

## Off The Fringe

# Fast Crowd

THANKS TO JOHNNY MILLER'S SWIFT COMMENTARY, MANY GOLFERS MAY BELIEVE THAT "10" MEANS SLOW ON THE STIMPMETER. THAT'S NOT GOOD NEWS

By Anthony Pioppi

**W**ait. Quiet. Listen for it. Yup, there it is. A golfer complaining about green speed. More accurately, complaining the greens are too slow.

That golfer, whoever it is, on whatever course it is, knows the putting surfaces aren't running at the speed they should be. Until recently, what Stimpmeter rating constituted slow was never defined, but thanks to television announcer Johnny Miller, the number is now carved in British steel.

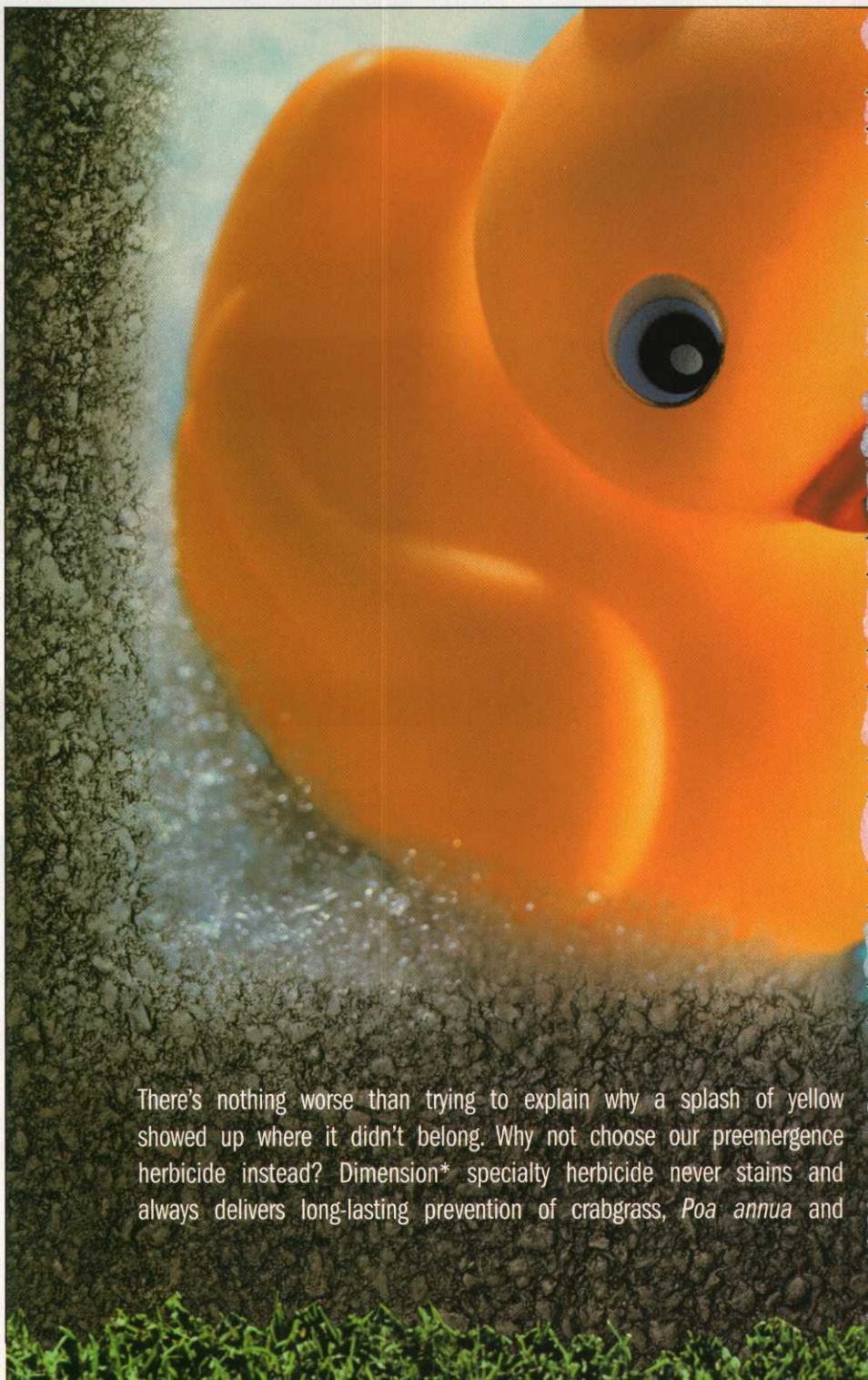
During the Ryder Cup broadcasts, Miller could go no more than 45 seconds without referring to the greens at The Belfry as "slow," even though he said they were rolling at 10 on the Stimpmeter. On-course commentator Roger Maltbie began beating the drum shortly after Miller let loose with the line.

When Tiger Woods was asked about the frequency at which American players were leaving putts short through the first day's matches at the Ryder Cup — with the implication being it was because of slow green speeds — he did not blame the pace of the greens. The fault, Woods said, was with the players failing to adapt to the speed of the putting surfaces. Woods said The Belfry greens were rolling at the same speed as nearly every European PGA Tour venue, including Muirfield, which hosted this year's Open Championship — where every U.S. Ryder Cup player participated.

That information didn't matter to Miller. Instead of saying the greens are slower than what American Tour players are used to, he just kept saying the word "slow" over and over until his brand of poison spread. By week's end, The Golf Channel's squawking heads were also



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marching to Miller's ill-informed beat. In no time, all of America knew that "10" on the Stimp constitutes as slow.

As one greenkeeping friend pointed out, Miller's mouth is going to cause problems on the local level. When a superintendent tells his club's members that the greens are running at 10, the members will — thanks to the influence

of Miller — respond, "Oh, that's slow."

Miller's repeated faux pas serves to illuminate the problem of golfers wanting faster and faster greens. It's ironic, considering that few golfers are really sure of green speeds unless they are one of the few lunatics carrying Stimp meters in their golf bags. Even if golfers do know the Stimp reading, few can translate

that into real-world experiences.

Stimp measurements, like the Dow(n) Jones Industrial Average and Richter Scale readings, are general reference points at best for the average Tom, Dick and Mary. When the Dow plummets 300 points, it is easy to see things are not going well in the market. Honestly, though, what does a plunge really mean to the average person in everyday life? OK, so the Dow is down, but if on the same day all your retirement money is in Unethical Tobacco and it's up 8 7/8, then how bad can things really be?

The same can be said of earthquakes. Sure, one of a magnitude of 3.7 on the Richter Scale is far less severe than one at 7.3, but how much less? At what number do dishes fall off the shelves? Outside of the nearest seismology center, does anyone really know?

The same is true with greens. One running at 11 feet is much quicker than one at 8, but do players know how that translates to everyday life on a golf course? Ask the average complainer how does a downhill putt on a green running at 8 with a slope of 2 percent compare to a flat putt on the 11th green and they'll get the same glazed-over look as Rams fans after last year's Super Bowl.

There are no real meanings to the numbers. They're just used as generalizations by the Neanderthals: Fast . . . good. Slow . . . bad. Ugh.

Now, because of Miller's comments, superintendents are going to have to ratchet up the speeds whether the turf likes it or not. Either that or practice a little deception. At least one high-profile superintendent lets his members believe the greens are rolling at 11 when in fact they are not. "I Stimp them maybe twice a week," he said after requesting anonymity, "but I putt them every day to make sure they are consistent."

Consistency, is that what's important? Nah, fast is the goal and from now on that means anything above 10. Thank you very much, Johnny Miller.

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*Pioppi is a free-lance writer from Middletown, Conn.*




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