

TURF TWISTERS

KNOWLEDGE OF THE RULES

Question: During a recent round of golf, I observed a fellow-competitor pressing down a spike mark. Knowing that there is a Rule against this practice, I informed him of his misdeed. He said that he was pressing down an old hole plug, and because the spike mark was in the old hole plug that he was within the Rules. Who is correct? (Wyoming)

Answer: Pay up; your fellow-competitor was correct. Rule 16-1a permits touching the line of putt in repairing an old hole plug. If the spike mark had not been within the hole plug, the ruling would have been different. We offer another alternative. Encourage all players at your golf course to use the spikeless alternatives that have become increasingly popular during the past several years. The issue of spike marks will be eliminated, along with a few more strokes off your score due to the smoother putting surface.

FOR STATE-OF-THE-ART IRRIGATION

Question: The golf course I play at just purchased and installed a new state-of-the-art irrigation system. I don't understand why we continue to see employees pulling hoses and hand watering spots on greens, tees, and fairways. Can you help me understand why it is necessary to hand water when we have a well-designed and functioning irrigation system? (Kentucky)

Answer: A well-designed and functioning irrigation system is a tremendous asset and tool that many courses do not have. Nevertheless, the cardinal rule in golf turf management is to *maintain the grass as dry as possible*. This rule means programming the irrigation system conservatively, which may result in occasionally missing areas or running certain areas on the dry side. Hand watering is necessary to supplement irrigation on problem areas or spots that simply require a bit more irrigation. The labor investment to hand water occasionally is money well spent. Even the best of irrigation systems do not eliminate the need for occasional hand watering in the pursuit of good quality playing surfaces and healthy turf.

IMPROVES TURF QUALITY

Question: Our greens seem to become hard and unreceptive to golf shots, especially during the summer months when the golf course dries out. We encourage our superintendent to water more frequently to soften the surfaces, but he refuses, saying that heavy watering will only make the greens harder and hurt turf quality. Help! A Concerned Golfer. (Massachusetts)

Answer: The irrigation system should not be used to keep the greens soft, as this method will result in excessive water applications that can lead to further soil compaction, a reduction in surface quality, and conditions that favor weaker grass plants. A long-range program of aerification and topdressing with a good quality topdressing material is the best approach for creating a surface that will accept a properly hit golf shot. Dry, firm surfaces generally are the most desirable for maintaining high quality turf and good playing conditions.