

# Turf Twisters

**Q:** Last fall I covered greens with lightweight breathable covers because some vocal golfers believe it will make it possible for the course to open a few weeks earlier in spring. I'm not sure when to remove the covers, but I know there will be pressure to remove them as soon as possible. Any thoughts? (Michigan)

**A:** When to remove winter covers is one of the most difficult calls to make in turf management for courses in northern locations. If you leave them on too long, the stimulated growth makes the surface more suitable for a fairway surface than a green. No one wants to start mowing greens at a half inch

when golfers are expecting fast surfaces. Pulling the covers too soon can expose the turf to dangerously cold temperatures. Most superintendents, however, tend to remove the covers earlier than later. If the cover is removed before the turf has completely broken dormancy, it has a chance to

acclimate to the cool spring-time temperatures. In any event, a hard frost will likely discolor and set back the growth of the turf, so the golfers' dreams of covering turf to start the season a few weeks earlier are, in fact, just dreams.



**Q:** During the spring our golf course superintendent has an irritating habit of delaying early morning play until the frost has melted on the greens. Is this truly necessary to protect the health of the turf? (Missouri)

**A:** The short answer to your question is yes. The long answer is that ice crystals on the surface of the grass blades make them brittle enough to break off at their base when stepped on. In fact, the turf can be so brittle

that even the weight of a small animal, such as a goose, can cause unsightly damage to the turf.

**Q:** We keep hearing about how low mowing heights are bad for growing grass on greens, but are there any other negatives associated with ultra-fast greens? (Washington)

**A:** Very low mowing does make it more difficult to grow healthy grass. However, several other compelling reasons to raise mowing heights or slow greens down to a moderate level (9' - 9'6" range) include:

• **Speeding up slow play.** It takes less time to hit two

or three putts than four or five.

• **Faster ball mark and old hole plug recovery.**

This problem is not just players who don't fix ball marks or fix them improperly. Damage to very low mowed turf simply takes longer to recover, and old hole plugs are more susceptible to scalping injury.

• **More interesting and less ridiculous hole locations.**

Based on current information, any slope 3% or more at a 10' Stimpmeter reading is too steep for hole

use. This results in many older greens with hole locations always in the same areas, resulting in more wear on the turf. At the same time, those responsible for hole locations must avoid any steep areas to prevent the inevitable criticism. Isn't it interesting that the players who complain about slow greens are generally those who complain when a hole is placed on a slope that is too steep for the location and green speed!

• **Average players do not prefer fast greens!** With

the average handicap for players in the U.S. standing at 16.1 for men and 28.4 for women, green speeds in excess of 10' greatly favor the playing ability of low-digit players (a small minority) while causing damage to putting surfaces. Don't believe for a minute that today's average players prefer to play putting surfaces that are 1' or 2' faster than those found at national championships only 20 years ago.

