

# A Comparison of Bowling Green and Golf Green Maintenance

Lloyd Woods, Greens Consultant  
Victoria, BC.

At first glance, it would seem that the maintenance requirements of golf and lawn bowling greens would be almost identical. However, although there are similarities, the differences are significant and turf managers who have been involved with both agree that bowling greens require the higher level of maintenance to produce an acceptable playing surface.

A bowling green must be fast, level and true if bowlers are to play with self-confidence and finesse. Compared to a golf green, it must be very firm and thatch-free and if the bowls are to run true, the green should be level to within 1/8 inch over its entire area.

Because of the differences between the weight of a golf ball (weighing approx. 2.5 oz) and that of a bowl (weighing up to 3 lb, 8 oz), the stimpmeter cannot be used to give a meaningful measure of the speed or "pace" of a bowling green. Instead, the standard pace measurement - stated in seconds - is the time it takes a bowl to roll from its delivery until it comes to rest at a point 90 feet up the green. Nine seconds is slow, 12 seconds acceptable, and 14 seconds is considered very good for bentgrass green in our climate. The width of draw, that is the amount that the bowl curves during its travel, is related to pace. As the pace increases, draws become wider, up to 10 feet in the case of a 14 second green.

Since a good pace is so important, a great deal of the maintenance effort is directed toward creating a firm surface. This means that thatch production must be kept to a minimum and the thatch which does develop must be removed on a regular basis.

Close, regular mowing reduces thatch production. Typically, bowling greens are mowed four or five times per week at a mowing height of 1/8" or 5/32", as opposed to 3/16" or so for golf greens. Thatching is also controlled by limiting the amount of nitrogen applied. One pound per 1,000 sq. feet per growing month is considered an absolute maximum.

In spite of one's best effort to control it, some thatch will inevitably develop and must be dealt with. Regular topdressing, as is practiced on golf greens to provide a firm surface, is not acceptable on bowling greens for two major reasons:

- 1) repetitive topdressing will in time raise the level of the green relative to the plinth, (the board that runs around the inside of the ditch surrounding the green), and
- 2) sand on the surface of the green damages bowls and makes for unpleasant playing conditions.

The answer, then, is regular dethatching. Weekly verticutting throughout the playing season is needed if a firm fast surface is to be achieved and maintained.

Also, since a dry surface runs faster than a wet one, irrigation must be more disciplined than is the case on golf greens. Of course, this increases the chance of localized dry areas, particularly in the case of sand greens which are built without any peat or other amendments. Therefore, applying the right amount of water is a real balancing act which can be made somewhat easier if wetting agents are used.

Low thatch levels and the use of less water tend to reduce the incident of disease, so preventive use of fungicides is uncommon. However, the same diseases which inflict golf greens are also found on bowling greens from time to time. *Fusarium*, *ophiobolous*, *pythium*, *brown patch*, *dollar spot*, etc., show up on occasion and must be dealt with.

Wear distribution is achieved by moving the rink centre (analogous to moving the cup on golf greens) and the direction of play should be changed regularly. During tournaments and other times of heavy use, the rinks are best moved after every game.

The green must be kept level over its entire 14,400 sq ft area (120' x 120'). Identification of low areas and selective topdressing is required and is usually accomplished before or after the playing season. Core aerating is also limited to the off-season and is an operation that must be done very carefully since there is a chance that the levelness of the surface will be compromised. All holes must be back-filled because areas with incompletely filled holes are prone to sinking.

The maintenance regime of close mowing, dethatching, restricted fertility, and limited water places the green under a great deal of stress, particularly in hot, dry weather and during periods of heavy play. It is indeed a challenge to maintain the turf in a healthy condition. Fortunately the bowling season usually lasts only about six months and the turf gets time for rest and recovery through the winter months, so all is not gloom and doom.

Fortunately too, bowlers seem to be somewhat more tolerant than golfers and will accept playing surfaces which are not particularly green if only the pace is maintained and the draws are wide and true. Of course even with almost perfect playing conditions, lawn bowlers, like golfers, have been known to criticize the green - more so when the result of their game was less than satisfactory!

(Presented at the 1995 WCTA Conference, reproduced with permission from *Turf Line News*)

Harry Shapko - Central Ont.  
Bill Carnochan - West Ont.  
Dave Telfer - East Ont.  
Chuck Demers - North Ont.



**Oseco** INC.

"The turfseed specialists"

P.O. Box 219, Brampton, Ontario L6V 2L2  
Phone 905-846-5080 Fax 905-846-6909  
Phone 800-668-5080

Equipment for professional turf management



**Bannerman** 41 Kelfield Street,  
Rexdale, Ontario M9W 5A3

The home of Sportsturf Magic

George Bannerman  
Ian M. Clark

Telephone 416-247-7875 • Fax 416-247-6540