

“The best thing since sliced bread” ... or “Let the buyer beware?”

by Glenn Lachapelle

Credit: “The Newsletter” 12/92

There are “hot” products, and then there are “hot” products. Ever since their introduction to superintendents in February at the GCSAA conference and show in New Orleans, greens rollers haven’t suffered from a lack of attention.

In addition to their exposure within the industry, the golfing public was treated to a “rolling” commentary by CBS’ Gary McCord as he zipped across a green at this year’s PGA Tour stop at Doral.

Marketed under names as Greensgroom, GreensIron, and Tri-Roller, greens roller manufacturers make claims of increased consistency, speed, and possible decreases in mowing frequency with regular use. Raising height of cut without losing green speed is another touted benefit. Too good to be true? The jury is still out and opinions are still coming in as New England’s first season with, or without, this new wave of machines winds down.

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“The people who own rollers are the testing ground,” said Jim Connolly, USGA Agronomist for the northeast. “There is no USGA-sanctioned testing at this time on rollers. They are very difficult to test because of the many variables involved.”

From the “testing grounds”, five area superintendents shared their thoughts on greens rolling in phone interviews. Three had purchased the machines and used them this season and the remaining two had tested them and decided against purchasing a roller. All are using, or had tested, self-contained machines as opposed to add-on roller units.

Jim Diorio of Purpoodock C.C., Portland, Maine, began using a roller in mid-July on a once-a-week basis after mowing. Diorio soon switched to a twice-a-week schedule, electing to skip mowing on a day he previously did not mow, effectively saving one day of mowing.

“The consistency is better and the roll is smoother,” said Diorio. “I toyed with the idea of raising the height of cut, but I left it alone. I’m happy with it as is.”

Before purchasing the roller, Diorio presented the concept to his greens committee and arranged a demonstration for his greens chairman and club president. To date, all is well.

“The reaction from members has been very positive,” said Diorio. “We haven’t had any negative comments. I’m really satisfied with the equipment.”

Further south on Cape Cod, Hyannisport’s Charlie Passios and New Seabury’s Tom Colombo both began rolling programs this season.

“My greens were lower height-wise than I’d like to have them” said Passios. “I’ve been able to raise the height and not lose any speed. The effect has been more trueness and the maintenance of speed throughout the entire course.”

(continued on page 26)

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Passios has also used a twice-a-week program, but had not cut down on his frequency of mowing. He curtailed rolling in late October.

Colombo has also been able to experiment with increasing his cutting height, and, like Passios, has seen speed can remain constant. Consistency has also increased, according to Colombo.

"I've had nothing but favorable comments from golfers," said Colombo. "We have slower growth on some of our ocean-side greens and the rolling has made for more consistency from green to green.

"I'll be curious to see what happens with it next spring," said Colombo, who began his program in mid-June. "We usually have complaints about bumpiness in the spring."

Although both Passios and Colombo had trouble-free seasons with their new rollers, each voiced caution.

"It's just one of many tools in the entire maintenance concept," said Passios. "It's not going to solve people's problems."

"It's just one of many tools in the entire maintenance concept," said Passios. "It's not going to solve people's problems.

"Anyone who goes for rolling must ask themselves why they are doing it," he said. "If it's just for speed, maybe it's better not getting involved."

"I don't know what the long-term effects will be," said Colombo. "For half a season it's been great. I hope it has its place in the industry."

Electing not to embark on a rolling program this season were Bill Spence of The Country Club, and Mark Gagne of Walpole C.C. Each took a different route in arriving at this decision.

With Spence the practice ran opposite to his personal leanings against creating conditions that run contrary to turf health and attempt to copy what he termed the new "baseline" for golf course grooming — that being the conditions seen on televised professional golf events.

Gagne, on the other hand, had an experience that those inclined not to roll their greens may openly or secretly wish they had — his membership didn't like the harder, faster greens the rollers produced.

"The membership just did not like it at all," said Gagne. "They felt that the roller compacted the greens and made them harder and increased spiking. It became quite an emotional issue."

The complaints, according to Gagne, seemed to center mainly around one particular machine he tested and all came from the higher handicap members. Although more favorable results came with another roller Gagne tested, the members mindset against rolling was established and Gagne's idea of maintaining green speed while raising height of cut through rolling was put on hold.

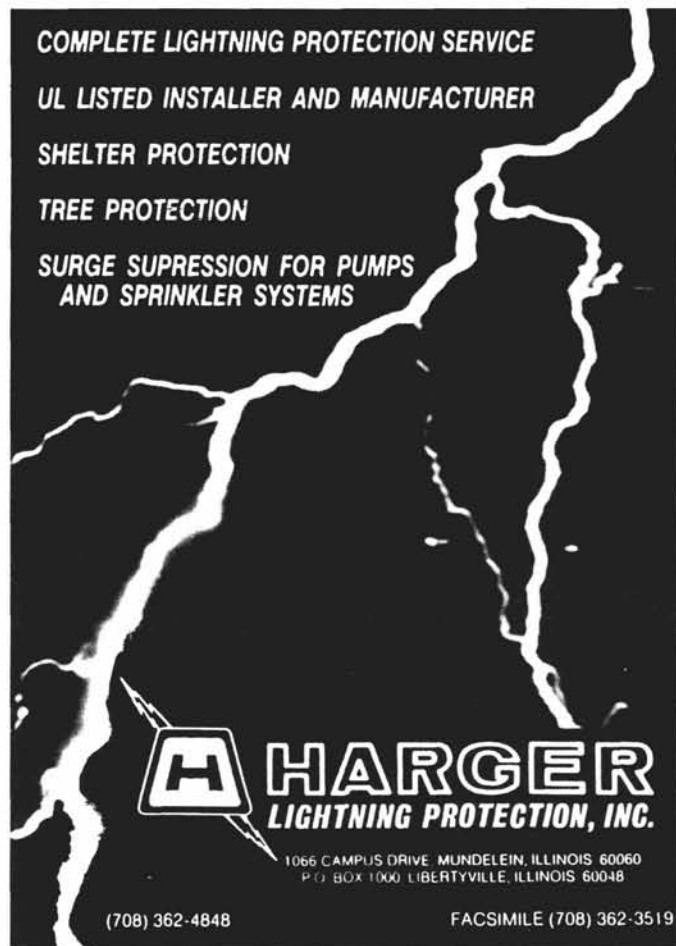
Spence, who tested several models of rollers and saw his greens go from 8½ to 9 on the Stimpmeter to 11½ with one rolling felt that the focus on green speed was, and is, too great.

"I feel that once a roller is in use, and once the greens committee knows that the roller is in place, it's difficult not to commit to using it all the time," Spence said.

"If you were able to buy it and use it at your own disposal, I think that would be great," he said.

(continued on page 28)

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Despite his reservations, Spence predicted that roller use would proliferate in an industry that will "hit the wall someday."

"The more people that play courses will use rollers, the more courses will have them," he said.

"We may not see the effects for two to three years," said Jim Connolly. "The roller is another tool. If used properly and effectively, it can be another thing a superintendent can do to meet the needs of today's golfer."

"It's not right or wrong, it's how you use it that is right or wrong," he said.

Connolly listed the following four points of USGA concerns with respect to greens rolling: 1) rolling of greens during unfavorable weather; 2) rolling of greens following an abrasive maintenance practice; 3) rolling of greens to achieve synthetic green speeds; 4) the superintendent must be in control of when greens are rolled.

(Editor's note: I thought I would reprint the above article on the comments of the greens roller that I introduced to the Chicago area back in May of 1988).

Are You Ready For A Fire In Your Shop?

by Marty Baumann, Fresh Meadows Golf Course

When was the last time you conducted a fire safety audit of your shop? No, I don't mean you told someone to put out their cigarette when they walked in. I mean a comprehensive safety check. If a fire were to start in your shop, considering the nature of our business, the odds are high you will lose your entire facility.

A safety audit for fire hazards will do many things for you. First, by having a different person do the audit each time, you will educate an employee on the importance of safety in your shop. Second, your overall workplace will be a safer place for everyone to work in. When doing the audit, every shop will be a bit different, and some things need to be stressed over others. But if you focus on these basic items, you will go a long way toward reducing your chance of a fire ...

- 1) Monitor open flame or sources of ignition in your shop. Have a safe area for these kinds of activities.
- 2) A buildup of trash, oily rags and other waste products can cause spontaneous ignition and will add to a fire load.
- 3) Mechanical sparks can ignite a fire. These areas should be monitored also.
- 4) Portable heaters need to be used carefully; placement of a heater is very important. Spring is a good time to clean heaters and check them for proper operation for use next fall/winter.
- 5) Chemicals, including gasoline, need very special care, signs and personnel training. Keep in mind that if you have a fire involving chemicals, even a small one, the EPA will declare any item in your shop that receives smoke and/or water damage from the fire a toxic waste and you will not be able to salvage those items.
- 6) Welding/cutting torches need to have full-time, on-going training and a special area for their use.
- 7) Check all fire extinguishers.

Keep in mind that almost all fires can be prevented. Stick to a good audit of your shop and control all sources of flame or heat in the shop and you should be fine. Remember, the cost of fire safety per 1000 square feet will give you an excellent return on your investment and last many months.



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