

Eight Reasons Why Putting Greens Play Differently In The Afternoon

By Brian Whitlark, agronomist, West Region | April 21, 2017



A putting green with a mixed stand of creeping bentgrass and Poa annua may not putt as smoothly in the afternoon as it did in the early morning.

Like all outdoor sports, golf contains inherent variability. For example, some putting greens play differently in the afternoon than they do in the morning. Here are eight reasons why golfers may notice some changes in putting green playing conditions over the course of a day:

1. Greens can become firmer.

Low humidity, hot temperatures, sunshine and wind can make greens firmer as the day progresses. This could make it more challenging to control shots into a green. Also, although not always the case, golfers often perceive firmer greens to be faster.

2. Green speed can become slower.

Golfers can expect greens to be slower in the afternoon than they were in the morning. Thousands of [USGA Stimpmeter](#)® measurements have indicated that in most cases green

speed will slow throughout the day regardless of the weather. Turfgrass growth, golfer traffic, ball marks, thatch and organic matter rebounding after morning mowing and rolling, and increased humidity are common factors that could cause slower afternoon green speeds.

3. Traffic makes greens bumpier.

Although *Poa annua* is often blamed for reduced putting green performance throughout the day, the biggest culprits are usually golfer foot traffic and improperly repaired ball marks. Golfers are encouraged to [properly repair ball marks](#) – even those that aren't their own – and tap down spike marks from their golf shoes.

4. *Poa annua* can affect smoothness.

Poa annua can negatively influence putting green smoothness when there is a mixed stand of *Poa annua* and another grass. If 40 percent of a bentgrass putting green is comprised of *Poa annua* it may play differently in the afternoon due to the different growth rates of the grasses. Furthermore, *Poa annua* seedhead production in the spring can create bumpy playing conditions. Golf course superintendents use a variety of techniques to [manage issues associated with *Poa annua*](#).

5. Soft conditions are prone to severe footprints and ball marks.

Greens that are soft underfoot are very likely to play differently in the afternoon because of normal golfer traffic. Soft greens are also prone to deep ball marks that impair smoothness. Soft conditions often are caused by excessive organic matter accumulation, rainfall, heavy irrigation or some combination of these and other factors. [Managing organic matter](#) will help produce firmer, smoother greens.

6. Bunker sand can impede ball roll.

Sand that has been splashed onto a putting green by bunker shots or tracked onto a putting green by other golfers may disrupt ball roll. Golfers are encouraged to clean their shoes upon exiting a bunker. Following good [putting green etiquette](#) will help maintain quality playing conditions throughout the day.

7. Extreme environmental conditions can affect putting greens.

Extreme cold, heat, rain, hail and wind may negatively influence putting green playing conditions over the course of a day.

8. Necessary agronomic practices can disrupt putting greens.

Agronomic practices such as vertical mowing, [sand topdressing](#) and [core aeration](#) will ultimately produce smoother greens. However, these practices may create some short-term disruption to putting surfaces. Should you find yourself playing a round following such practices, rest assured that you can still make putts. Tom Watson once shot an astounding 58 at Kansas City Country Club just days after aeration.

The bottom line is that golf is an outdoor game with inherent variability. Golfers are encouraged to embrace that variability as part of the game's challenge and remember the wise words of the late Payne Stewart: "A bad attitude is worse than a bad swing."

For more information on putting green performance, please contact the [USGA Green Section](#).

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