

When It Comes to Green Speed — Be Specific!

USGA

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Editor's Note: This is a topic discussed with other superintendents, but one that hasn't been written about extensively. It is valuable information, especially in the context Larry writes about. I saw it on the June 27th, 2005 USGA Green Section regional updates and appears with permission.

Psst! Want to know a great secret that is being used by golf course superintendents all over the Pacific Northwest? This secret has allowed some to raise mowing heights, create smoother surfaces without causing more stress, and keep the green speeds desired by their golfers. Specifically, it is called "site specific" rolling and golfers in the Pacific Northwest (and other portions of the country) cannot tell the difference in their greens, other than they are healthier and seem to play better.

The idea of site specific rolling (rolling only 20' - 30' around the holes rather than the entire green) makes perfect sense when research on this subject (Michigan State University, 2002) showed that rolling entire greens more than three times weekly can cause problems with wear. By changing holes on a regular basis and rolling only the portion of the green around the hole six times weekly, the entire green is rolled only one to two times weekly based on green size. Here are the positives that have been reported that can also be applied to your course to minimize stress on the turf and the golf course superintendent:

1. Improved smoothness with increased rolling.

How many times do superintendents hear that the greens are "bumpy" or not fast enough? Unfortunately, this oft-heard refrain is often due to a bad day with the putter; however, increased rolling will improve what is really needed for putting greens - a smoother and firmer surface. Focusing efforts in the area where players can truly tell the difference in speed results in less complaints concerning green speed as players cannot tell the difference of six inches to one foot in green speed when striking a 40' - 50' putt over a non-rolled area. It is when the ball slows near the hole when players generally judge both green speed and smoothness.

2. Less time for the rolling operation. Many golf course superintendents report that site specific rolling is the perfect (and only) answer when an early morning shotgun requires rapid preparation. To date, no golfer has been able to notice

the difference when entire greens are rolled compared to 20' - 30' around the hole. However, greens that have excess organic material near the surface during wet weather could provide noticeable differences.

3. The ability to raise mowing heights for healthier turf. With the many different aeration units now at the disposal of the golf course superintendent, the potential negative of increased rolling on some portions of the greens can be offset with spiking, small tine aeration, or other forms of aeration. Most importantly, if you begin rolling greens five to six times weekly in a site specific manner, the mowing heights on the greens can be raised slightly while green speeds will remain at desired levels. This slight increase in mowing height (one superintendent reported going from under 0.100 to 0.125 and keeping the same speed with greater smoothness) can have a very positive impact on rooting depth and summer turf survival. With *Poa annua* dominated surfaces this is definitely a step in the right direction.

If you are faced with an ever-increasing demand for green speed, be specific to provide positive results for your golfers and your turf. ♣



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