



Green Surrounds



Raising The Standard

Stuart Ormondroyd, STRI Head of Turfgrass Agronomy & Assistant Director, offers some advice on improving your green surrounds



on how each hole should be played and there is certainly no hard and fast rule. A lack of any collar and apron at all, or a higher height of cut than would normally be the case on green surrounds, can generally be associated with limited resources or high wear, ie. basically as a means of protection. However, for playing quality reasons the trend is now more towards golf balls trickling off the putting surface to be taken down into a bunker, swale or semi-rough/rough rather than sticking on the edge. Therefore, increased maintenance is needed to develop a tighter sward that will also withstand drought and wear.

Slow down!

Surround contours should allow turning for triple mowers, ie. turning off the putting surface, and tight contouring of the green outline should be avoided. Even with smooth contours, the writer often sees scuffing and wear on immediate surround where triple mower operators have turned too fast and sharply at the end of a run. Here the general message is to slow down and take care. A switch to hand mowing can also make a big difference in terms of perimeter wear both on and off the green, particularly in the winter.

Drainage is everything

It is surprisingly common to see a putting surface built to a high standard yet the immediate surround still has the indigenous heavy clay soil. Poor drainage inevitably leads to problems with a reduction in playing quality and a change to weed or coarse grasses. Therefore, any initial construction of a new green and surround should involve soil improvements and contours to shed water more effectively both on and off the putting surface. Pipe drainage should be introduced as required, including catchwater intercept drains as needed. Add to this tree management where there is a shading issue.

Coarse grass

In terms of consistency and uniformity, coarse grass contamination in green surrounds is a big issue on all types of golf course. This can sometimes be traced back to 1960s when wear started to increase and when trade representatives often recommended perennial ryegrass as the new hard wearing grass to solve all wear issues. The result is now coarse, clumpy perennial

Playing quality and definition

For all components of green surround, the key playing quality requirements are a firm, consistent surface with a dense fine grass blemish-free sward.

Green surrounds are normally defined as areas with an intermediary height of cut between putting surface and fairway. Immediate surround usually comprises a collar encircling the putting surface of, say, one to two passes with a cylinder mower (clippings removed). At the front of the green the collar is increased in size to form an apron or foregreen.

Features such as mounds, banks, bunkers and traffic routes would fall under the classification of general surround.

Some 20 years ago green surrounds were often found to be neglected. There is nothing more frustrating for the golfer to play a pitch and run shot and either have it plug into the apron when it is expected to run on, or be deflected by a clump of daisies! However, in recent years maintenance has increased to the point where we are carrying out virtually the same programme on surrounds as putting surfaces, save for a height of cut difference for immediate surround and a reduced frequency treatment for general surround.

A good quality collar and apron will also define a green and enhance general presentation as well as potentially lessening the chance of poor etiquette through a golfer taking the shortest route with a trolley between the putting surface and bunker.

Increasing the size of a green

Despite the improving standard of green surrounds, issues still arise. An example would be increasing the size of a green into immediate surround, usually for additional pin position reasons. In contrast, as a result of mowing practices changing over the years the surround area can increase at the expense of green size.

If enlarging a green is contemplated, the big mistake is rapidly to reduce the height of cut in May as this will inevitably lead to scalping and potentially bare areas, often necessitating autumn re-turfing. Planning is the key here, bringing down the height of cut gradually from the winter level in half millimetre increments (two cuts between a reduction) using a hand mower. This should allow for a smooth transition without problems.

Design and drainage

As with all design, getting it right at the beginning helps maintenance thereafter and, of course, ultimately playing quality. Certainly, smooth undulating contours will allow for mowing with triple mowers and should accommodate traffic route flow and aftercare maintenance. Unfortunately, the end result can often be just the architect's vision of the golfing aspect of the hole and the visual impact only. Sharp contours will inevitably lead to scalping and having to resort to strimming/use of a Flymo and the extra time this involves.

In terms of cutting height and width of banding, this will depend

ABOVE: Ryegrass contamination affecting playing quality and presentation.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: Scalping: the result of mowing out green into surround too quickly and too late.



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ABOVE: The difference irrigation and wetting agent can make to an apron/immediate approach.

ryegrass contrasting sharply with annual meadow-grass that now contaminates many immediate surround and walk-off areas yet, interestingly, the greens and fairways are invariably ryegrass free.

Verticutting can keep the coarse grass fined down, but eradication up until now involves plugging, patching or whole scale re-turfing and even then with limited success. Over the last two months a new herbicide called Rescue© has come onto the market with the purpose of eradicating ryegrass and leaving the other grasses intact. The initial results are very positive with an autumn treatment followed by oversowing with finer grasses.

Surface blemishes

The changing weather pattern as well as a reduction in chemical availability and period of effectiveness, means that surface blemishes such as weeds, moss and disease are an issue on green surrounds. Such blemishes are also a source of infection for the greens as well as affecting playing quality just off the putting surface. Cultural and chemical controls where required are therefore important. Interestingly, one very common problem, particularly on parkland courses, is to see disease-free greens yet with major fusarium outbreaks on the immediate surround. This is often the result of relaxing mowing heights and frequency too early in the autumn and confining brushing/switching to putting surfaces only. In this day and age we should never go by the calendar but on the prevailing conditions. So, keep to a

summer type mowing regime until we see signs of the first frost, ie. well into the autumn, so that you reduce the risk of fusarium outbreaks in collars and aprons. Applications of iron and brushing/switching in particular should always include green surrounds as well as the putting surface.

Irrigation

Irrigation has not been a major topic of conversation over the last three years but even this season the writer did see drought-stressed aprons and approaches. In these areas, try and extend treatments given to putting surfaces and collars as it is the routine work such as top dressing, aeration and a light feed that makes the difference between good and bad playing quality. In addition, ensure you include these areas in a wetting agent programme and always check irrigation coverage. Indeed, the irrigation system may need updating to include immediate approach or green pop-up heads adjusting to include surrounds.

Walk-on/walk-off areas

Many articles have been written on combating traffic route wear but the essential aspects revolve around improving soil conditions, employing mature wear resistant turf, carrying out renovation work early, ie. before Christmas, and building in an aftercare maintenance programme. In addition spreading wear through traffic control and re-contouring will be essential.

However, in certain situations where traffic routes become muddy in winter yet there is still significant grass cover, it is surprising how effective an application of medium-coarse sand followed by Verti-Draining can be. As well as stabilising the surface to walk on and improving immediate drainage for the future, this technique can also have a positive irritant effect against worms and hence worm casting. Needless to say, carry out the work early in the autumn before deterioration is noted.

In summary

All aspects of green surrounds are critical to a variety of golf shots to and around the putting surface. It is true there has been an improvement in maintenance and general condition over recent years, with also a knock-on effect in terms of presentation and definition.

Nevertheless, there are still issues arising relating to old chestnuts such as weeds and drainage. However, there are new topics that do require addressing such as fusarium in collars in the autumn and ryegrass control using the new herbicide.

The article is designed to address old and new issues so that the best end result is gained and potential problems avoided.

Whilst a great deal of attention is lavished on putting surfaces, and quite rightly so, perhaps now is a good time to look afresh at the various elements that comprise green surrounds.

After all, they are the critical link between green and fairway.

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