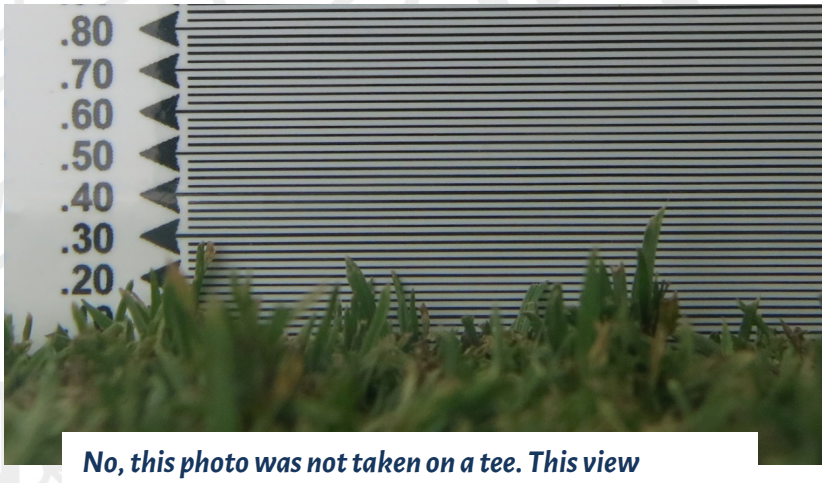
Do Your Greens Need a Haircut?

By Brian Whitlark, agronomist, West Region

June 16, 2015

Some retailers have apps available to minimize the wait when you need a haircut. However, the technology to cut hair remains very simple; scissors, water and a pair of skilled hands. Notice that the stylist stands up your hair with their fingers in order to achieve a good-quality cut. A good-quality cut on putting greens requires the same principle. Regardless of the turf species, standing up the blades of grass with either out-front or gear-driven brushes is an important practice. Without brushing, the blades of grass tend to grow horizontally and lie flat along the surface of greens. Consequently, horizontal blades of grass shade underlying turf, negatively influencing growth, especially on bermudagrass greens. Furthermore, in this agronomist's experience, it may be more difficult to achieve a target green speed on greens displaying a high population of horizontal blades, and greens with significant horizontal growth may lose more speed throughout the day when compared to greens with more upright growth. Utilizing grooming blades and vertical mowing also is important to encourage upright growth, but they affect a smaller surface area when compared to brushes. Moreover, grooming blades or vertical mowers have greater potential for scalping and turf damage than brushes.



No, this photo was not taken on a tee. This view through a prism gauge was captured on a creeping bentgrass green in need of brushing.

The attached image shows a prism-gauge view of a creeping bentgrass green in need of brushing. The green was mowed closely – i.e., 0.115 inch bench height of cut – and had been double-mowed for several consecutive days prior to capturing this photo. Despite mowing efforts, running your hand across the surface to stand up the leaf blades clearly shows the bentgrass blades are closer to 0.25 inch or longer. The target green speed was difficult to achieve – i.e., required daily double mowing in the morning and rolling – and the greens on average lost approximately 12 inches of speed by the afternoon, as measured by the USGA Stimpmeter® .

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Information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service

Contact the Green Section Staff