

Treasure Coast "Tide"ings

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PUTTING SURFACE MANAGEMENT AT INDIAN RIVER PLANTATION

Putting surfaces may only account for 2%-3% of the total acreage on a typical golf course but 50% of the game is played on that small portion. Golf course greens have become the most intensively cultivated crop found anywhere in a natural environment to satisfy the demands of the game as it is played today.

In order to gain the respect of the golfer today, the golf course superintendent must first provide him with a quality putting surface. You can give the golfer a lush, green and beautifully landscaped golf course, but if the greens are not "perfect," your talents are downgraded in the golfer's eye.

No two golf courses are alike and to compound that basic difference, no two memberships or clientele are alike. There's no way for golf course superintendents to carry out identical maintenance procedures and wind up with the same product — there are just too many variables regulating the micro-environment of a golf course green.

Craig Baker has been Golf Course Superintendent at Indian River Plantation in Jensen Beach for 5 years. His club, which is regarded as one of the best executive golf courses in the country, caters to an older clientele that doesn't demand super fast greens. Craig maintains them to a degree, providing healthy turf and a smooth surface which in turn creates a medium to fast green that is pleasing to the membership.

Craig's greens are subject to some environmental conditions that are far from the norm for most Florida golf courses. Nestled between the Atlantic and the Indian River, his golf course is situated in the toughest region of the state to maintain quality turf. Soil Ph runs in the 7.5 to 8.5 range as does irrigation water which is also high in chlorides. Rainfall is normally less during the summer months due to the afternoon seabreeze that keeps thunderstorms from approaching that build up over the mainland. Craig noted that last summer, Crane Creek located 5 miles to the west, received some 30 inches of rain more than he recorded at his golf course. Environment can be extremely different at two points separated by only a few miles! And the golfers can't understand why the conditions of two golf courses the same distance apart aren't identical.

The daily maintenance program on the Tifgreen 328 greens at Indian River Plantation, which average 5,550 ft.², includes mowing at 5/32" to 3/16" with triplex greensmowers using grooved rollers year-round. Greens are mowed in different directions daily, changing direction on the clean-up pass to discourage grain.

During the peak season when play approaches 300 rounds/day, cups are changed daily. Inspection of each and every green first thing in the morning is insurance on spotting unexpected surprises such as vandalism, disease or insects. It's most embarrassing when a member has to call your attention to something that you should already be aware of.

Craig's routine cultural practices include fertilization of greens every two to three weeks with .75 to 1.5 lbs. N/1,000 ft.² depending on weather, growth rate, color and density of turf. Nitrogen sources used are usually slow release with a low salt index (Craig already has enough salt in the soil). Craig stated; "I believe in keeping the greens growing moderately at all times when conditions are favorable for regeneration of the grass-plant. I'm not an advocate of lush greens — but I do strive for a good growth response that will protect me if something undesirable pops up."

Craig supplements his regular fertilization with micro-nutrient sprays and applications of sulphur to reduce high soil Ph. This insures optimum nutrient uptake required to provide a good putting surface. Wetting agents are used frequently, especially during dry periods, thus reducing the severity of localized dry spots that reappear under stress conditions.

Greens are verticut and topdressed lightly with an 80-20 materials as needed, usually every 4 to 6 weeks between April and October.

To insure quality turf on top, measures are taken in May and October to correct any damage to the putting surface below. At this time, greens are aerified using 1/2" tines. Verticutting and heavy topdressing follow. Also, Mocap or Neme-cur is applied to insure that the material winds up in the root zone where it's needed.

Craig's fungicide and insecticide programs are curative in nature except when conditions are favorable for a given problem — then prevention takes hold. His intensive program has kept weeds on the greens to a bare minimum and they are spot treated as needed.

Craig pointed out, "In greens management, one must realize that individual greens on the golf course have their own environment and what works on one may not give the same results on another. One must make necessary adjustments between greens to provide uniformity as required."

By playing his course regularly and lending an ear to the membership, Craig is always on top when it comes to the condition of the greens at Indian River Plantation. If adjustments are in order, they are carried out immediately.