

MIDWEST BREEZES

Charles Anfield, CGCS, *Heritage Bluffs Golf Course*



The Ball Mark Scar

For a Greenkeeper, the ball mark scar on a golf green is one of the most annoying turf related “challenges” we have to deal with.

The golf green is the highest profile, most vulnerable and delicate turf on the golf course. The greens, by far, require our highest course maintenance inputs (except maybe bunkers, more on that in another article). The golf green has the lowest mowing heights, sustains the most concentrated foot traffic and is where the majority of the game of golf is played. We primp and prod our greens by vertical mowing, topdressing, rolling, dew whipping, spiking, applications of plant protectants, deep tining, core cultivation, fertilizing, growth regulating and mowing, mowing and more mowing. Greens are watched over more carefully than any other part of the golf course. The golf green is where we search for the holy grail of perfection. We want them smooth, fast, green and vigorously growing to handle the stresses caused by the extremes of the weather and of the masses of people playing on them. A set of smooth, fast greens can define a Greenkeeper’s reputation and make or break their career.

For Golfers the greens are also very important. To the golfer, high quality, fast greens will define the level of overall conditioning on the course and more than likely affect the cost of the green fee. Good putting can make or break a golf game and often determines the outcome of a tournament. People often will determine the quality of their overall playing experience based on their experience on the golf greens. Almost all golfers will say they like them fast. It’s a bragging right. “Here at XYZ Country Club, our greens are 17.7 feet on the stimpmeter!” “Those greens at Podunk Golf Club are shaggy”. Not good for public relations. Greens are without a doubt the most important part of the overall golf course.

So I head out on my morning rounds to inspect the greens and ohhhh yuck. A ball mark scar, and another one and there’s another one, they’re everywhere! It’s like an out-break of acne for a teenager. Why me? How did we get so marked up? All of the sudden, I feel ugly and self conscious. Unrepaired golf ball marks can leave localized necrotic scars, raised turf prone

to mower scalping, loss of surface smoothness and the potential for weed (*Poa annua*) encroachment. Improperly repaired ball marks are just as bad, maybe worse.

Let’s break it down. A golf ball hits the green. Is it a high wedge shot or a short chip? The height and velocity of the shot will affect the impact point. Multiply the number of impact points by the number and type of shot into hit into the green. Some courses handle less volume of play than others. Those courses will have less ball marks, less imperfections. The more play, the more potential for imperfections, it’s a numbers game.

After the ball hits the green it will leave some kind of mark. This is a critical time for the future of a ball mark scar. At this point here comes Joe Golfer arriving at the green to continue his play. Will he even fix his ball mark? Have you ever been to a course where there are too many ball marks to even count? Sad, but true. How does this happen? Proper golf course etiquette requires you to repair yours and one other. If everyone did that....Yeah and if everyone raked their bunkers and replaced their divots....At my course we start each day out by fixing all the ball marks prior to mowing, so we start each day fresh. From that point on it’s up to the golfers to “maintain” the ball marks.

Joe Golfer being my kind of guy, after marking his ball on the green, is going to begin his search for “his” ball mark. What will he use to repair the ball mark? There are dozens of different kinds of tools out there. Believe it or not, there have been expensive and extensive University studies undertaken to determine the “best” ball mark repair tool. Joe only has a tee. Not the best tool for the job but in the right hands it will work just fine. That was the result of the study. It’s not the arrow folks, it’s the Indian. Proper repair technique is critical for the ball mark repair to recover from the injury. Most people want to pop up the center of the ball mark, tearing the roots out, exposing soil to the surface. “Hey at least it’s flat and you can putt on it”. Wrong! That soil scar will be there for three weeks! A properly repaired mark where the sides are pulled to the center will leave all grass exposed and heal over in a couple of days. If performed properly there may not even be evidence of a mark. Some of the

new tools with shorter prongs work better because the user cannot pop up the center of the mark with the shorter prong. They do work. Any tool will work. Some clubs have a great "culture" built in because of the deep commitment they have to having smooth, firm greens. They may either have Members policing themselves or a "Ranger" cruising around searching for neglectful offenders. Nobody wants to be called out for not doing what they are supposed to be doing.

There are a few variables to help reduce the ball mark scar, which we as Greenkeeper's do have control over. Surface firmness is one variable that we can attempt to control. Obviously, if we are deluged by heavy rains, the greens may be softer than we desire. Overwatering can also result in less than firm conditions. Frequent rolling can increase surface firmness. One way we can significantly impact overall surface firmness is by managing the organic content in the top 2 inches of the soil profile. This organic matter is often the culprit of the deep mushy ball mark. We can reduce the depth of the ball penetration by reducing this organic component with regular organic removal/dilution maintenance. This is accomplished with topdressing, core cultivation, grooming and vertical mowing. We need a work "window" and a commitment from our owners/ members to implement such a plan. Managing organic material is often messy, time consuming and may impact the ball roll for a short time. The long term benefits of a smooth scar free putting surface outweigh the short term inconvenience. Neglecting this organic matter management will have a negative

One way we can significantly impact overall surface firmness is by managing the organic content in the top 2" of the soil profile.

effect on impact of a ball mark and resulting potential scar. Typically, smoothness comes with firmness. The name of the game is to reduce the recovery time of the ball mark, reducing the severity of the ball mark scar. It's a great big circle centered on organic management.

There are cosmetic solutions for excessive scarring. Scars can be cored out and filled with green sand. Scars can be removed with small turf plugs. Unfortunately the "patches" can become overwhelming and the overall smoothness is lost.

Next time your Golf Course Superintendent wants to core aerify it isn't because he just likes to make holes and bother golfers, heck, it's a lot of hard work. No, he just wants to make your greens better and reduce the number of the dreaded ball mark scars. As they say in the Kitchen, "you've got to scramble a few eggs to make an omelet". Bon appétit. **-OC**

PEA GRAVEL
BUNKER SAND
TOP DRESSING SAND
BOULDERS AND RIP RAP
ALL GOLF COURSE AGGREGATES

Richard E. Mika
mobile (847) 514-9761
office (847) 228-9607

OLD DUTCH
SAND COMPANY, INC.

RABINE PAVING
DISCOVER THE DIFFERENCE
888-722-4633

PAVING THE WAY WITH QUALITY FOR OVER 40 YEARS
Cart Paths - Driveways - Parking Lots - Roads

- Asphalt Paving & Engineering
- Concrete Paving / Whitetopping
- IDOT Pre-qualified
- Decorative Pavements
- Infrared Pavement Repairs
- Sealcoating and Striping
- Snow Removal / Ice Control

www.rabinepaving.com

THE PREFERRED SERVICE PROVIDER FOR ALL OF YOUR PAVEMENT CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE NEEDS