

Why greens 'flunk'

USGA Mid-Continent

Director Jim Moore proposes

a grading system (like in

school) to point you and your

greens committee members to

a workable greens improve-

ment program.

by RON HALL / Senior Editor

Forget that you're a golf course superintendent and pretend that you're a grade school teacher. Ask your

greens committee members, even golfers at your course, to participate. Your task—all of you—is to grade each and every green on your course.

Do any of your greens deserve an "A"? Mark down a "C" in the column denoting average greens. Hopefully, you don't have many "F's" because if you do...well, as a superintendent, you know what's going to happen.

Why stop there?

James F. Moore, USGA director in Waco, Texas, suggests that the grading also extend to each performance category and stress factor affecting every green. This past winter he worked up a "Greens Performance Rating Sheet" for just that purpose. (See accompanying chart.)

For example, say the fifth green at your course is located on a slight rise with nothing surrounding it except two small bunkers, while the green at hole six, a much smaller green, is in a depression, surrounded on three sides by mature trees.

Which of the two greens is more prone to problems?

You might give the fifth green an "A" or "B" in the categories of "sunlight" and "air

circulation," and a "B" for "size." Meanwhile, the sixth green would probably receive lower grades in all three categories.

While it's unlikely you could upgrade or rebuild the sixth green into an "A" without materially changing its character, you could, perhaps, remove some of the trees or branches, and install fans to improve it a grade or two. That, in fact, may be enough to satisfy your membership.

The Greens Performance Rating Sheet provides two immediate benefits.

It gives you, the superintendent, greater insight into why some greens are so easy to maintain and, conversely, why others are seemingly always in trouble. It demon-



The USGA's Jim Moore says you can educate members with a greens grading system.

Common failures of new greens

Your new greens are suffering and you need answers.

You've been a superintendent long enough to know that there is no specific maintenance formula that you can follow to ensure each green's success, including those built to USGA specifications.

Being a good turf detective, you focus on factors that could be affecting your new greens. You don't limit your thinking to a single cause, but consider combinations of causes, too.

To start the process, James Moore, USGA Mid-Continent Director, offers some trouble-shooting suggestions. You may have others.

► Greens open for play before

they're ready. Tender new grass plants aren't yet strong enough to sustain traffic.

► **Improper or incomplete cultivation** of the green, particularly after seeding or sprigging.

► **Poor location** leading to poor growing conditions. Are your trouble greens located in areas with shade and/or poor air movement?

► **Too much traffic.**

► **Improper fertilization** causing slow establishment. Pay attention to phosphorus. Phosphorus will move through sandy soils.

► **Poor water quality.** It's becoming common as more courses irrigate with treated wastewater.

► **Temperature extremes.** Do bent-grass greens make sense in the Deep South?

► **Pest/disease problems.** They're often associated with other factors such as lack of air movement and heavy traffic. Nematodes will become more of a problem as treatment options shrink.

► **Improper watering.** New greens require more precise irrigation than established greens. Their water requirements change as they mature.

"The first year of a new green's life will probably be the most difficult year of that green for the next 10 years," says Moore. "It's hard to bring in a new green. It's not normal maintenance."

strates that rarely does a single factor cause a green to suffer. It's usually a combination of factors.

But perhaps the bigger benefit is that the rating sheet will act as an educational tool. It will, hopefully, open the eyes of your greens committee and/or membership to the complexities involved in delivering top-quality greens.

"For the first time, you might get them (green committee members) to realize that improving a problem green is not just a matter of buying just one more piece of equipment, or planting the right grass," says Moore. "They'll realize that they have to look at all of the factors on the check list."

Moore says that any superintendent is welcome to use the Greens Performance Rating Sheet, or to adapt it in any way they feel will most help them.

"I cannot emphasize strongly enough the benefit of involving green committee members and golfers in the grading process. If nothing else, it helps drive home the point that successful green management requires their support and understanding," he adds. □

Greens Performance Rating Sheet

Stress Factors	Green Number						etc.	PG
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Sunlight exposure	A	B						
Air circulation	C	B						
Root competition	B-	B-						
Purity of stand (Poa/bent)	B	C						
Disease pressure	B	B-						
Insect pressure	A	D						
Walk on/off	D	C						
Cupping area	C	C						
Size	C	F						
Surface drainage	B	C-						
Internal drainage	B	C						
Irrigation coverage	C	D						
Overall historical performance	B-	C						
Greens construction*	1	2						

*Construction key: 1-USGA Spec Green 2-Modified USGA Green 3-Pushup Green (native soil)

Instructions: Assign a letter grade--A, B, C, D, F--to each performance category or stress factor. Consistency in your ratings is key--as is assigning a grade for each green's overall performance. This will show the combined impact of the various stresses and which greens deserve the most immediate attention.