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MOWING-PATTERN APPEAL

Q I watched February's Pebble Beach event on television and noticed the fairway mowing appeared to produce a diamond-cutting pattern pointing to the putting surface. Is this done by request? Is this the regular pattern? How does the superintendent plan for this practice?

A The PGA Tour doesn't require fairways to be mowed in a certain way. However, it prefers no mower stripes be aligned with a player's shot. The resulting light and dark stripes can produce a "grain" issue of a favorable or detrimental golf shot in the minds of players. Chris Dalhamer, CGCS, and long-time assistant Jack Holt check the television camera angles from the television towers to prevent mower stripes from running into a television shot, including the overhead blimp camera shots. This eliminates any aesthetic issues regarding quality of cut, height of cut, scalping, mower-pass overlap and wheel tracks.

For ball-roll consistency, Dalhamer prefers his first cut to begin in the middle of the fairway – which is perennial ryegrass – angling from 4 o'clock to 10 o'clock and the second cut angling from 8 o'clock to 2 o'clock, which will produce the diamond image desired.

The most difficult mower pass is the first pass on a sharp dogleg. In this case, Holt will stand at the back of the putting green and guide the mower stripes based on the design of the golf hole. However, a sharp dogleg can produce a silly stripe with an unusual bend to it.

Beginning three weeks before the event, to enhance the stripe patterns, Dalhamer will monitor fertility to peak the week of the event, use brushes on the back of the mower reels to highlight the stripe, set his height of cut, apply Primo, double-cut daily and monitor mower overlap to produce a full stripe for each pass.

Q I've always mowed my square teeing grounds front to back, or 6 o'clock to 12

o'clock, to set the line of cut to the middle of the fairway. However, watching the recent professional event at Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades, Calif., teeing grounds were cut left to right. Why?

A Riviera, which is a George Thomas design, has a classic, subtle look. Golf course superintendent Matt Morton would prefer to accentuate Rivera's design qualities rather than overstripe the golf course with a more modern look. He mows the tees left to right, matching the cut in the fairways. When a player looks down the hole from the teeing ground, the side-to-side cut ensures he won't see a distracting, busy-looking golf hole.

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Being an older course, Rivera's many teeing grounds aren't lined up perfectly to the middle of the fairway and don't match up as far as back-to-front alignment to the golf hole. This off-line, varying tee-shot option has a 6-o'clock-to-12-o'clock stripe pointing the player toward the proposed landing zone; the stripe is off-center to prevent the course from looking crooked.

Professionals are always checking with their caddies or each other during practice rounds to confirm they're aligning with their target. Consider this issue when cutting your teeing grounds. To test the best, you might wish to cut side to side, as Morton does, to get the competitors thinking about something other than their next shot.

Q While attending the LPGA's match play event at Hamilton Farm Golf Club in Long Valley, N.J., I was curious. Are there different set-up requirements for women compared to their male counterparts?

A Not for this championship. Golf course superintendent Paul Ramina met with LPGA staff and outlined a plan acceptable to the organization for this format. Addressing mowing patterns, Ramina reviewed each hole to decide what mowing pattern would best highlight the course's architecture. He considered how his mowing pattern would be seen through the eyes of competitors and wanted to highlight the design by pursuing the less-is-better option and reducing the busy look.

When it came to mowing, Ramina implemented two practices. First, a 3-o'clock-to-9 o'clock, cross-cut pattern eliminated the "grain" issues affecting the players' shots and eased the pressure on the volunteer fairway mowers when it came to scalping the edges in the intermediate rough cut. Also, two triplex clean-up passes around the perimeter of the fairways allowed his volunteers room to maneuver. This helped avoid any miss cuttings in the intermediate cut, decreased the time required to mow and reduced tire tracks on the turfgrass within the primary rough.

Q Our big club invitational is approaching, and I want to give our golf course a tournament look for our members and guests. When deciding whether to stripe or not, what options should be considered?

A Follow the advice of Bob DiRico, golf course superintendent at Brae Burn Country Club in West Newton, Mass. Though Brae Burn is a Donald Ross classic, DiRico believes the great design is best shown off with no striping. But during a big event, DiRico realizes members want to impress their guests. The "wow" factor becomes important to give a great first impression of the golf course to those who haven't been to Brae Burn before.

Like it or not, a great first impression usually stems from intricate mowing designs, stripes and diamond cuts. In many instances, the "wow" factor can aid a club in retaining current members while attracting new ones, especially during an invitational. **GCI**