

# Collar ID

Identification of the proper maintenance strategies will improve this area of the golf course.

BY MATT NELSON

Look through the Rules of Golf and you will not find any mention of a collar. This section of the golf course falls into that all-encompassing category of “through the green.” But ask any golfers and they immediately know the collar, or fringe, as that area of closely cut turf immediately surrounding the putting green. Although the width and height of cut vary among golf courses, all collars serve the important role of providing the golfer an intermediate surface between the putting green and surrounding rough. The collar helps prevent the player from being severely penalized for shots that barely miss or roll through the putting green. These small, distinct portions of the golf course are often taken for granted, but collars can cause golf course superintendents real grief in certain situations. Proper construction, turfgrass selection, and maintenance programs safeguard turf health and playing quality, while streamlining maintenance efficiency.

## AVOID BUILT-IN PROBLEMS

When building new putting greens, the collar should be built as part of the green (1,2). Utilizing the same rootzone architecture helps minimize management differences between the putting green and collar. With USGA greens, the putting green cavity wall should be vertical or very steeply sloped at the outside edge of the collar. Burying wire along the perimeter of the cavity enables accurate mowing contours to be maintained over time.

Among the most common construction problems facing collars is the feathering of rootzone mix at the perimeter of the green, which commonly results in shallow rootzone mix below the collar

turf. This can lead to an overly wet rootzone that offers poor turfgrass vigor, poor traffic tolerance, and difficult irrigation management. Maintain a vertical cavity wall during construction to help assure a uniform rootzone mix depth. Also, install smile drains along the edge of the cavity at any low gradient.

Another construction oversight is the failure to install a wicking barrier

in arid or stressful climates. A wicking barrier is a plastic liner installed along the perimeter of the putting green cavity to prevent moisture from being drawn from sandy rootzones into fine-textured soils typically found in putting green surrounds. Moisture drawn from the edges of putting greens and collars can result in severe drought stress to turf in these areas.



Avoid unnecessary damage to the collars by minimizing hard turns with the mowing equipment on the area. Employees should be properly trained to turn their mowers in the rough beyond the collar, space permitting.



Treat the collars like the putting greens. When the putting greens are scheduled for aeration, aerate the collars as well.

## TREAT COLLARS LIKE PUTTING GREENS

To as great an extent as possible, maintain the collars as you do the putting greens. When the greens are aerated, aerate the collars. Likewise with top-dressing, verticutting, pest control, wetting agent use, and fertilization. Adopting this philosophy usually will thwart many turf problems common to collars, including the development of puffy turf, disease activity, reduced density, and otherwise poor playing conditions. A good cultivation program for the collars is important to maintain a smooth transition from putting green turf to collar turf.

## MOWING

Mowing of collars is no different from any other portion of the golf course — lighter machines invariably result in

better turf quality. Walk mowing is definitely the preferred means of maintaining collar turf. Collars can be adjusted to a 22- or 26-inch width to accommodate a single pass with common walk mowing equipment. Although there is no standard for collar width, a width that enables mowing with a single pass saves time. Many golf courses combine tee, collar, and approach mowing into one task that can be performed with the same machine. Where labor and resources are limiting, these areas may all be mowed with a triplex putting green mower. The mowing of collars almost always requires continuous turning; thus, more torque and subsequent wear injury will be imparted to the turf compared to mowing in straight lines. Consequently, triplex mowing of collars often results in turfgrass injury and inconsistent playing quality. At all costs,

avoid mowing collars with fairway mowing units. To maintain good turf quality and playability, keep the fairway units off the approach and collar.

Another task to monitor when assessing collar quality is mowing of the putting greens. Turning either walk mowers or triplex mowers on the collar (especially the infamous spin turn) can accelerate wear injury and, when the turf is wet, cause direct injury. Check out the preparation of a major championship sometime and you might notice the greens mowers turning on carpet laid over the collars. Obviously, most golf courses won't go this far on daily preparation, but the method underscores the importance of protecting the collar turf. Be sure employees are properly trained to avoid causing unnecessary wear injury to the collars when mowing the greens.

Some golf courses have installed dedicated sprinklers to mist the collar area.



## IRRIGATION

As mentioned above, collars are often maintained at the same height of cut as tees and approaches to streamline maintenance. Under certain conditions, this can lead to water management problems in the collars. One theory concerning accelerated turfgrass wilt in the collars versus the putting greens suggests that collar turf has an increased water demand due to the higher height of cut it receives. Therefore, reducing the height of cut during periods of drought stress may actually equilibrate water demand between the putting green turf and the collar turf. This phenomenon is usually more of a problem with new construction and seems to diffuse as the water-holding capability of the rootzone improves with time. Of course, hand watering, soil-surfactant use, and proper construction also should be considered. Also, be sure to check that accumulating sand displaced from nearby bunkers is not compromising the water-holding capacity of the rootzone.

## TRAFFIC CONTROL

Certain portions of the collars invariably will be subjected to concentrated traffic. It is essential that all power golf carts and pull carts be kept off of the collars. Substantial wear injury from pull-cart encroachment on collars has been observed at numerous golf courses throughout the United States where play is high and traffic control is poor. Golfers should be made aware that the relatively low height of cut and concentration of both golfer and maintenance traffic put significant stress on turfgrass in the collar.

Where design features such as bunkers concentrate golfer traffic to the extent that severe turf injury and poor playing quality exists, consult with a qualified golf course architect about potential renovations that would allow additional access areas to putting greens, whereby traffic can be more widely distributed.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT SPECIES OF TURFGRASS

In most situations, it is preferable to use the same species of grass on the collars as on the putting greens. Creeping bentgrass greens typically have creeping bentgrass collars. Likewise, bermudagrass greens generally have bermudagrass collars. But this arrangement may not be desirable or practical in some locations of the country. Kentucky bluegrass can provide an excellent collar surface in the Intermountain region of the western United States. Annual bluegrass can comprise a significant portion of the stand, particularly in coastal climates of the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere. In the transition zone, maintaining good quality creeping bentgrass collars can be a real challenge due to the myriad of stresses, including diseases, insects, physiological stress, and traffic. Where maintaining bentgrass collars is met with poor success, perennial ryegrass can be a suitable alternative. Perennial ryegrass has good traffic tolerance, can withstand relatively close



*Poa annua* collar turf can prove an ideal snack for certain insect pests, particularly the hyperodes weevil. Thorough scouting is necessary to properly identify the problem.

mowing, and, with a reasonable disease control program, will persist. It couldn't be put any better than Stan Zontek, Director of the Green Section's Mid-Atlantic Region, says: "Ryegrass is much better than no grass" (3).

## WATCH FOR SLOW TOPOGRAPHICAL CHANGES

Another common problem with long-term collar management is the slow, incremental change in grade that can occur in areas adjacent to greenside bunkers. Displaced sand from normal bunker shots accumulates on banks and collars over time. In some cases, surface drainage patterns are adversely affected and irrigation challenges arise where very droughty rootzones are created. Periodic renovation may be necessary where play from popular greenside bunkers alters drainage characteristics, management feasibility, and playability.

## SUMMARY

Managing collars may require that additional cultivation, overseeding, or sod be required from time to time to provide the desired level of playing quality. This small, distinct portion of the golf course is subject to concentrated traffic and management criteria that pose stressful conditions for turfgrass. Monitoring quality control throughout construction, incorporating the putting green management program, utilizing the lightest mowers feasible, controlling traffic, and systematically troubleshooting any problems that may occur should help with your collar ID.

## LITERATURE CITED

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MATT NELSON is an agronomist in the USGA Green Section's Northwest Region.