

Proper Etiquette

A little effort can make all the difference.

BY PAUL VERMEULEN

As the tools for maintaining putting greens have improved over the past decade, superintendents have gained the upper hand in the daily battles against fungal pathogens, unwanted weeds, and nuisance pests. While victory is always cause for celebration, the war against bumpy putting conditions has yet to be declared over.

Many greens still look like battlefields despite the advances of modern technology because they are pitted by hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of unrepaired ball marks. Proper etiquette demands that each golfer repair his/her own ball mark before walking off the green. So why, then, do so many choose to ignore the damage caused by their own hand?

The damage caused by unrepaired ball marks is no small matter. These blemishes literally constitute the number-one problem facing many superintendents during the peak of the golfing season when 200 or more rounds are played each day.

The solution to this problem cannot be found in the application of sound agronomic practices. Superintendents cannot simply apply more fertilizer, as this would compromise the overall health of the turf and reduce the putting quality of the greens. Where, then, can we turn for answers?

Truthfully, the answer lies at the feet of golfers. This is because ball marks must be repaired almost immediately in order for them to heal properly. When left unattended, the injured turf is subject to desiccation under the strong summer rays of the sun, and death of some grass can be expected within hours.

Identifying the guilty parties is the easy part. Getting them to follow



proper etiquette is the hard part. No doubt this will require strong leadership, constant reminders, and good instruction.

For strong leadership, there is none better than Tiger Woods. Let's not forget that during a playoff with Jim Furyk for the 2001 World Golf Championships – NEC Invitational, he walked straight over to his ball mark and repaired it, and only then did he proceed to mark his ball and line up his putt. If he can exercise proper etiquette with a million dollars on the line, then what excuse do the rest of us have?

To constantly remind golfers of their duties, the weight of responsibility must fall on two of the game's professional organizations, the PGA of America and the GCSAA. Each course should have at least one member from each organization to remind golfers before and during each round.

Solving the ball mark problem should be a quick fix. Remember, a little effort can make all the difference.



Ball marks come in all different shapes and sizes. The end result is still the same — they need to be repaired in a timely manner to minimize long-term damage to the putting surface.

PAUL VERMEULEN is the director of the USGA Green Section Mid-Continent Region. An avid weekend golfer, he never fails to repair his own ball mark plus one or two others left by those who do not follow proper etiquette.