

New Mowing Patterns Improve Playing Conditions

Rolling Rock Club
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Issue

The weakest turf on fairways is often found in the transition zone between the fairway and approach. This is a result of fairway and approach mowers turning in the same area. On northern courses, *Poa annua* and perennial ryegrass often dominate this high-traffic area because they are more tolerant of wear than creeping bentgrass. Unfortunately, *Poa annua* and perennial ryegrass are more vulnerable to stress and turfgrass diseases than bentgrass. *Poa annua* and perennial ryegrass also can create a bumpy, uneven surface because they have different growth rates throughout the season. Traffic-related turf issues were common in the transitions between fairways and approaches at Rolling Rock Club, causing playability and aesthetics to suffer.

Action

The solution to this problem was altering mowing patterns to spread the traffic over a larger area. Two different mowing lines were created between the fairway and approach. They were spaced a comfortable distance apart and marked with colored disks at the edge of the fairway to indicate where the approach and fairway mowers should stop and start. White and yellow discs were used to distinguish the different boundaries and provide good visibility for the mower operators. Every two weeks, the fairway and approach mowers would alter which set of disks they mowed to, effectively moving the line between the approach and fairway and dispersing traffic.

Results

Dispersing mower traffic in the transition zone between fairways and approaches improved turf quality within the first month. Over time, bentgrass populations in these areas increased significantly as a result of the reduced maintenance traffic. The playing surfaces are smoother, turf is healthier and golfers have noticed the improved playability. It is no longer necessary to regularly repair damaged approach areas with plugs or sod.

This system has also helped reduce confusion between the staff mowing fairways and approaches. Their responsibilities are now very clear and there

has been a reduction in mowing errors as a result. The biggest challenge has been keeping the mower operators organized so that they know which colored disc they should mow to on a given week. Some extra communication is necessary to keep everyone on the same page, but overall this program was implemented with minimal expense and no additional labor.



Using colored disks to create alternate lines between fairway and approach mowing has helped disperse mower traffic and improve turf conditions.