

# Turf Twisters

**Q:** With each passing year it seems as though the pressure to schedule core cultivation on the greens in mid-March gets stronger and stronger. In my position as the golf course superintendent, putting together a convincing argument in opposition to this request is difficult in that other courses in the area are aerated soon after the ground thaws in spring. Does the USGA have any advice

regarding scheduling this practice during the first half of the growing season? (Kansas)

**A:** Core cultivation creates a void in the turf canopy, so scheduling this practice too early in the year has several disadvantages. First, with the likelihood of cold temperatures prior to mid-April in the Midwest, the turf will exhibit slow recovery from

any practice that causes significant surface disruption. Second, if the greens are creeping bentgrass, creating open holes in the canopy at times when it is not growing vigorously creates an opportunity for *Poa annua* germination and establishment. Lastly, early scheduling diminishes the benefit of improving water infiltration during early summer. With so many disadvantages com-



ing into play, it would be best to avoid playing follow-the-leader with neighboring courses and instead schedule core cultivation in late April or early May.

**Q:** Our greens are mostly *Poa annua* and we have a few members who are speed freaks and believe that verticutting is the only way to get it. How often should greens be verticut without putting undo stress on them? (Connecticut)

**A:** Verticutting utilizes a mechanical device with

vertically rotating blades that cut into the turf surface to remove excess thatch or leaves, depending upon how deep the blades are set. Verticutting can have a positive influence on putting green firmness, as well as trueness and ball roll distance. It is not uncommon to verticut greens several times during a week in the spring or late

summer when shoot growth is most active and environmental conditions are less stressful on the turf. Be cautious about verticutting during or preceding stressful periods of the season, when the turf can be weakened and then predisposed to attack from diseases or other pests. Verticutting is not the only practice that influences

ball roll. Lightweight rolling and light, frequent sand top-dressing can help improve surface smoothness and ball roll without compromising turf health. The old adage “everything in moderation” definitely applies to practices aimed at increasing green speed.

**Q:** Why does our superintendent recommend keeping carts on the path and off the fairways in the winter even though the course is dry? (Alabama)

**A:** The bermudagrass on your golf course cannot repair itself from traffic during the times of the year when it

is dormant (brown). Keeping carts on the path helps to minimize the beaten-down, worn-out appearance so often associated with bermudagrass fairways in late winter. Keeping carts on the path in the winter rewards the golfer with more “cushion” underneath the ball.

