



## GREENS SPEED? SLOW IT DOWN!

**T**rying to make your greens faster? Think twice before listening to those members who have a need for speed. Their desire could be your demise. What is it about fast greens that is directly related to manhood?

Nearly everywhere I go, no matter the geographic region, I meet supers who have been tasked by members to make the putting greens faster.

But the non-agronomic individual, typically a low-handicap player, doesn't understand what he is asking of his superintendent, of himself, or of his golf course. Saying he wants the greens a foot faster, does he understand what it will mean to his game, let alone to lesser-skilled golfers? I doubt it.

And by trying to comply with this request, the superintendent could very well be his own worst enemy. Of course, you want to keep your job and please the members. But where do you draw the line?

I'm tired of seeing superintendents playing green-speed chicken, trying to outdo one another, with or without the resources and at the risk of losing turf. You know who you are. You're not doing the rest of us any favors by swinging for the fences all the time.

Compare the superintendent who lives at the edge with the one who has been around for a while – and wants to stay around – who wants his customers/members to come back, play again, and enjoy themselves, and who doesn't want to put any unnecessary stress on his course, especially in the hot summer months. Who do you want to be?

**DESIGN.** Green size, surface contours, pitch and slope – these design features affect green speed and the ability to set hole locations. Any pre-1960 golf course, built when green speed was not an issue, presents challenges due

to undulations and the era's construction methods.

There's a big difference as to where holes can be placed on the green – depending on pitch and slope – when you go from 10.5 to 11.5 on the Stimpmeter.

Speeding up greens takes away good-quality hole locations. That makes the game easier for the better player since most holes will eventually end up near the middle of the green.

And while we're talking about the Stimpmeter, just who is taking the

courses. Even private clubs will notice slower rounds on busy days. Consider investing in some lights for night golf.

**FIRMNESS AND MOISTURE.** Maintaining firm, smooth conditions is definitely the healthier choice for turfgrass than keeping it wet and soft. But firm and fast requires patience and resources, and the firmer and faster you want it, the more time, material, and manpower you need.

Furthermore, the practices necessary to achieve and maintain these conditions are invasive – cultivation,

Nearly everywhere I go around the country, no matter the geographic region, I meet superintendents who have been tasked by their members to make the putting greens faster.

readings? Does this person really know what he's doing? I can speak with authority on this subject...as can my knees.

**PLAYER ABILITY.** Here's something you've probably noticed about golfers: They think they're much better than they really are. That self-delusion leads to an interesting fallacy about greens, that a "fast green" is more challenging. I don't believe it.

On fast greens, you hardly need to tap the ball to get it moving, so you're usually putting defensively. Slower greens require determining how hard to stroke the ball, how far will it roll, how much affect break will have – in short, the skills of putting. I don't know about you, but I like to be responsible for my putting success (or failure), rather than be at the mercy of super-slick greens.

**PACE OF PLAY.** Faster greens mean slower rounds and a snail's pace of play, particularly at daily-fee and resort

coring, sand top dressing, regular heavy rolling – all need to be conducted when the turf is healthy and growing. So, the faster the greens, the longer and more often the course will be taken out of play. How will your low-handicappers like that?

One more point about resources: Maintaining firm, fast turf requires labor, equipment, and resources means more money. Enough said.

**STRESSED SURFACES.** Speedy surfaces are stressed surfaces, and it's when turfgrass is stressed that some of the most common issues rear their ugly heads: nematodes, bacterial wilt/etiolation, and anthracnose. And don't forget the other effects of stress: hair loss, lack of sleep, and unhappy families.

There was a popular expression when I was growing up that sums it all: Speed Kills. In our industry, it can get you fired.

So slow down your greens for healthier turf – and your sanity. **GCI**