

Reconciling primo conditioning & healthy turf: Two takes

● Raised heights to 3/16? Ball roll needn't suffer

By PAT GROSS

You've heeded the warnings and raised your putting green cutting height to 3/16 of an inch, just like all the experts have told you. Just when you're proud and confident of your accomplishments, the golfers start complaining that the greens are too slow.

"Cut 'em lower!" they cry.

"Turn off the water!"

"They need more verti-cutting!" and the ever-popular: "I don't care what you do, but they better be rolling 10 feet for the big tournament!"

Don't they remember all the disease and turf loss that occurred when you tried to keep them fast all summer?

Mowing at 3/16 is a prudent practice for creeping bentgrass/*Poa annua* greens during the summer. There is no doubt the increased mowing height improves turfgrass stress tolerance during the summer and, yes, the greens are going to be a little slower. Instead of

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caving in to demands for lowering the mowing height, there are several things you can do to improve ball roll and keep the turf healthy at 3/16.

1. Keep'em sharp — Greens suffer just as much from a poor quality cut as they do from an excessively low mowing height. Your mechanic should check the cutting units daily when they come in from mowing, and make any necessary adjustments. Weekly or biweekly back lapping along with checking the bedknife will help keep the cutting units sharp at all times.

2. Proper Irrigation — Irrigation management is far and away the most important practice for maintaining healthy turf at any cutting height. With creeping bentgrass/*Poa annua* greens, the goal is to keep the soil uniformly moist, but not wet. If you are on a leaching program to control salinity, go ahead and give the greens a good long soaking when necessary (4 to 6 hours). Then turn off the automatic system and go to hand watering for as long as possible. Overly wet greens are slow, bumpy and disease prone.



Pat Gross

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● The perfect shot shouldn't mean the perfect lie

By DENIS GRIFFITHS

Years ago, when the links courses of Scotland and England were laid out in and around the natural dunes and land forms, man moved minimal earth to provide contiguous golf holes. Everything on the links was adapted to fit existing conditions. You might say that Mother Nature was actually the builder, and the course designer was merely the one who discovered routing.

This use of nature often provided courses that were testing and frequently offered imperfect lies, blind shots and unmanicured turf. Part of the enjoyment of these courses, however, resided in having to respond to these challenging circumstances, often through creative shotmaking.

But somewhere along the line, the American perception of the game strayed from its European roots. That percep-

Denis Griffiths is principal of the golf course design firm, Denis Griffiths & Associates, Inc. of Braselton, Ga. He is sitting president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

tion, which has been a major influence on course design around the world, applauds wonderfully maintained, impeccable golf courses. It also encourages complete fairness in design, and is skeptical of "unusual" design measures such as the occasional blind shot.

TV, golf magazines and the PGA Tour have all had a hand in furthering this perception, particularly in setting expectations that are often mistaken for standards. Announcers banter on about how players are penalized for anything less than a perfect lie and touring professionals complain about course conditions. Meanwhile, we nod in empathy.

But must a good tee shot always be rewarded with a perfect lie? Must every shot be hit to a clearly visible target? Must it always be possible to advance a ball from a sand bunker? Must every green hold approaches? Must the play area contain 100-percent turf coverage throughout the season, no matter what weather conditions exist?

I am the first to agree that these conditions can contribute to the game's overall enjoyment level. But I also feel this

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Denis Griffiths

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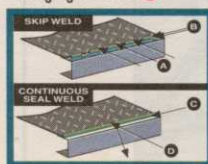


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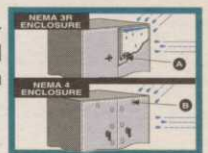


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Griffiths comment

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"Americanization" may eliminate many shots that are required on the traditional Scottish and English courses... shots that add to the game's challenge and finesse.

In discussions with other members of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, I find that most strive to meet these Americanized expectations. As a result,

today's course architecture may best be described as a study on how to best modify terrain to create the desired golfing experience.

With sites containing more and more limitations — whether they be related to size, terrain or environment — designing to this American style of golf often involves extensive earthwork to reform the ground, especially to prevent blind shots and provide level play areas. It also requires green

construction methods, irrigation system design and grass selection that have reached a level of sophistication almost beyond comprehension. All in the name of perfect playing conditions.

While meeting golfers' expectations, these designs have and will continue to drive course construction costs higher. The dramatic upswing in maintenance costs is likely to continue as well. (It is not uncommon for the average annual

maintenance cost of a 25-year-old facility to exceed the original cost of construction for the same course!) All of which has led to an overall rise in green fees.

It is my belief that the quality of a game of golf should be judged more on the integrity of the course's design than its condition. The goal of the golf course architect is to create variety, demanding that players use every club in their bag. Less-than-perfect turf

conditions provide an additional variable that should not necessarily be considered a negative.

When playing older courses where the condition of the turf is determined by the most recent weather cycle, golfers are required to adjust their game to the specific conditions every time they play.

I believe we should consider changing our expectations and returning more to the original concept of the game. In this concept, the ball is played as it lies, and there is not always a reward for a perfect shot. In doing so, we will expand the opportunity for more affordable golf. We will also obtain a better appreciation of what the game has to offer.

Flyovers

Continued from previous page

pare the design to the actual build and calculate the cut-and-fill off of that. Or when they do a rough grade of the course, you can shoot the contours then; and when it comes to moving the dirt, you can also do the cut-and-fill.

The contour mapping is extraordinarily precise. When it was receiving bids to renovate its Pinehurst No. 2 greens, Pinehurst Resort asked LDI to produce 300th to 400ths of a foot verticle mapping. Surveyors generally work in 10ths of a foot, Katula said. "We have to do special things to hit that 300th height every time."

But LDI's normal survey data shows 1/10th-of-a-foot contours on each green and 1-foot contours of fairways at any scale the superintendent requires.

"I hope to achieve two things," said Alonzi. "First, as a warning sign. Since it has the ability to see what the naked eye cannot, is perhaps give me warnings of things that may be occurring in the plant before it actually happens.

"Second, to reaffirm some of the critical areas on the golf course... from subsurface rock formations, or just poor soils, to help me to zero in on these areas and explore it. Not only to be able to go out myself, but to take a committee out on the course with evidence in hand that there is something wrong."

In the future, Alonzi said, infrared photography's use may expand. "It's new technology and they're improving it every day. Maybe we'll be able to tie it to certain pathogens from information we get from the stress areas. It could help to manage microclimate situations.

It already has come to Alonzi's rescue. The same day a club member objected to overwatered fairways, the aerial film arrived showing that the course was in jeopardy from lack of water, Alonzi said. "So it also becomes a tool to help you support some of the practices you are exercising."



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Heart of America elects Bologna

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Swope Park Memorial Golf Course superintendent Bill Bologna has been elected president, heading a new slate of officers for the Heart of America Golf Course Superintendents Association (HAGCSA).

Joining Bologna, who succeeded Jeff Eldridge of Lakewood

Oaks, are Vice President Gary Higbie of Trails West Golf Course in Leavenworth, Kan., and Secretary-Treasurer Chuck Hybl of St. Joseph (Mo.) Country Club.

Winning election to the board of directors were Ron Darnell of Mazingo Lake Golf Course in Maryville, Jon Kindlesparger of Alvarmar Golf Course in

Lawrence, Kan., and Tyler Koch of Hodge Park Golf Course here.

A certified golf course superintendent, Bologna has been at Swope Park Memorial for three years and superintendent for the Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department for five years. He has served on the HAGCSA Scholarship and Research Committee and as chairman of the Education Committee.

Viera hires IGM

VIERA, Fla. — International Golf Management, Inc. of Lakewood has been retained to provide professional golf course maintenance services on a contractual basis at Viera East Golf Club in this newly created city.

IGM is providing turnkey golf course maintenance services for the publicly owned 18-hole

course which is part of a 30,000-acre Chapter 290 Community Development District close to Melbourne. The project, including the Florida Marlins' spring training home, is a project of Viera Co. Maintenance will be supervised by Jim Wells, IGM's Central Florida regional manager, working with Dommie Veasey Jr., the club's IGM resident superintendent.

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The choice: Slow grass or fast dirt

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3. Double Mowing — Consider double-mowing your greens once a week. This is a good practice to improve surface smoothness without having to lower the cutting height.

If you are short on labor, you can use a triplex mower in one direction and hand mow in the opposite direction, or even double mow with the triplex units.

4. Light Topdressing — If the turf is healthy and the temperatures are not too high, it is perfectly fine to apply light sand topdressing to smooth the surface.

Many superintendents refer to this as "dusting the greens" with approximately 0.1 to 0.3 cubic yards of sand per 1000 square feet every two to four weeks. Topdressing should be suspended at the first sign of turf stress or if temperatures are expected about 90 degrees F.

5. Grooming — Groomer attachments are great tools to improve the quality of cut and green smoothness, especially at increased mowing heights. The groomers can be used on a frequency of two to three times per week as long as the turf is actively growing. This is another practice that should be suspended at the first sign of turf stress.

6. Rolling — Putting green rollers have proven to be very effective tools to maintain surface smoothness and slightly increase speed without negatively impacting turf health. The rollers should only be used two to three times per week to avoid abrasion injury.

When asked their preference for speed or smoothness, most golfers agree that surface smoothness is most important. Smooth greens with reasonable speed can be achieved without having to lower the mowing height by paying close attention to the previously mentioned practices.

And if the golfers persist in their desire for lightning-fast greens during the summer, remind them that "slow grass is better than fast dirt."