



THE LONG STIMPMETER

By Monroe S. Miller

Summer sort of smacked me right in the face early this morning. Some people think the early time of the day—dawn—is cool and pleasant. They obviously don't get up early often enough to know the truth.

It had rained pretty steady for three days and finally, this morning, it had stopped. The heavy air remained, moist with humidity.

The grass on our seventh fairway was covered with dew, and as my eyes surveyed the valley that divides the course east and west the mist rolled in like a fog from the ocean.

Already it was hot, and when the sun came out it would be miserable. Three days worth of uncut grass was trouble, no matter how you cut it. Clipping harvest is something we always do, but three days of growth coming off at once would make every mowing job take an unreasonable amount of time.

Fortunately, our course is well drained and the large ponds and puddles of water left quickly. I expected the crew would be out almost immediately, working around the few really wet areas that might remain.

Players who have been cooped up in the clubhouse for three days expect to play the minute the rain stops, making it important to compromise when you can reasonably do so.

The argument wouldn't be over opening or closing—we'd be open. The battle would be fought over carts.

Battle? Well, not really. I simply make the decision I have to and get on with my work for the day. The issue of cart traffic is non-negotiable with this golf course superintendent. Fortunately, most members agree with the philosophy although they often don't like the decision.

Hot and humid weather also brings disease pressure, makes golf course employees a little grumpy and causes clouds of mosquitoes to appear everywhere. This wasn't likely to be a fun day.

Worst of all, for me at least, is the issue of slow greens that comes with humid weather in the dead of summer.

That is why I'd decided to send extra walkers out so that we could cut the greens twice right away.

Driving my golf car carefully, I took a quick tour of the course, seeing nothing unexpected or unusual. Just a lot of long grass.

Everybody was rolling into work as I crossed the railroad tracks. My shirt was already soaked and I hadn't done anything but drive the course (which is what my crew says I do all the time anyway!).

It's an impressive sight—equipment and mowers lined up, fueled, adjusted and ready for 16 people. Dave started his day earlier than anyone else, and at 5:50 a.m. one can see he has done half a day's work already.

Rain filled days can be a major hassle in the life of a golf course superintendent. Most would prefer gentle rain that begins at dusk and ends at dawn.

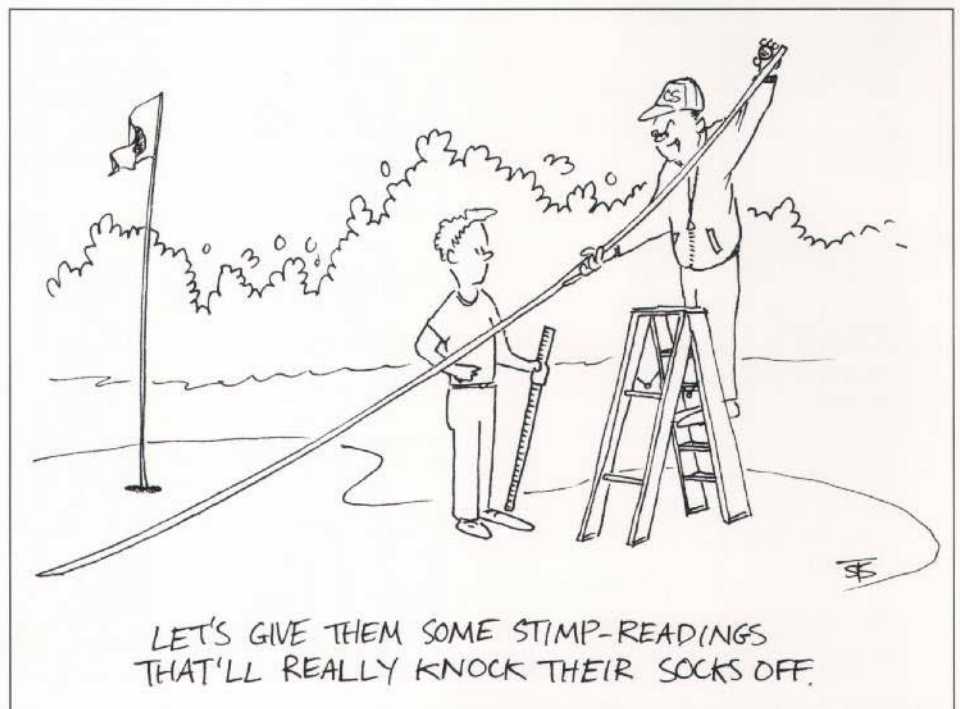
On the other hand, three days free from the golf course responsibilities give us a chance at some serious housecleaning.

You could see that today. The machinery sparkled, the shopyard was so tidy that you would never guess the activity it normally handles, and the shop itself was cleaner than the day it was built. I was pretty proud.

Once our young staff had individual assignments and took off for the course, the shop was quiet again. I poured myself a cup of coffee while Chad and Dave each popped open a Coke. We held our usual powwow, reviewing what we hoped would happen on this very uncomfortable summer day in Wisconsin.

Chad went out for a closer look for any disease and to make certain everybody was doing what they were supposed to be. He also had a selection of signs to use to direct golf cars away from wet areas. Nobody yet can

(Continued on page 21)



(Continued from page 19)

figure why bright and successful people lose all common sense when they get behind the wheel of a golf car. I simply accepted that fact a long time ago and nowadays try to herd traffic where damage will be the least.

Dave readied equipment for the second round of work that would happen after the mid-morning break.

And, as happens a lot of mornings, I went to my office to get a stimpmeter to check some greens after they were cut. I expected some grousing today about slow grass, despite the fact that all the walkers had just been sharpened and backlapped.

No sooner had I started down the hill toward the course a horn blew. I turned around to see who or what it was. A jet black Ford three-quarter ton pickup had pulled up to our shop—I knew it was Sandy Grant.

"What in the world is he doing here?" I thought to myself. He had someone with him, someone with trooper shades on. The passenger door opened and out stumbled Bogey Calhoun.

Now I was really curious. "What are you characters up to?" I asked with

some sarcasm. "Don't you have any work to do?"

Sandy hitched his jeans up, put on a pair of sunglasses and strolled down toward my cart. Bogey wandered into the shop for a few minutes. He's one of the nosiest people I have ever met and I swear that every time he comes over he checks out what is going on in our buildings. I didn't mind terribly although at times his brashness is annoying.

"Mendota Bay is so wet that we will never open for play today," Sandy offered as he got closer. "I returned some Milorganite I had borrowed from Bogey. He helped me unload it and when I told him I was coming over here, he asked to ride along. You know how he is."

By then Bogey was standing next to my cart.

"What's the deal, Bogey?" I asked. "Is Shady Dell CC closed today, too?"

"No, we're open for walkers. But there is so damn much grass to cut that nobody will get in any trouble if I am gone for a little while. There didn't seem to be any disease active earlier, so I figured I could afford to see how you're doing."

The stimpmeter was on the seat next to me. The "nose" had to ask me what I was going to do with it.

"I'm going to use it as a pry bar to raise a sprinkler head. What the hell do you think I'm going to use it for, Bogey?"

"That is about all it is good for. After all that rain and the humidity, you should know all greens around Wisconsin will be lagging today."

"I'm aware of that," I replied with some irritation. "I just want to know for myself. I am going to see how much roll I'll get with the second cut I am making this morning."

"You're lucky that's how you get to use it," Sandy said, finally coming into the conversation. "I have to post daily stimpmeter readings in the vestibule outside the pro shop entrance. It's a stressful, miserable responsibility."

Bogey groaned. "That's ridiculous," he said. "The thing wasn't designed to foster fast greens competition among clubs, but that is what has happened in some places. Like here in town."

Sandy and Tom Morris were the two I knew who had to post daily stimp readings. I suspected there were more.

The fast grass syndrome has affected most areas but seemed con-

Spending too much time in the rough?



Hanley's of Sun Prairie will get you back on the course fast with the Cushman 6150 Wing Rotary Mower.

The Cushman 6150 can mow at 7 m.p.h. with 1, 2, or 3 decks. It can cut up to 7 acres per hour with up to 10' 7" cutting width. Zero turning and fold up wings gives it maneuverability. It offers four wheel drive performance, and is easy to operate and service. The 14 m.p.h. transport speed will get you on and off the job fast.

Get in and out of the rough fast - Call Hanley's.

Hanley

Power Equipment & Turf Sales
641 W. Main Street • Sun Prairie, WI 53590
(608) 837-5111 • (608) 257-7815
Toll Free 1-800-279-1422



CUSHMAN
Driven to be the best.

centrated in larger metro areas among the private clubs.

"They all want braggin' rights," Bogey claimed as we visited more about the prospect of fast greens in hot and humid and wet weather like this. "The stimpmeter is an accomplice in the fast greens contest some clubs have entered," Bogey said.

Of course we all know how the stimpmeter evolved and what its intentions originally were—a management tool. Somehow that has been only a part of its use.

"Have you heard the story about the stimpmeter and the British Open?" I asked Bogey and Sandy. Neither had.

"Shaig Logan, the late greenkeeper at Muirfield Golf Club in Southpoint, England, was handed a stimpmeter before the British Open began there a number of years ago. Logan looked at it and appeared dumfounded.

"What's this for?" he asked.

Somebody told him it was used to measure the speed of the greens.

"Why would I want to do that?" he asked.

So all the greens have the same speed he was told.

"Why would I want to do that?" Logan asked.

So the sixth green isn't faster than the fifth, the twelfth isn't slower than the eleventh, and so on, he was told.

"Laddie," Logan said, "that's why you plan a practice round."

I thought Bogey and Sandy were going to cry they laughed so hard.

"Wouldn't it be super if that is what we went back to doing?" Sandy asked.

"That is a good story, fellas," Bogey said. "But here's one for you that I witnessed with my own eyes."

He went on. "A few years ago—actually, quite a few—a USGA Green Section agronomist was invited to a gathering of superintendents to try to soothe over their anger about all the troubles this new fangled implement had foisted upon them.

"When he was all done—and a lot of those in the audience didn't buy what he was saying—he was called back to the podium to receive a small gift as thanks for driving over to speak. The gift? A brand new stimpmeter and a five pound jar of Vasoline. The implications were obvious!"

"I have heard that story, Bogey, and wondered if there was any truth to it. Now I know." It was a story I have wanted to repeat but couldn't since I was sure of its veracity.

"It is true," Bogey replied. "I saw it

with my own eyes."

"Well," Sandy slowly started, "I've got a little less dramatic story to tell, but it shows how frustrating the fascination some players have with green speed can be for a golf course superintendent. I would just as soon neither of you repeats this story. It quickly becomes part of the gossip mill."

"We won't," Bogey and I replied at the same instant. We wanted to hear more.

"You both know how quiet and deliberate Tom Morris is. Well, I've got a surprise for you—I have seen him when he was madder than a wet hornet.

"I was standing inside his shop, outside his office door, one afternoon a few years ago. He drove up to the shop quickly in a Cushman, shut it off and before he took a full step he launched his stimpmeter into the shop. It looked like a boomerang until it hit the far wall and fell to the concrete floor with a loud, hollow clang.

"Tom didn't see me and I didn't say anything. Too surprised, I guess.

"He went over, picked it up and in one move banged it into the big vise on the workbench that went from one corner of the shop to the other. With his other hand he spun the jaws tightly shut with the stimpmeter parallel to the ground. The vice clamped it on the ball end.

"Tom stepped over, carefully unraveled the oxygen and acetylene hoses, screwed the cutting tip onto the torch and lit the flame. He then put the face protection on, snapped the green visor down and turned the oxygen up. He had one helluva a flame.

"And then, with full deliberation, he cut the stimpmeter in two. Sparks and molten aluminum were jumping from the bar. When the unclamped end hit the floor, he flipped up the green visor and took the face protection off. He turned the oxygen down carefully and then shut off the acetylene.

"A look of smug satisfaction came across his face. He glanced over and saw me."

"How long have you been there?" he asked.

"Long enough to see you know how to use a cutting torch. What are you doing?" I asked.

"Tom went on to tell me the green committee chairman from Maple Leaf had played at Pumpkin Hollow CC and called to report PHCC's greens were faster than MLCC's were. He sent Tom out to stimp theirs and insisted he call back with the numbers.

"Tom did what he was told, but before he called he cut the stimpmeter into two pieces. He told me 'now I'll have a few days of peace. It will take three weeks to get another stimpmeter from Far Hills.'"

Bogey and I got a kick out of the story but really felt sorry for Tom and the frustration that caused him to do something totally out of his character.

I considered telling my friends a true story that would top theirs. It was better than anything a premier fiction writer could dream up. It was so good I decided to share it but leave the superintendent nameless.

"Listen up, guys, you won't want to miss a word of this. I'm not going to tell you who did this, so don't ask me or bug me about it. Suffice to say he is someone you all know, and the course he manages is top notch. You've both been there.

"His green committee chairman hounded him until he got his request—his own stimpmeter.

"The superintendent was constantly hassled about green speed and only half cooperated with the stimpmeter posting. It was a classic case of being caught between the bark and the wood—complaining if you do post and the numbers aren't big enough, and complaining when you don't post at all. What was supposed to be a daily task might have gotten done twice a week.

"And on those days he did post, there was usually a lot of complaining, which made him even more reluctant

NATURAL ATHLETIC TURF INC.

GOLF COURSE CONSTRUCTION

Specializing in

Greens — Tees — Bunkers

Drainage Systems

Also: ASTROTURF CH-4

"DRAG MATS"

By Contract or "T & M" Basis

ROY G. ZEHREN

(414) 242-5740

11040 N. Buntrock Ave.
Mequon, WI 53092

to post the green speeds. And he refused to fudge the numbers.

"That's what led the chairman to insist on his own stimpmeter to carry in his golf bag.

"Well, he got his own stimpmeter. In fact, he got one of a kind. Seems our buddy spent a fair amount of time that previous winter having a "special" stimpmeter made at a machine shop.

"It was almost exactly like the real McCoy—a machining process was used that even resulted in the same surface striations. He figured out how to match the burnished color of the aluminum used in the USGA model. The bevel was perfect and the ball released at the same precise angle of an original.

"There was one small difference—it was six inches longer! It wasn't enough to notice—when he showed it

to me and asked if I saw anything different, it looked the same as mine.

"Man oh man, did that extra length add to the ball roll! He picked up well over a foot.

"The fact that the readings were made and subsequently posted by the green committee chairman gave full credibility to the numbers.

"Immediately, the bitching and griping stopped. The greens weren't any faster, but the numbers were bigger.

"It was a huge risk to take, and you have to admire his courage. He has a near permanent albeit subtle smile on his face. His life is better; the players think he is a hero these days. And all he had to do was lengthen his stimpmeter!"

The guys accused me of fiction. "I couldn't make anything that good up in my mind," was my honest reply.

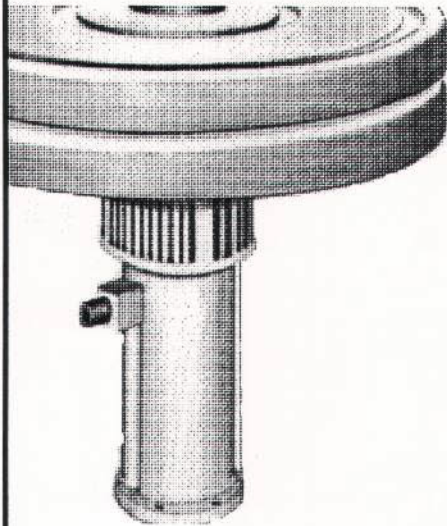
It seemed to us there was justice. The stimpmeter was designed to give an empirical method of measuring green speed that would discount opinion. A handful of golfers at many golf facilities seem bent on perverting that pure and helpful intent.

And leave it to a resourceful superintendent to overcome the unreasonable even irresponsible demands of a small minority of players. He did it in a way that was painless for him, the golfers and, most of all, the golf course. We didn't even think about the insignificant "ethics" that might be in play.

So Sandy, Bogey and I headed back to the shop. Despite the oppressive heat and humidity, we were in a good mood that would last all day.

I had a feeling the stimpmeters were going to stay on the shelf for a few days. ♣

Troubled waters



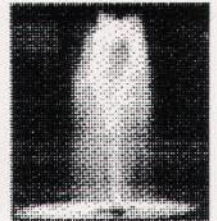
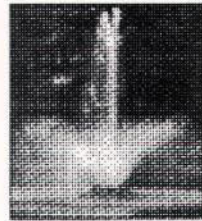
Reinders

OTTERBINE AERATORS

The prescription for troubled breathing, poor circulation and changing temperatures in ponds and lakes is practical engineering that is aesthetically pleasing. These aerators range in power, circulating from 600,000 to 20 million gallons of water in a 24-hour period. Each complete, turnkey system is delivered fully assembled; no special pumps or foundations are required.

Striking patterns begin with the Starburst, Rocket, Sunburst, Constellation, or Phoenix working alone or mingled together. Add the Otterbine Fountain

IRRIGATION SUPPLY
13400 Watertown Plank Rd.,
Elm Grove WI 53122-0825



Glo™ lighting system for spectacular evening display as well as security or the Rock Float Cover for the illusion of natural spray.



Otterbine Aerators meet the water management needs of golf courses, parks, recreational lakes, office developments, and residential condominiums.

800-782-3300