



USGA

United States
Golf Association

Green Section
Great Lakes Region



Mr. Monroe Miller, Editor
The Grass Roots
P.O. Box 5129
Madison, WI 53705

Dear Monroe:

Dr. Cookson's observations (Grass Roots, January/February 1993) on the greens at Pebble Beach during the 1992 U.S. Open were entirely correct, according to Tim Moraghan, the USGA Agronomist for Championships and superintendent Ed Miller. The wind problem was not unusual and was taken in stride by the golf course staff. Incidentally, the contract between the USGA and the organization hosting USGA Championships gives the host the right to protect the course, turf and all, during the event. That includes any irrigation thought necessary by the superintendent as well as stopping play to syringe greens.

I must, however, differ with other statements in the letter, specifically his opinion on having ultra-fast greens as a daily routine. Grass must have an adequate amount of leaf surface in order for photosynthesis to create the energy required for growth. The closer greens are mown, the less the surface area. Fortunately bentgrass, Poa annua and bermudagrass will tolerate defoliation to a surprising degree, but there is a limit to this when the other factors involved in high Stimpmeter readings on a daily basis are considered.

It is one thing to have fast, firm greens for a week of Championship play—after two or three years of intensive preparation—and another to provide these conditions on a daily basis and without regard to uncontrollable weather, the condition of the soil, or the environment at the green site (shade, etc.). It is noteworthy that the Open is played in late June, usually on bentgrass. The date allows recovery from winter damage and is before high temperature stresses usually begin.

I know that many superintendents can and do produce these super conditions, but broad brush statements about all courses under any conditions are ill-advised simply because some operations do not have the growing conditions, finances, etc. necessary to avoid damage to the greens. Furthermore, not all golfers prefer fast greens (or closely mown fairways). Recently, frequent rolling operations have been added to close mowing to obtain greens even limber than fast and firmer than firm. This soil compaction puts even more stress on root systems already limited by defoliation. It is being postulated by some plant pathologists that "high speed stress" may be an indirect cause of the appearance of new disease problems. Remember that the bacterial blight of Toronto bentgrass did not kill the collars of the infected greens—only the closely mown putting surfaces. Today, "new" soil-borne diseases are taking their toll of green quality as well as the budgets of courses where green speed is everything.

The speed syndrome has been taken up by late afternoon golfers who resent the fact that as grass grows, a green slows. At the last Senior Open at Oakland Hills, Stimpmeter readings at 6:30 a.m. were a consistent 10.5 feet, but at 5:30 p.m. they were 9.5 feet. What to do?

This letter was not intended to be this lengthy, but it is impossible to reply to broadsides without giving some abbreviated rationale behind the rebuttal. While some adequately financed superintendents live "on the edge," the less fortunate cannot, but their golfers do not know, or refuse to recognize, the difference.

Speed Kills!

Sincerely,
Jim Latham