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Can Well-Maintained Greens Lower Your Scores?

By Jack Moorehouse

I don't often mention green maintenance in my golf lessons. Nor do I often discuss it in my golf tips.

That's because golfers want to talk about hitting the ball instead. But the care and feeding of a club's greens—how they are mowed, watered, fertilized— can have a major impact on a player's golf handicap, especially if he or she plays the same course a lot.

Speed is the key factor when considering green maintenance. Usually, players want a superintendent to increase green speed. It's probably the most frequent request about greens. Occasionally, players want a superintendent to decrease green speed, but these requests are few and far between. Misjudging the speed of a putt can add strokes to a score, as I've mentioned in my golf tips.

The term "green speed" is technically inaccurate. The device measuring "speed" —the USGA Stimpmeter —gauges the distance a ball rolls when released at a controlled speed on a putting surface, not the ball's velocity. To talk about green speed then is a bit of a misnomer. Nevertheless, we continue to use the term when talking about greens. (I even use it when giving golf lessons.) A green with a relatively long ball roll is considered "fast." A green with a relatively short ball roll is said to be "slow."

Ball roll relates to relationship between the initial energy when a putter strikes the ball and the resistance between the ball and the turf's surface, or friction. As the ball rolls across the green, its surface slows it down thanks to friction. A green with high resistance slows a ball down more than a green with low resistance. Moderating friction changes a green's speed.

Environmental factors, such as humidity, can moderate friction and change a green's speed. For example, high humidity increases green speed, a consideration when playing on a hot day. Soil type also influences green speed. Greens made predominately of clay are faster in spring than their sandier counterparts. While superintendents have little or no control over these factors, they have minimal impact on your game.

Management practices, on the other hand, like mowing or irrigation, can make a profound impact on a green, both short-term and long-term. Below is a summary of how some popular management

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practices affect green speed.

Mowing:

An effective way of increasing ball roll in the short-term, mowing has a significant impact on green speed. Decreasing mowing height by only 1/16 inch can increase ball roll from 6 to 10 inches. A similar response occurs when you "double cut" a green (mowing it a second time, perpendicular to the first cut) which can increase ball roll 6 to 12 inches. Mower type also influences green speed. Greens cut with a walk-behind mower are generally 6 to 8 inches fast than greens cut with triplex mowers.

Irrigation

Dry greens are faster than moist or wet greens. Withholding irrigation or decreasing it before an event requiring faster greens will increase ball roll 4 to 8 inches, depending on soil type.

Rolling

Rolling golf greens isn't new, but it's growing in popularity thanks to new research and better equipment. Depending on the type of roller you use, you can increase green speed from 4 to 10 inches, with minimal compaction problems on sand-based greens

Topdressing

Light frequent topdressing with or without vertical mowing or core aerating is common. Topdressing decreases speed for up to 1 week after application, followed by an increase of from 4 to 8 inches (above the speed before topdressing.) Vertical mowing has a similar effect. Core aeration reduces speed initially, and if you don't topdress to fill in the holes, decrease it long term.

Fertility

Decreasing nitrogen fertility will gradually increase ball-roll distance. A decrease in nitrogen fertility of only 10 percent can increase ball roll 8 to 12 percent. The effects may take up to a year to see, however, depending on previous fertility practices. Plant growth regulators can increase ball roll from 4 to 8 inches, depending on product, rate, and frequency of application.

Keep in mind that these factors do not operate independently. Modifying one may require compensation by modifying another.

Next time you play your favorite course be aware of these factors and how they affect a green. Take them into account when putting. Doing so might just help you improve your round and your golf handicap.

Jack Moorehouse is the author of the best-selling book "How To Break 80 And Shoot Like The Pros.

<http://www.howtobreak80.com>

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" He is NOT a golf pro, rather a working man that has helped thousands of golfers from all seven continents lower their handicap immediately.

How To Deal With Sloping Greens

By Jack Moorehouse

Reading slopes correctly is vital to putting well. All putts start out straight, but the green's contour curves the ball. If you're going to improve your putting and lower your golf handicap, then you must learn how to read a green's slope.

Reading a green's slope comes with experience, like a lot of things in golf. The more you play, the better you'll become at it, as I stress in my golf lessons. Nevertheless, there are some proven techniques I've used that will make learning how to deal with sloping greens faster.

Technique #1: Get used to the differences between fast and slow greens The green's slope determines the degree of break on a putt. How much the putt breaks depends on two factors: the ball's speed and the green's speed (In other words, whether the green is fast or slow). In the summer, the ball tends to break more because the grass is shorter than in the winter, making the green faster. In the winter, the ball tends to break less because the grass is longer than in the summer, making the green slower. Take note of how fast or slow the greens are the next time you play. Get used to the difference between them.

Technique#2: Assess the green's slope as you approach it Studying a green as you approach it from the fairway yields a wealth of information, which can prove vital to sinking the shot. In general, a green tends to slope more one way than another does. Take an overview of the green as you approach it to determine its slope. Note which way it slopes. Also, check to see if the grass is cut with the putt, in which case the grass will appear lighter, or against the putt, in which case the grass will appear darker.

Technique #3: Practice putting long-range Learning to make long-range putts is difficult enough without adding slopes or borrows. Adding slopes between the ball and the hole takes long range putting to another level of difficulty. The best way to learn how to putt in this situation is to practice it. Try this drill to improve your long-range putting. Stand on one side of the green and putt the ball all the way over to the other side. Try to get the ball as close to the green's fringe as possible, without going off the green Make a game of it with your friends.

Technique #4: Play every putt as if it were straight One way to deal with slopes is to play every putt as if it were straight. This approach seems contradictory, but Greg Norman relies on it when dealing with a sloping green. Norman, one of the tour's top money winners, uses this method when confronted with a sloping green. And he's not the tour that does. When dealing with a sharply sloping green, identify the putt's breaking point—the exact spot wide of the hole indicating the amount of break the ball will take. Then putt the ball straight to it.

Technique #5: Deaden the impact on downhill putts Most golfers would rather putt a ball uphill than

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downhill, especially on a fast green. But if you play a lot of golf, you'll face a downhill putt on a fast green sooner or later. One way to do this is to hit the ball off the putter's toe or off the putter's heel, close to the hosel. Either way deadens the ball enough so you can take a somewhat normal putting stroke without hitting the ball well past the hole. Which approach you adopt is a matter of personal choice.

These five strategies on dealing with sloping greens will help you learn to read the slopes on greens faster. But no golf instruction, whether golf lesson or golf tip, can teach you how to putt well. Only practice can do that. Remember improving your putting is the fastest way to lower your scores and your golf handicap.

Jack Moorehouse is the author of the best-selling book "How To Break 80 And Shoot Like The Pros

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