

PLAYERKILL on Frosty Greens

TO PLAY OR NOT TO PLAY . . . WHOSE DECISION?

By PAUL M. ALEXANDER, Ph.D. GCSAA Director of Education

Like a slap in the face, the sign on No. 1 tee coldly states, "Golf Course Closed Because of Frost."

The overworked, harassed green chairman sighs resignedly and says, "Boy! How will I explain *this* to the Saturday morning boys?"

He turns and enters the pro shop. Before getting half way through, the golf professional halts him with a half-hearted, "Good morning, Mr _____".

After a pause, he asks, "Say, do you think we can get the superintendent to reconsider and open the course? We've already had to close four Saturdays this year because of rain and this sure bites into my sales."

Shaking his head, the green chairman heads for the locker room again, only to be stopped once more. The first four-some of the "Saturday morning dew-busters" group has recently arrived and they look pretty steamed up!

"Why on earth should the superintendent close the course because of a little frost. I pay dues all year 'round and I resent coming here and being told that I can't play . . . besides, Saturday morning is the only time I can get out for golf."

"Look, there are only four of us and we certainly can't cause any damage. How about letting us tee it up?"

Unaware of turf threat

Does all of this sound too familiar? It certainly should — particularly for those courses located in areas where fall and spring frosts are common occurrences. And it is only natural for people to react in this manner. Why shouldn't they? Their reactions stem from the fact that they, unlike the superintendent, do not know *why* traffic on frosted turf (especially greens) presents a threat to the continued health, vigour and playability of that turf.

Expose them to facts

This is not to say that we should try to make every green chairman, golf professional, club manager or golfer an expert agronomist. Far from it. On the

other hand, it actually behooves us to make sure that they are exposed to certain facts about "playerkill" . . . which is the net result of permitting play on frosted or frozen turf.

An example of how frost can affect major tournaments took place recently during the Del E. Webb Pro-Am in Nevada. An early morning frost delayed the starting of the field, resulting in selection of the winning team on the basis of 27 holes instead of two full rounds.

The total number of foot imprints is not the basic reason for closing a course (although this is certainly a consideration); rather, the superintendent is concerned about the damage done to the individual leaf blades within each imprint. If conditions are such that individual cells within the leaves contain ice crystals, it is almost certain that these cells will be ruptured when trod upon. When enough cells are ruptured, the leaf blade will die or, at best, be severely injured.

Playerkill is reflected in a slight depression of the turf which produces the much-hated "bouncing ball" type of putt. Worse yet, it becomes practically impossible to maintain a true-line putt—regardless of how well the ball is stroked. These are just two of the *short-term* undesirable effects of playerkill on frosted or frozen turf.

Long-term effects

More serious—and of importance to all persons interested in the golf course—are the long-term effects of playerkill; those which persist until weather conditions are such that vigorous turf growth resumes, and the damage heals over. A few words of caution are really necessary at this point—these long-term effects can occur just as easily on overseeded bermudagrass greens as they can on bentgrass greens.

Temperature requirements

To the superintendent, the reasons are obvious; if playerkill occurs relatively

late in the growing season when soil temperatures are low, the chances of re-seeding or renovation procedures being successful will be very poor. True, the grasses used for overseeding (or re-seeding) purposes are of the "cool season" types, but they, like all living organisms, have definite temperature requirements which must be met in order for them to germinate, grow and mature.

Playerkill is not to be taken lightly by any green chairman, golf professional, club manager or golf course superintendent. Without true putting surfaces and near-flawless turf that all golfers seem to demand, the over-all operation of the golf club is bound to suffer.

Poor turf results

Simply stated, poor quality turf results in fewer players, which, in turn, leads to lower sales potential for the golf professional, reduced food and beverage sales in the clubhouse and increased headaches for the green chairman.

The need for closing a frosted or frozen course boils down to a clear understanding of all factors involved. Once these factors are placed in the proper perspective it becomes obvious that the superintendent, with his agronomic knowledge and expertise, is the one club representative who should bear the responsibility and authority for such a decision.

Notify club representatives

In addition, it should also be the superintendent's responsibility to ensure that other club representatives are notified immediately as to his decision so that the golfing membership can be informed. Finally, the superintendent must watch the course conditions very carefully so that he can reopen the course as soon as weather conditions permit.

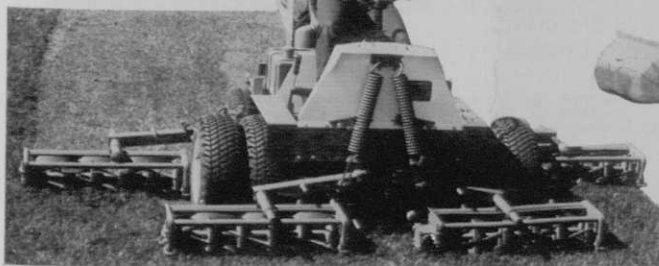
How about it? Is the price paid for one round of golf on frosted or frozen greens worth all the potential trouble mentioned above?

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