



## March Madness Is Here

By Chris Hartwiger, director, Course Consulting Service

**March 15, 2016**

While millions of basketball fans are busy filling out their brackets, golf course superintendents are preparing for the madness that marks the beginning of the growing season. Golfer enthusiasm builds quickly after a few 70-degree days, but playing conditions may need some time to catch up. Most warm-season turf grasses are just starting to emerge from winter dormancy and this transition period can generate a lot of questions about course conditions. To kick-off golf's version of March madness, here are answers to several of the most common questions received each spring:



*During spring, turf management teams shift their focus from winter tasks to managing actively growing turf.*

Why isn't there grass on our fairways?

In the transition zone, turfgrass growth on fairways slows and eventually stops in late fall.

However, golf continues throughout the winter, along with the use of carts on fairways.

Turfgrass that is not growing does not have the ability to recover from traffic

damage. Eventually, fairways that receive heavy traffic become beaten down, leaving the appearance of no grass. With a little patience and warm weather, superintendents will be able to manage fairways back to expected standards.

Our creeping bentgrass putting greens are beautiful. Why do we have to aerate them now?

Spring is a great time for bentgrass growth and playing quality. It also is an ideal time to aerate bentgrass greens because the healing time is kept to a minimum.

Core aeration may not be appreciated by golfers in the short term, but it is an important preventative maintenance practice. Failure to adequately aerate creeping bentgrass greens increases the risk of serious turfgrass and playing quality issues in the future.

Our ultradwarf putting greens were fast all winter and now they are slow. Why?

It is important to remember ultradwarf bermudagrasses are warm-season grasses that do not grow much during winter months. This period of slow growth can translate to fast winter green speeds. However, there inevitably comes a time during spring when bermudagrass greens emerge from dormancy, often causing a flush of growth that causes slower green speeds. March is not the ideal time to begin implementing surface management practices like vertical mowing, frequent topdressing or lower mowing heights. Overly managing ultradwarf putting greens before the end of cold weather is a formula for stressed turf when warm temperatures eventually arrive.

For more information on the [USGA Course Consulting Service](#), please visit the [Course Care](#) section of USGA.org.

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