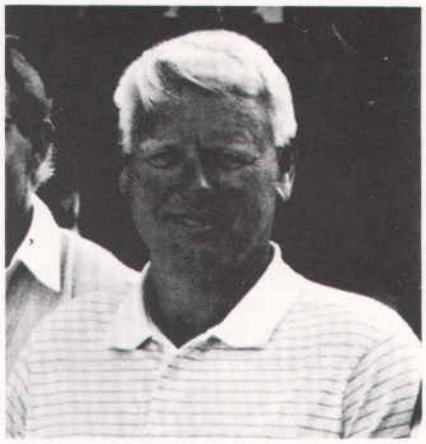

A Player's Perspective

Fast Greens; A Reply to Your Editor

By Dr. David Cookson

Your editor requests my comment on his editorial in the last issue of this magazine relating to fast greens. His argument, projected in flowery prose and excited hyperbole, was basically that the desire to increase green speed carried to extremes may result in turf damage, and that the gains in achieving a high stimpmeter reading do not justify the time and effort involved.

My first thought on reading Mr. Miller's essay is that he is not talking about any place that I have been lately, and is in effect creating a bogey man where really none exists. I counted up the number of different golf courses I personally played on last year throughout the country, reaching a count of fifty. Not one of these courses approached the kind of greens my editor is lambasting; in fact, my most common experience was greens far too slow to create the most enjoyable playing conditions. Yes, we all read about "lightning fast greens," but I don't see them in ordinary play anywhere—maybe occasionally in major tournaments (Oakmont, Augusta National sometimes), and even twice recently in our own state events—but these are rare exceptions to a general rule of greens too slow to be fun to play on.

It is an inborn genetic trait of green superintendents to worry excessively about potential problems before they occur, and Mr. Miller's overblown concern about the myriad of diseases that **might** happen to fast greens is one example. The above mentioned Oakmont greens—"lightning fast" for over fifty years, still exhibit a healthy turf; and you can't tell me that fast greens have shown any more disease than those excessively thatched, over watered, over fertilized greens most of our golf courses have exhibited for the past decades, and about which tomes have been written concerning diseases known to propagate all the time in such a setting.

Yes, Monroe; it does take a little extra effort to increase green speed. But isn't the green superintendent's job to get his golf course, including greens, in the best playable condition possible—and if it takes extra effort the top green superintendent will do it. I submit that green speed sufficient to allow the ball to roll naturally without abruptly stopping as it begins to slow is the mark of an excellent playing surface giving maximal enjoyment to all players, and **does** mean increased quality. I decry my editor's dismissal of this concept as "macho" or "false bravado."

This year I have again become green chairman at my club after several years hiatus. We strive for fast (and fair) greens, and early this season, before growth had begun, they were too fast for a brief period. Nobody complained; but lately the speed has become slower, and I am besieged with comments from members about our too slow (stimpmeter 8'6") greens, even from 20 to 30 handicappers. The moral of the story is not, as Monroe suggests, that members are "disgusted and frustrated" by fast greens, but that once used to greens of proper speed, they vociferously object to a lessening of green surface quality.

I can agree with Mr. Miller on one thing, sloping greens with severe undulations can become too fast— and a stimpmeter reading of 10'6" on a flat green may be fair while 9' may be too fast for sloping greens on another course. Common sense, not a stimpmeter reading, suggests the proper criterion for green speed on a slope; if the ball putted from below the hole to the cup starts to roll back down the hill after it stops its forward motion, then the green is too fast and unfair. I agree in rare tournament situations this simple truism has been ignored, and it should not have been. Still, the greater problem in Wisconsin and indeed all over, is not excessive green speed, but greens that are too slow; and I am concerned that the recent flurry of articles similar to Mr. Miller's in various trade publications will lead to a backward move and slow the welcome recent trend to better and quicker green surfaces. I think that would be a tragic mistake.

David Cookson