

## A Quiet Walk

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Familiarity is also important, Hiers stresses. "If you have an outstanding mechanic and he's familiar with a particular brand, you might go with that brand to overcome the lack of service," he adds.

Superintendents should also listen to what their peers are saying about the

brands. Of course, they need to consider their individual needs. "You buy the mower that does the best job on your greens, that your people can handle the best, and that you can keep in the best operating condition," Hiers adds. ■

*Blais is a free-lance writer from North Yarmouth, Maine.*



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## Double-cutting Greens Could Add Up to Double Trouble

**By Peter Blais**

**T**he week of June 10 through June 16 will be quite a test for the greens on the Black Course at Bethpage State Park in Farmingdale, N.Y., site of this year's U.S. Open. Not only will superintendent Craig Currier and his crew be double-cutting the greens at 90-degree angles, they'll be cutting them at least twice a day during the tournament and keeping the speeds at a minimum of 12 on the Stimpmeter.

"We'll cut as often as we have to in order to get there," Currier says. "We could be cutting four times a day."

This might be extreme and, certainly, out of the ordinary, but it's America's championship, after all. However, in their quest for ever-faster green speeds to please members, owners and customers, superintendents are walking an ever-narrowing edge between fast greens and healthy turf.

"We are seeing more pressure for green speed in general," says Darin Bavard, an agronomist for the USGA Green Section's Turfgrass Advisory Service in West Chester, Pa. "It stems from a lot of things. Golfers watching the Masters and PGA Tour on television week after week apply the main pressure. Fast greens are a nice calling card for a club."

Double-cutting, which is usually done during tournaments and special events, is one way to add speed and smoothness to a green, Bavard says. The obvious problems are that it puts additional stress on the grass and requires more labor to complete.

The greatest stress is placed on the turf during the warmest summer months, particularly on cool-season grasses.

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"The turf isn't growing fast and it almost gets to the point that mechanical wear on the grass is enough to kill it," Bavard says. "On poa/bentgrass greens, anthracnose can be excited by double-cutting. Then you add [golfer] traffic, and it has a compounding effect."

Double-cutting after a rain storm, when

the greens are soft, can increase mechanical damage and may cause scalping, Bavard notes.

"Superintendents have lost their jobs because they've pushed green speeds," he says. "Double-cutting greens can be part of that."

More and more superintendents are using rollers to increase green speed.

Solid rollers put less stress on the grass than grooved rollers, Bavard says.

"Instead of simply double-cutting, you can single cut and roll," Bavard says. "You get the same effect without clipping the grass twice. You have to pick your spots and do it when the grass will tolerate it. That's weather dependent. If you get 100-degree temperatures, then you're playing with fire."

Bavard says you can get away with more in the spring and fall, but "you're teetering on the brink in the summer, especially if you don't have modern sand-based greens and one of the older turf varieties."

"If you've got one of the new A-4, G-2 or L-93 bentgrasses, double-cutting becomes less of a concern," Bavard says. "They are more tolerant of lower cutting heights. But if you have old Penncross and poa greens on soil-based, push-up greens, that's more difficult"

If golfers persist in their demands for double-cut greens when conditions aren't appropriate, superintendents need to educate them about the possible consequences.

"That educational process sometimes gets them to back off from double-cutting, at least in July and August," Bavard says. "It's a narrow line to walk. Superintendents don't just say, 'I don't want the greens to be fast.' If they could get away with giving golfers green speeds of 11 every day, with no consequences, they would be more than happy to do it. But there are consequences."

If golfers want faster greens at an older course with older turf types, then converting the greens to one of the newer grasses should be mentioned as an option. "Ask who you are being compared to if golfers want greens like they've seen someplace else," Bavard says. "They may say course A is faster than course B. But course A may have been built just two years ago, have a higher budget and be planted with new grasses on new greens. Those things make a difference." ■

*Blais is a free-lance writer from North Yarmouth, Maine.*

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