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Keith Faber

Suggestions to Heed Regarding the Speed Of Your Greens

One of the best statements on green speed can be found in the 1973 Manual for Championship Preparation by the USGA.

"The greens should not be rolled or cut to the point where a ball could gain speed in putting down all but the severest slopes."

Furthermore, "A player should be able to stop the ball at the hole."

The ball should come to rest within 2 to 3 feet of the hole when putting from above the hole. There are rare occasions where this may not be the case, perhaps on a green where the *obvious* strategy is to keep the ball below the hole, and only a miss-hit shot would end up above the hole.

These guidelines should be followed when setting cutting height and green speed. The speed should be set to represent the average of all 18 holes. If there is only 1 severely sloped green, the speed should not be set to this green. However, 5 or more greens with slopes and undulations would have a definite impact on overall cutting height/green speed.

I recently visited a golf course built in 1921 that has an average green size of less than 5000 sq. ft. and more than 9 of the greens could be considered "undulating." Many areas of the greens are not used for hole locations when cutting heights go below 5/32". When greens are cut so short that flagstick locations are lost, you are essentially robbing the golfer of a good part of the game. This is a shame.

Large, flat expansive greens are most prone to lower cutting heights simply because of their design. Many golfers who complain about slow greens, especially on large greens, lack a quality in their game known as **authority of stroke**. John Jacobs, famous British instructor and former Walker Cup coach, describes this fault in golfers.

"We tend to wave it, coax it, steer it, drag it, jab it, twitch it—anything but *hit it*."

On this type of green, the emphasis should be upon *smoothness* because the distance of the ball travel may be longer.

Imperfections along the line of putt will make it difficult to predict ball direction and roll.

Enter this season with these thoughts in mind and begin to manage the putting surfaces appropriately. Go out on the course with the green committee and go through the above steps. Examine each green and see if there are hole locations that have been sacrificed to the Speed God.

—Jim Connolly, USGA Green Section