

Define the Line

A simple mowing strategy to maintain the dimensions of greens and the width of collars.

BY KEITH HAPP

Putting surfaces are the most intensely maintained turf on the course. In most instances, greens are mowed at least daily, with some course managers choosing to double or even triple mow greens to prepare for play. This exposes greens to a high level of mechanical stress/activity and increases the chance of altering the size of greens and the width of collars. While operators are trained to make a conscious effort to maintain a distinct line of demarcation between the green and collar, over time the size and shape of the putting surface can change. There is an additive effect when the employee intentionally mows inside the collar/green interface to avoid causing damage. It is important to

have a defined interface between the green and the collar so the golfer knows if any part of a ball is touching the putting surface. Under the Rules of Golf, a player can mark, lift, and clean the ball during play of a hole when a part of the ball lies on the putting surface.

John Shaw, CGCS, superintendent of Valley Brook Country Club in McMurray, Pa., is aware of the importance of maintaining his course's architectural integrity as well as the size and shape of his greens and collars. He experimented with a strategy that would allow his crew to mow the putting greens and collars of his 27-hole operation in a very consistent manner. His ultimate goal was to

maintain the size of each green and achieve standardized collar width from hole to hole.

Each spring John begins by reviewing with each employee how the greens and collars are to be mowed. The putting surfaces are cut with walk-behind mowers, and John makes two special requests of the operators. First, it is a must that the baskets be emptied prior to making the outside pass around the outer edge of the green. Secondly, operators are instructed to mow 6 inches inside of the collar/putting surface interface.

All of the collars are mowed with a single triplex. This in itself is not unique, but the way the machine is set up is. One of the cutting units is set



A triplex mower is set up to maintain the collar. One of the cutting heads is set at putting green height. This technique allows the collar to be sustained at two cutting units wide.



Each spring John Shaw begins the season by reviewing with each employee how the greens and collars are to be mowed.



John Shaw instructs his employees to complete the cleanup pass six inches inside of the collar/putting surface interface.

at putting green height and the other two are set to collar height. This setup allows the collar width to be easily maintained. Rather than the operator focusing on the edge of the green/collar, the operator uses the edge of the intermediate cut of rough/collar as a guide. The width of the collar, which is two cutting units of a triplex, does not vary. As a secondary control factor, a wire is positioned in the soil along

the outer edge of the collar. A metal detector can be used if necessary to check this reference point if any questions arise concerning green shape or size.

John's management process for this particular area of the course has been in place for several years and has met with great success. Clean, clearly defined putting surfaces and collars are being produced in a consistent manner.

If you are having trouble with this particular element of course setup, give John's strategy a try.

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