

# How Fast Is Fast?

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*Editor's Note:* Many discussions with colleagues and turf professionals this summer have focused on problems associated with turf being maintained under low mowing heights. The following article is quite timely and informative — from a professional's point-of-view. CHP

In the English language, the word "fast" has many meanings such as you can run fast, go for a fast, have fast women, and have fast greens. The topic of conversation around the locker and grill rooms of most golf clubs these days is "How fast are the greens today?" In some areas of the country it is referred to as the "roll of the green." It all boils down to the speed of the ball on the

green. Lost is the art of stroking the ball—today, a tap is all that is required. I think some of the golfers want the ball to roll into the cup just by looking at it. At some clubs they post the speed of the green on their bulletin board for the day.

Are we becoming victims of the stimp meter, fast greens and tournament play? When big tournaments are on TV, all we hear about is how fast the greens putt; that they doublecut the greens daily, even triple-cut and yes, on some greens quadruple-cut to increase the speed.

Whenever a group of golfers or superintendents congregate, golf and turf are naturally discussed, green speed for the average club is a favorite topic. Seven, 8, 9, 10 or more feet is suggested.

Has the superintendent contributed to the dilemma? Yes, in a way. He probably has perfected his course to the point where only incredibly fast greens will save par. Also, the competition to have faster greens than your neighbor is not helping the situation in any way.

In any event, an increasing amount of pressure is put on the superintendent to increase the speed of the greens. Every superintendent has heard the following remarks: "Are the greens going to be mowed today?" "When are you going to lower the height of cut?" "The greens at such-and-such a club are faster than ours."

Seriously, I am concerned about this trend of "fast greens." Can we afford to maintain greens of this caliber—that require frequent topdressings; frequent verticutting; daily cutting or double-cutting of greens; close, close mowing—even to the point of grinding the under side of already thin bed knives.

And, in all my conversation and reading and listening, I have never heard anyone mention a thing about the little grass plant. How is it standing up under all this abuse? I was tutored under the late Professor Lawrence Dickenson of Massachusetts, and one of his often quoted phrases was, "Give the little grass plant half a chance. It wants to live." Under these conditions of shaving the grass plant to  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch or less, are we giving it "half a chance?" I do not think so. We are giving it very little chance. Sooner or later we are headed for trouble.

We all know that the root growth of a grass plant is in proportion to the top growth. That the grass plant needs leaf surface for survival, for transpiration, respiration, the manufacturing of carbohydrates to maintain life and growth. It also needs nitrogen and other nutrients that we are withholding so as to increase speed by limiting plant growth.

I predict that in the not too distant future we will get back to the basics of a good putting green surface—that the demands of the grass plant will be given equal or more consideration than the demands of the golfers. A firm, true, healthy green with reasonable speed is much more pleasurable than putting on dead grass and plain soil. We will return to stroking the ball, not tapping it.

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