twice a day, collecting weather data, recording cultural practices and surveying members, Morris has determined the optimum green speed for the 1933



Asst. superintendent Don Roth checks out a pin placement.

Alister MacKenzie and Perry Maxwell-designed layout.

"We never had a problem with green speed before," said Morris. "But the issue arose at the club after we had a course come in up the street that had A4 bentgrass greens that were fast as lightening. All of a sudden it became a problem.

"The greens committee wanted to know two things: What is the most appropriate green speed for our golf course, and what is

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Morris determines optimum green speed for Crystal Downs CC

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the range of green speed that we can maintain consistently," he continued.

Morris turned to Michigan State University turfgrass research specialist Thom Nikolai to find answers to these questions.

"He asked me if you could have the same speed every day

throughout the year," said Nikolai. "I told him the easy answer is 'No way.' But a better answer is 'Let's find out.' So we started this study."

In addition to recording weather data, Morris took Stimp-meter readings at two different greens twice a day for two years to determine the actual

green speed.

"We measured speed and what inputs impacted speed and tried to get a range," said Morris. "But the way we determined the appropriate range was by doing a golfer survey. For two years we surveyed 20 golfers who play regularly and who represent a cross-section of skill levels."

The blind survey asked golfers whether they thought the greens were too fast, fast but okay, okay, okay but too slow, or too slow. Looking at the survey results side-by-side with the actual Stimp-meter readings



Morris collected two years' worth of Stimp-meter data.

allowed Morris and Nikolai to compare perceptions with reality.

"When we compared the survey with the actual green speed, we found that when our greens were between 9.5 and 10.5, 80 percent of the golfers were answering fast but okay or okay. This is what we were shooting for," said Morris. "When we went to 10.5 to 11.5 we got 20 percent saying it was too fast, so there is an upper limit."

Morris found that it was possible to maintain the range between 9.5 and 10.5 on his bent/Poa annua greens throughout the year.

"We do everything we can to hit the target range," he said. "We have gone to every other day rolling and spoon-feeding fertilizer to eliminate the ups and downs caused by fertilizer."

With the comparison results in hand and maintenance regime finalized, both Morris and his greens committee feel they have found the optimum green speed range for the course that can be maintained consistently and make the members happy consistently. This has solved numerous problems.

"There is now an optimum speed that can be managed and maintained," said Morris. "In the past we would speed up the greens for the member-guest and then go back to our routine maintenance and that's when the complaints came. So we have developed a policy that this is the green speed for our course and we don't speed them up for events. These are the speeds that the members have chosen to play, so we have taken that issue out of the equation."

In the process, Morris has eliminated complaints from members.

"This process worked because we involved them," he said. "It has been great and everyone is buying into it."

Nikolai would like to see more courses follow Morris' lead.

"He has taken control of green speed from his membership because he uses the Stimp-meter and they know he uses the Stimp-meter," he said. "Now they have an understanding that Mike has this under control. I want to see more superintendents do this." ■

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