

RING MANAGEMENT

A useful tip to help you get rid of mower ring around the collar.

by JOHN H. FOY

THE INTRODUCTION of the triplex putting green mower in the late 1960s was a significant event in the golf course maintenance industry. These units provided savings in manpower hours for routine mowing of putting surfaces, and in turn helped control course operating costs. Since their introduction, modifications and further improvements in the performance of these mowing units have been made by the various manufacturers. Today, in addition to routine mowing, they can be used for other operations, such as verticutting/grooming, spiking, brushing of topdressing material, and rolling of putting surfaces.

However, the occurrence of "triplex rings" has been a problem associated with their use. Around the perimeters of putting surfaces, a ring-like pattern can develop where the triplex mowers are used to make the final cleanup cut. Over time, a progressive deterioration in turf quality and coverage can occur. Triplex ring problems result from the mowers being operated on the same path day after day when making the cleanup cut, and the perimeters of the putting surfaces receive double traffic. Thus, along with increased soil compaction, additional wear and abrasion are exerted on the turf. These turf wear problems are even more pronounced in locations where tight turns must be made and/or severe surface contours are present. The rate of turf deterioration greatly accelerates during periods of environmental stress or when other growth-limiting factors come into play.

Over the years, various measures have been used to try to counteract the occurrence of triplex rings. One of the most common has been to skip the cleanup cut two or three times per week. When this mowing schedule is used, it is also a standard practice to dew whip the perimeters of the putting surfaces so that the golfers do not notice the ragged cut pattern during the early morning hours. Altering the cleanup cut in from the edges and then back out, along with extra aerification of the putting green perimeters, has helped. Unfortunately, these measures have not always been adequate in

alleviating or preventing the occurrence of triplex rings.

In keeping with this year's conference theme of "Teaching Young Dogs Old Tricks," my Turf Tip comes from Frank Sbarro, golf course superintendent at Sawgrass Country Club in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. Sawgrass Country Club is a 27-hole private facility that was the early host site of the Players Championship. As with most facilities, very high member expectations exist, yet walk mowing of all of the putting surfaces, particularly through the long, hot, and humid summers of northeastern Florida, was felt to be labor-intensive and cost-prohibitive. An old trick for dealing with triplex rings is to use a walk-behind mower for the cleanup cut. In some cases, walk mowing the cleanup cut of problem greens during stressful periods has been adequate. At Sawgrass, routine walk mowing the cleanup cut around all of the putting surfaces has totally eliminated triplex rings. For labor efficiency, the staff members

assigned to daily course setup (changing of hole locations and tee marker placement) also mow the cleanup cut. Thus, one triplex mower plus one utility vehicle with a walk-behind mower on a trailer is sent out per nine holes.

Furthermore, regardless of whether triplex or walk-behind mowers are being used, having them set up with smooth rather than grooved front rollers is another beneficial old trick for reducing mechanical stress and turf damage. Over the past couple of years in Florida, the use of smooth front roller setups during winter overseeding establishment or when adverse environmental conditions are occurring has become a common practice.

As they say, "What goes around comes around," and this is definitely the case with walk mowing of cleanup cuts and the use of smooth front rollers.

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Regardless of whether triplex or walk-behind mowers are being used, care must be taken to avoid the problem of triplex rings around the perimeter of putting greens.



Moving the clean-up pass on putting greens in one foot every other cut is one solution to relieve stress and the occurrence of triplex ring.