

Keep Them Greens a Rolling, Rolling, Rolling

Gary Hearn
Salt Creek G.C.

It's funny how the turf industry goes in circles. Back in the early 1920s, rolling was part of the maintenance program for putting greens. Then this machine was left for the early spring revival of frost heaving and to make greens a little smoother for early play during the middle of the century and up to the 1990s. During that period, we saw the growth of modified greens, better varieties of bentgrass, lower mowing heights, improved topdressing techniques, and better aeration programs.

Now, during the 1990s with increased pressure on green speed, increased volume of play, a new breed of bentgrass varieties, weather conditions, and "Tiger Wood mania," rolling has made a comeback. There are three kinds of rollers: tow drum rollers, triplex attachments, and light-weight dedicated greens rollers.

For most superintendents, rolling is done in late winter or early spring to take out the frost heaves and to help smooth out the greens for early play. But in the last two to three years, especially in the Chicagoland area, rollers have increased in popularity. I am not here to promote a brand which will do the best job for your golf course, but the ones that can be attached to greens triplex mowers seem to work the best for most superintendents.

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I interviewed six superintendents from the Chicagoland area who have different types of greens and situations. They are:

Tom Lively, Ruth Lake C.C.—Private, 18 holes.

Jim McNair, Orchard Valley G.C.—Public, 18 holes.

Steve Partyka, White Pines G.C.—Public, 36 holes.

Steve Van Acker, Crystal Lake C.C.—Private, 18 holes.

Mike Vukmir, Maple Meadows G.C.—Public, 27 holes.

Paul Wagner, Boulder Ridge C.C.—Private, 18 holes.

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All of these golf courses are cutting their greens at about 5/32 inch and are using attached rollers on used triplex units. Most of the superintendents are rolling right after mowing the greens and picking up about six to twelve inches more on the stimpmeter. Also, by using these attached units, they are getting their greens rolled much faster without disrupting play. Jim McNair double-cuts his greens, then rolls them. Both Jim and Mike Vukmir use their rollers more in the spring and fall as a supplement to mowing when the greens are growing slowly.

Steve Van Acker and Paul Wagner roll their greens at least two to three times per week and don't see much in compaction of the soil or thinning of the turf, and Paul has sand-based greens. All of these superintendents use their rollers very liberally during

special functions, tournaments, weekend play or certain weather conditions—again, to gain some speed without changing the height of cut. Consensus from this

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I got mixed reviews on top-dressing; both Steve Van Acker and

Jim McNair are not very pleased with the rollers' effect after top-dressing, but that might be due to either wet sand, application procedures, or particle size. Paul Wagner brushes his greens the rolls them, and that seems to work fine. Mike Vukmir and Steve Partyka don't seem to have any problems with their topdressing procedures. Tracking with the triplex units raised a question with Steve Partyka because he had used a lightweight dedicated roller before and saw some good results, like a longer period of speed on the stimpmeter and a much smoother surface. Another question that I asked to each superintendent was irrigating the night before a rolling would take place, and they felt there wasn't a problem.

Tidbits: Mike Vukmir has sand-based greens that are fairly new, and he is trying to get his greens established by using the
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rollers. Steve Van Acker has had his rollers for three years now, and it seems like he is using them more this year than before. Tom Lively has 6 USGA-type greens and 12 native soil greens with heavy topdressing material and uses his rollers more on the native soil greens.

In summary, there are some advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are increased green speed, smoothness, consistency, dew removal, and gaining speed without changing height of cut. The disadvantages are soil compaction on native soil greens (if rolled more than three times per week), some turf injury from wear, and impeded air and water soil infiltration.

These six superintendents didn't see any compaction or thinning of the turf; the quality of the

turf wasn't sacrificed, and bulk density might be too early to tell since they only started to roll their greens in the last two to three years.

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I would like to say thank you to these superintendents who took their time with me answering my questions. I really appreciate

it. Talk with these guys if you have any question, and I can tell you that there are more than six superintendents in the Chicagoland area that are using some type of roller in their maintenance program for their putting greens. ■

Editor's note: In June of 1988, I was, I believe, the first to introduce the green roller to the Chicago area. While in Australia, I saw a roller being used on bowling greens and thought it would work on putting greens. A couple of phone calls later, and a green roller was in the Chicago area along with the inventor. Chicago Turf and Irrigation was kind enough to take it around to some courses. The gentleman who invented it never obtained a U.S. patent, and the idea was picked up by others—the rest is history. For extra reading, see the June 1988 Bull Sheet.

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