

# TRIPLEX FAIRWAY MOWING THE SUPERINTENDENT'S VIEWPOINT

by

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You've all no doubt heard about the idea, or read about it in the February 1983 issue of Golf Course Management or the January-February issue of the USGA Green Section Record; but you, like us at Interlachen, wondered if what they were all saying could possibly be real. The concept of triplex fairway mowing; and, heaven help us, clipping removal, brought lots of jeers and snickers from turf managers in the area. But, after personally conducting a survey of several clubs already incorporating the procedure into their maintenance program, we aren't snickering any longer.

Our primary purpose for conducting the survey was to investigate the rumor that triplex mowed fairway turf experienced an increase in the percentage of bentgrass and to get a handle on just what changes would have to be made in our present maintenance program to accommodate triplex mowing. I sent out 17 survey forms to clubs in Ohio, New York, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Illinois and received only eleven responses back. The survey data can't be considered all-inclusive and certainly not scientifically substantiated; but, we definitely noticed a trend in all eleven responses we did receive. For example, all clubs were removing clippings at least a portion of the season; all experienced an increase in their bentgrass population; on the average, fairway acreage was reduced; all noticed a marked increase in labor requirements and all had budgets of over \$ 200,000 per year (18-Hole basis).

We immediately asked ourselves two questions about the program and looked to the survey for answers. Our first

question was why triplex mow fairways anyway? Does the program offer us enough in Minnesota to make the change worthwhile? There appears to be a definite trend in the golf course industry today toward improved fairway quality - the good player wants that "tight" lie similar to that found on a tee or collar. Triplex fairway mowing seems to offer a way to achieve this. The smaller, light-weight machinery used creates less compaction, less wear patterns, less bed knife skuff at low heights of cut, possibly less fungicide and water usage while allowing for easy cross-cutting capability, smooth cuts at heights below 1/2"; neat cutting under more moist or "dew" conditions, and a generally more aesthetically pleasing surface.

Sounds great so far! Our second question was why not triplex mow fairways? What problems will be encountered? As I mentioned earlier, all the responding clubs were removing clippings at least part of the time. A big concern then was disposal of the huge quantity of clippings that were collected. The smaller, higher RPM equipment will not last as long and will undoubtedly require more maintenance over its shortened life. More pieces of equipment will have to be purchased to mow in the same time frame. Direct labor cost will likely increase four-fold. Removal of clippings may affect the long-term soil structure and nitrogen requirements. Almost all clubs already on the program found it necessary to reduce fairway acreage to an average of 30 acres (could be good or bad point). Just making the management changes necessary to incorporate a triplex fairway mowing program might create initial negativity to the idea.

How are those on the triplex mowing regime battling with the "why not" aspects? Many clubs have begun contour mowing fairways. They have traded size for a more strategic layout. Some have traded size of fairways for an attractive intermediate rough. Clipping removal problems and higher labor costs are being traded for improved playability, more bentgrass and aesthetic enhancement. The bottom line of the whole survey, which did satisfy my purpose for conducting it, was that triplex mowing does increase the bentgrass population (at least at those

clubs surveyed) and it does create a more pleasing, "tighter" lie surface which will survive stress periods quite well. One interesting fact extrapolated from the data was that the percentage of bentgrass increase did not change whether clippings were removed all season or just a portion of the season. No one yet knows if a bent increase can be realized on turf where clippings are not removed at all. Another key fact noted was that the bentgrass population increased considerably more on turf cut at 1/2" or under than that cut at over 1/2".

We're rather impressed with the results the program is showing and are sure there are several clubs in Minnesota who are candidates for the program. We might point out that if a club in the area decides to initiate the program, they might consider a year or two of experimentation and a comprehensive evaluation as to the "total" cost for these beautiful, "tight lie", bentgrass fairways. There are many unanswered questions about the program. It appears to be working very well in Ohio, New York, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Illinois; but, will it work as well in Minnesota? Will we get as much bentgrass

increase in an area that nurtures Poa annua so well respectively? We'll have many more answers in a year from now, so stay tuned and best of luck in '83.

## THE VIKINGS' WINTER PARK

by

SAM MONSON  
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Winter Park, named for Max Winter, President, has been the new home of the Minnesota Vikings for the last three years. Included in the fifteen acre complex are the corporate headquarters and training center, 200' x 200' covered artificial field, two full turf football fields, and a maintenance building. The work I handle would be all grounds upkeep, the air structure, and the mechanical portion of the headquarters. The fields being the primary concern at Winter Park, we had some help to start them correctly.

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