

# ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

## Those Were The Good Old Days!

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**R**EMEMBERING HOW things were back in the "good old days" is a common pastime. Among golfers, a favorite and commonly heard sentiment is, "I remember how fast our greens were back in the good old days. I sure wish they were that fast today. I just don't understand why our superintendent can't get them that fast."

The fact is, putting green speeds were *not* faster years ago. Here's proof.

For one thing, it was not until the 1970s that greensmower bedknives could be purchased that were less than  $\frac{3}{16}$ " thick. Since the thickness of a bedknife determines the minimum cutting height to which a putting green mower can be set, it is clear that a  $\frac{3}{16}$ "-thick bedknife would drag on the ground if the height were set at anything less than  $\frac{3}{16}$ ". It was not until about a dozen years ago that thin, "tournament" bedknives became available to allow for cutting heights in the range of  $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Also, the practice of grinding or shaving bedknife edges to achieve even faster green speeds has been done only recently.

Times and conditions change, and this is as true with putting greens as with anything else. I am fortunate enough to have been exposed to stories about golf course maintenance from my father,

who has been associated with the game of golf and turfgrass management for more than 50 years. I also have had the pleasure to meet and spend time discussing the "good old days" with many golf course superintendents of yesteryear. They remember the way it really was — from a perspective of maintaining fast greens through two or three generations of golfers.

What is their story? Most putting greens 30 years ago were cut at  $\frac{1}{4}$ "; fast greens for the time were shaved down to  $\frac{3}{16}$ ", and slow greens were cut at  $\frac{5}{16}$ " (the height at which some fairways are cut today). Not exactly the stuff of which lightning-fast greens are made!

Finally, perhaps the best proof comes from the tool that has stirred much of the controversy about green speeds in recent years. When the Stimpmeter was introduced by the USGA in 1976, the agronomists of the Green Section staff checked the speed of several thousand greens on golf courses throughout the country. The average reading was  $6'6"$  on the Stimpmeter. Such a slow speed is practically unheard of these days, yet there are plenty of golfers who claim that greens were faster in the mid-1970s than they are today.

Our perceptions of conditions in the good old days aren't so easy to reconcile with what we see today, are they?

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