Bryan Miller *The Georgian Resort*

Our Friend, the Stimpmeter

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the May/June 2002 issue of Through the Green, *the newsletter of the Georgia GCSA.*

There is no doubt: putting green quality is the most important component of the golfing experience. "What are the greens rolling today?" is the most common question I find myself answering.

Since opening in fall of 1998, The Frog at The Georgian Resort has been recognized for its superb Crenshaw bentgrass greens. The stimpmeter, like it or not, has become a universal way of judging our greens management success. Most golfers are familiar with the process, and each has his own range of acceptable measurements. Unfortunately, the announcement of stimpmeter readings during PGA televised tournaments has unrealistically lengthened the expectations of many golfers, but the stimpmeter, however perceived, can be a very effective management tool for promoting green speed consistency.

Our first year after construction, green speeds were predictable and easily managed. As with most USGA spec greens, fast and firm were the conditions regardless of what nature threw our way. The stimpmeter was used more for shock value than for aid in management. Stimpmeter readings varied little, regardless of surface moisture or management practices performed. Because so few nutrients were stored in soil, plant growth was readily managed with weekly spray applications. Rain and irrigation brought no surprises.

With time came a gradual accumulation of an organic component to the greens. While golfers were pleased with the improvement in golf ball receptibility, green speed became less predictable. Growth often followed precipitation or ideal temperatures and sunlight. Because greens are now more responsive to factors we can not control, we use the stimpmeter for guidance before and after any activity, natural or cultural, that might affect green speeds.

As we prepare the golf course each day for play, stimpmeter readings guide us to perform or skip different cultural practices. For normal play, our management team and owners have developed an optimum range for green speed. If readings begin approaching the excessive end of the range, a greens roller may replace the mowers. The stimpmeter has given us the confidence to divert labor to improve other components of the golfers' experience. This is especially helpful during the winter months when we are short-staffed. Without an accurate means of predicting green speed, we may feel compelled to mow greens everyday.

As stimpmeter readings begin approaching the lower end of the optimum range, we realize the need to increase our management aggressiveness. Rolling, light topdressing, grooming or double-cutting may be required to maintain pace during periods of excessive growth. Slight increases in fertility or decreases in growth suppression often precede aerification or verticutting. This

(continued on page 26)

As we prepare the golf course each day for play, stimpmeter readings guide us to perform or skip different cultural practices . . . If readings begin approaching the excessive end of the range, a greens roller may replace the mowers . . . As stimpmeter readings begin approaching the lower end of the optimum range, we realize the need to increase our management aggressiveness.

necessary growth for recovery must be monitored. Daily readings after such events allow us to accurately relate our recovery status to the golfing staff. Golfer warnings and reductions of green fees can be eliminated when stimpmeter readings return to the optimum range.

Our weekly (seven- to ten-day intervals) spray applications of fertilizer and growth suppressants are also guided by stimpmeter readings. By monitoring green speeds after an application, we can gauge the effectiveness of the mixture and predict the most effective day to make another application. At any time during the year, we may slightly alter the rate of either to maintain desired pace.

Tournament or special event preparations increase the need for and use of the stimpmeter. Reading comparisons between greens guide management practices of each green. Mowers and rollers are guided by readings to promote uniformity. Ideal ranges for speed and variances between greens become smaller. By double-cutting, rolling or skipping greens on an individual basis, a difference of no greater than 6″ becomes the goal. Each green is managed independently to achieve the goal speed.

Because green speeds are greatly influenced by plant condition, seasonal changes affect stimpmeter readings. The more active the bentgrass, the slower the pace of the greens. By spoon-feeding nutrients and incorporating growth regulators, we have minimized the dreaded growth spurts that drastically reduce stimpmeter readings. Many practices cannot be altered or skipped without negatively affecting bentgrass health. The stimpmeter gets little use during July and August when we are focused on maximizing plant health. Green speeds are only one component of golfer satisfaction; greens health is never jeopardized to increase pace. My highest priority as superintendent is to protect the owner's investment.

Green speed consistency is of undeniable importance in the golfing experience. While the most prevalent controlling factors of green speed may be out of our hands, there are cultural practices we can perform to minimize variances. The golfing staff is informed daily of stimpmeter readings, and this information becomes another benefit of playing at The Frog. The stimpmeter allows us an accurate means of predicting nature's effect on green speed and the effectiveness of our management program's ability to control them.