

Turf Twisters

Q: Next to playing golf, another of our loves is watching it on TV. Each week we see what appears to be a perfect, emerald green golf course with no blemishes. We spoke with the golf course superintendent where we play as to why our course does not or cannot resemble those that we see. It seems that money is the primary excuse given. Are there any tips you can provide that we can pass along to the superintendent so we too may enjoy the emerald



green conditions that are enjoyed by the professionals? (Connecticut)

A: We hate to disappoint, but the superintendent at your golf course is absolutely correct in telling you that the conditions you see week to week on television do not come cheaply. Those golf courses have been prepared for months and sometimes years for that single event, working with budgets that are very much higher than at your golf course. Do not be fooled by the common misconception that the greener the grass, the healthier and better it is to play on. This cannot be further from the

truth, as lush, green grass is usually more susceptible to disease, traffic damage, and heat and drought stress. Excessive water, fertilizer, and pesticides also are required to maintain the unnatural conditions day in and day out, and playing conditions generally deteriorate. Memorize these few words spoken by Alexander Radko, former National Director of the USGA Green Section: "Green is not great — golf is played on grass, not color."

Q: Our maintenance budget has been reduced for this season, but I'm sure players will continue to expect the same level of quality as in the past. Any suggestions to help protect the maintenance operation from severe criticism? (Wyoming)

A: Developing maintenance specifications will clearly outline what is expected of the maintenance staff and what players can expect on the golf course. Obviously, the maintenance specifica-

tions will have to correlate well with the budget. Going through this exercise will allow course officials and players to put a direct cost on the maintenance procedures necessary to achieve

the desired level of playing quality. Developing specifications is a good way to establish priorities on the golf course.

Q: The past winter brought some very low temperatures, and we are concerned about the health of portions of our bermudagrass greens. Is there a quick way to assess how much, if any, damage has occurred? (Georgia)

A: There is no good way to accurately measure a percentage of damage. However, experienced turf managers can use a pocket knife to quickly estimate the health of the bermudagrass in a particular area. Insert the knife vertically into the green and make a 6" to 12"

cut. As you are cutting, you should be able to feel the knife slice through the stolons and rhizomes. Healthy stolons and rhizomes will cut with a distinctive click or snap. If the knife passes through without resistance, it is likely the bermudagrass has been severely damaged.

Remove a small section of the green and separate the stolons from the soil. Bend a stolon in half. A healthy stolon will break with a snap. One that is damaged or dead will be so soft that it will easily bend in half without breaking.

