The Perils of Playing on Freeze-Dried Greens
By Joe Gambatese

Golfers anxious to loosen up their winter-rusted swing were delighted this week when the temperatures rose into the 50's and 60's. But not the golf course superintendent. He was in a tough spot and deserved sympathy and understanding rather than being the target of criticism.

Its the superintendent's job to keep golfers happy by providing greens that are in good condition during the playing season. Naturally, he wants to keep them from being damaged during the winter. There is no problem in cold weather; walking on frozen greens by a few golfers causes little damage. But when the surface thaws and the turf underneath remains frozen, as happened this week, watch out.

"When frozen greens get mushy, walking on them does more than create bumps," says Dr. Fred V. Grau of the Musser International Turfgrass Foundation, former director of the USGA Green Section. "It disrupts the root system, which can't be repaired until spring."

Woodmont's superintendent, Bob Shields, national president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association in 1965, feels that surface damage - the footprints - are not a big problem.

"We can fix footprints," he explains. "But we can't fix the grass roots which die because walking on thawed greens breaks the stems from the roots that are frozen in the ground." Bill Black has warned his Congressional members of the compaction that results from walking on a frozen green whose surface has thawed.

"Fertilization becomes less efficient, water cannot penetrate properly, and the green will no longer support a quality bent-grass much less a well-hit golf shot," he wrote in the club's newsletter.

At Columbia, George Thompson builds good temporary greens in the fall, top-dress- ing and seeding them with rye grass so that the members will more readily accept them when their use becomes necessary.

"We shouldn't let a few winter golfers spoil the greens for the greater number of members who want to enjoy good greens in the spring," he contends.

"Temporary greens stink," exclaims Marty McHugh. "I don't mind them," says Jack Weber, with support from Perry Lippitt. "If I can't play the regular greens," says Fred Parson, "I don't play at all."

The final word, of course, belongs to Kenwood superintendent John Henley and Kenwood's member, John Conover.

His solution - putting temporary greens - has worked as long as the members of the compaction that results from walking on a frozen green whose surface has thawed.

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