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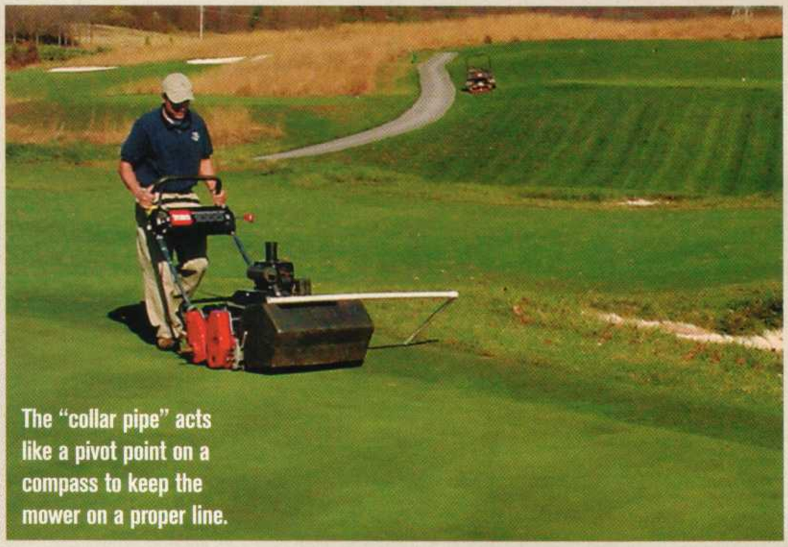
So Much for Scalping

Superintendent, former assistant invent "collar pipe" to correct common maintenance headache

BY MARK LESLIE



COURTESY OF FOUR STREAMS GOLF CLUB

The "collar pipe" acts like a pivot point on a compass to keep the mower on a proper line.

With visions of table-saw guides dancing in their heads, certified superintendent Ray Viera and his former assistant Rob Larsen brainstormed their way to eliminating scalping and "moving greens" at Four Streams Golf Club in Beallsville, Md.

"All superintendents have scalped collars, and we have completely eliminated that," Viera says.

Choosing a walk-behind greens mower that would be dedicated to the cleanup cut on all the greens, Viera and Larsen, who now works for LESCO, drilled a series of holes on top of the clippings basket and attached what they call the collar pipe.

The thinking that they needed something that would stick out like a guide on a table saw fostered the idea. The L-shaped collar pipe has a 90-degree joint, so that it hangs out 30 inches from the roller on the mower and points to the outside edge of the collar.

As long as the downward pipe is lined up with the outside of the collar, Viera says a green can't be scalped. "It eliminates narrowing of collars and any other cutting problems associated with an operator who does not do the same pass each time," he adds.

The collar pipe, which can pivot and reverse directions, makes a perfect circle, Viera says, adding: "It's like the pivot point on a compass. As long as you have the pipe lined up, you can't stray from that orbit. Sometimes you see a triangular cut of grass in the cleanup, but we never have that here anymore."

Noting that operators normally "freehand" the cleanup cuts so that they're never the same, Viera says another key besides the dedicated mower is a dedicated person on that mower.

"This type of innovation enables us to design the bunkers and other features closer to the putting surface," says Steve Smyers, the architect of Four Streams. "This allows these features to fit more in context with one another and also allows for the development of greater strategy and risk-reward."

Asked how they got the idea, Viera replies, "Out of necessity."

Perhaps the old saying — "necessity is the mother of invention" — is true. ■

Problem

Scalped greens damage grass, arouse angry comments from golfers and create myriad headaches for superintendents.

Solution

Create a "collar pipe" that guides the mower around the edge of the green like a guide on a table saw. The device has eliminated scalping at Four Streams Golf Club, according to the superintendent.

Leslie is a freelance writer from Monmouth, Maine.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Slow Play Kills Revenues Quickly

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD

Compounding the silliness of narrowing and lengthening courses is the impact of unregulated technology on modern golf's problems of slower play.

More than a few owners can probably relate to Cog Hill Country Club owner and operator Frank Jemsek's slow-play-related revenue declines. In the busy summer months, his courses are getting less play — not because golfers have lost interest in the Lemont, Ill., facility, but because so many players tire of waiting for greens to clear.

Armed with hot balls and drivers, many golfers are now able to drive the green on a short par 4 or get home in two on a par 5. These shot types prevent golfers from playing holes in a timely fashion because they have to wait until the players in front of them have finished on the green. This slowdown backs up all of the golfers behind them.

The waiting also means tee times need more space between them, and with Cog Hill rounds taking longer and only so much sunlight in the day, some customers are being turned away while others are forced to play fewer than 18 holes. Not only does waiting lead to fewer rounds on busy days, golfers leave the course dissatisfied with their rounds. But the waiting problem isn't relegated to Cog Hill — it has affected the professional ranks, too.

In 2003, the PGA Tour instituted a new set of guidelines and fines for players "put on the clock" too many times. The Tour practically jumped for joy when the average 2003 round decreased by 10 minutes to — get this — just four hours and 37 minutes, and that's with no lost balls.

At the recent Honda Classic, a new course debuted and featured thought-provoking green complexes created by antistrategist Tom Fazio. Jay Delsing opened the third round as a single and took a mind-boggling three hours and 23 minutes to complete a round by himself. The rest of the field played in twosomes and took more than 4.5 hours to finish 18 holes. Yes, the players are slow, but unregulated technology has thrown designs out of whack, adding more of those painful five- and 10-minute waits.

COMPOUNDING THE SILLINESS OF NARROWING AND LENGTHENING COURSES IS THE IMPACT OF UNREGULATED TECHNOLOGY ON THE PACE OF PLAY

At the Nissan Open this year, every group waited for the par-4 10th green to clear (that rarely used to happen). Just a few years ago, the course's back nine par 5s were only reachable in two by a few players. Now just about every group waits for those greens to clear.

The overall effect of the tepid play is brutal. Crowds are bored, players look numb and perhaps it's not a surprise that attendance is flat everywhere you look outside Phoenix and the Majors.

In contrast, John Daly, Luke Donald and Chris Riley provided a glimpse into the world of fast play during the 2004 Buick Invitational's sudden-death playoff. Each pulled their clubs and played — no pacing, no twitching, no backing off, no painful preshot routine and, most of all, no waiting.

Faced with declining 2004 television ratings, PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem was asked by *Golfweek* to name his favorite moment of the "West Coast Swing."

Finchem instead pointed out what was not his No. 1 moment: "I picked on Chris Riley about this. If he makes the putt at 18 in San Diego (in his playoff against John Daly at the Buick Invitational), we go into the *60 Minutes* time frame [and] our ratings go up probably a full point. Chris crushed me."

Sliding into the *60 Minutes* time slot may allow the PGA Tour to convince networks that their "product" is healthy. But a full point ratings bump won't help the rest of golf. Fewer waits and faster rounds will.

But as long as technology goes unregulated, the slow play problem will only get worse.

Geoff Shackelford's latest book is The Future of Golf in America: How Golf Lost its Way in the 21st Century, and How to Get it Back. *He can be reached at geoffshackelford@aol.com.*

TURFGRASS TRENDS

DISEASE MANAGEMENT

Research Defines Dead Spot More Clearly

By J.E. Kaminski and P.H. Dernoeden

In 1998, researchers at the University of Maryland discovered a new disease of creeping bentgrass caused by an unidentified species of *Ophiosphaerella*. Through morphological and molecular study, it was shown that the pathogen constituted a new species, *Ophiosphaerella agrostis*, and the disease was named bentgrass dead spot. Subsequently, *O. agrostis* was found in Texas and Florida causing dead spots in hybrid bermudagrass greens. The disease is now referred to as dead spot.

In creeping bentgrass grown on putting greens, dead spot appears initially as small, dime-sized spots that may increase up to 3 inches to 4 inches in diameter. During early stages of disease development, the spots are reddish-brown and often are confused with other turfgrass diseases such as dollar spot, copper spot and microdochium patch. Spots also may be mistaken for damage from black cutworms or ballmarks, which commonly are found on putting greens.

Among commercial creeping bentgrass cultivars, dead spot generally was most severe in L-93, Penn A-1, A-4, G-1, G-6, Imperial and Providence.

In the later stages of dead spot development, grass in the center of the spots becomes tan, while leaves in the outer edge appear reddish-brown. Patches may be distributed throughout the putting green or localized, and generally do not coalesce. Spots often form depressions or pits and may severely reduce the quality and playability of the putting surface.

Active dead spot infection centers generally appear in areas with full sun and good air circulation. Initially, *O. agrostis* infection centers occur predominantly along ridges, on mounds and south-facing slopes of greens. These areas generally are associated with higher soil temperatures and often are the first to exhibit drought symptoms. The aforementioned conditions generally result in higher levels of plant stress and may reduce the defense capabilities of bentgrass plants.

Dead spot only has been found on newly constructed greens or on older greens that were fumigated with methyl bromide. The disease generally develops within one to two years of establishment, but outbreaks have been observed in creeping bentgrass greens less than 1 year old and as old as 6.

With few exceptions, dead spot is most severe during the first year of symptom

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expression. The disease then enters a decline phase which may last from one to three years. All newly constructed greens affected by dead spot had sand as the primary soil medium. Occasionally, dead spot was found on sand-based bentgrass collars and tees, indicating that O. agrostis can attack creeping bentgrass maintained at higher mowing heights. Dead spot, however, has not been found on fairways or other sites where bentgrass turf was grown on native soil.

Biological aspects

On golf courses in the mid-Atlantic region, dead spot symptoms may appear as early as May, but disease activity generally is most severe between July and August.

In a growth-chamber study, winter-dormant creeping bentgrass field samples showing symptoms of dead spot were incubated at temperatures ranging from 59 degrees Fahrenheit to 86 degrees Fahrenheit. After 12 days to 28 days of incubation, disease reactivation occurred at temperatures more than or equal to 68 degrees Fahrenheit, but dead-spot severity was greatest at temperatures between 77 degrees Fahrenheit and 86 degrees Fahrenheit. Similarly, in-vitro studies revealed that the optimum temperatures for mycelia growth of

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TABLE 1

Bentgrass dead-spot infection centers for 20 field-grown *Agrostis spp.* selections, College Park, Md., between 2000 and 2002.*

Cultivar	Bentgrass species	Infection centers per plot[x]					
		2000		2001		2002[y]	
		6 Sept	29 Nov	15 May	16 Aug	18 July	16 Aug
ABT-CRB-1	creeping	27a-d[z]	11b-e	9bcd	3ab	6abc	22abc
Backspin	creeping	18cde	6fgh	6cde	2bcd	2ef	12c-f
BAR AS 8US3	creeping	21b-e	7d-h	7bcd	2bcd	5a-f	18a-d
BAR CB 8FUS2	creeping	22b-e	10b-e	11ab	2bcd	3c-f	12c-f
Bardot	colonial	32ab	6e-h	4ef	1cd	2def	9def
Bavaria	velvet	8f	4h	2f	0d	2def	4f
Century	creeping	27a-d	14bc	11ab	3ab	6abc	22abc
Crenshaw	creeping	17def	5gh	6de	1bcd	2ef	6ef
Imperial	creeping	33ab	9c-g	8bcd	1cd	4b-f	15b-e
L-93	creeping	37a	11bcd	10abc	2abc	8ab	26a
Penn A-1	creeping	33ab	15bc	11ab	3ab	9a	25ab
Penn A-2	creeping	23b-e	8d-h	8bcd	2bcd	5a-f	17a-d
Penn A-4	creeping	29a-d	15b	12ab	3abc	5a-e	15b-e
Penn G-1	creeping	25a-e	10b-f	8bcd	2abc	3c-f	10def
Penn G-6	creeping	29abc	8d-h	9bcd	1bcd	4b-f	23ab
Penncross	creeping	14ef	6e-h	7bcd	1cd	2ef	7ef
Pennlinks	creeping	17def	7d-h	5de	2bcd	1f	5ef
Providence	creeping	24a-e	11b-e	11ab	3abc	4c-f	9def
SR1119	creeping	22b-e	10b-f	11ab	2bcd	3c-f	18a-d
SR7200	velvet	32ab	24a	14a	5a	6a-d	12c-f

*Numbers that have the same letters next to them are statistically the same.

[x] Data were transformed (y+.5), but pre-transformed means are shown.

[y] Bentgrass dead spot fully recovered in the autumn of 2001 and data from 2002 represent new infection centers.

[z] Means in a column followed by the same letter are not significantly different (P £ .05) based on the protected least significant difference multiple mean comparison test.