

Turf Solutions

Golf Green Speed

Golf green speed is one of the most contentious issues on the golf course, and one, which can give the course manager the biggest headache.

Fast greens are sometimes perceived to be good greens but this is not necessarily the case. This theory is probably partly due to televised or tournament golf and in particular The US Masters! The following article looks at the influencing factors that can affect green speed.

Heights of Cut

Average green heights of cut in the summer months are between 3-5mm and slightly higher in the winter months. One would think that the easiest way to produce quick greens is to cut the greens lower or roll them. However, this can actually have the reverse effect by encouraging undesirable coarse grass species!

Grass Species

In the UK greens are composed of a mixture of grasses ranging from colonial Bent grass, Fescue and *Poa annua*. Bent and the Fescue grasses are the most desirable species, as they provide the best year round surfaces to putt on. *Poa* is a ubiquitous species and is generally found in most fine turf situations. This species grows in clumps and patches and is susceptible to disease attack and is generally considered to produce poorer greens. Excessive rounds of golf and very low heights of cut can exacerbate the problem.

Measuring Green Speed

Green speed is measured with a device known as a Stimp meter. It is normally an aluminium bar, which is calibrated to allow a golf ball to run down its length and along the surface of a green. The distance the ball rolls is measured which can then give an assessment of the current speed of the green.

The table below shows different green speeds produced by the USGA

Speed for Normal Play	Category	Tournament Play	Category
8'6"	Fast	10'6"	Fast
7'6"	Medium fast	9'6"	Medium fast
6'6"	Medium	8'6"	Medium
5'6"	Medium slow	7'6"	Medium slow
4'6"	Slow	6'6"	Slow



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Some people think that this device actually creates more problems for the turf manager. It can be useful if it is used to ascertain consistency from one green to another. In this situation it can be used to adopt a management program that creates consistent conditions around the course.

Turf Management

Greens can be managed to produce firm, true putting surfaces without the need to cut them down to excessively low heights. Treatments include: light/frequent top dressing, regular verti cutting treatments, balanced nutrient input, and minimal use of irrigation. Occasional light rolling can help to increase green speed without the need to lower cutting heights (treatments should be used in conjunction with an appropriate aeration program).

New Grass Varieties

New 'creeping' Bent grass varieties that can be cut down to 2-3mm can produce extremely fast greens. The 'jury' is still out on these new cultivars. There is no doubt that they can produce good greens but some experts feel that they are not particularly suited to UK and Ireland conditions. Many courses are having great success by going down this route.

PGRS (Plant Growth Regulators)

PGRs (Primo MAXX) are regularly used on golf greens in USA to help manage turf more effectively especially during high stress periods.

There is considerable research that shows that the use of this product in a programmed approach can help to reduce grass plant stress and even allow higher heights of cut whilst maintaining speed and consistency.

Conclusion

The USGA guidelines set out for green speeds are achievable with good management techniques and if the course manager is not pressurised to significantly reduce the heights of cut. The Stimp meter can be used to good effect to measure consistency from one green to another not to see how fast the greens can get up to.

In our experience the best golf greens are the ones which are consistent from one to the other including the putting green. All golfers appreciate smooth, true surfaces where the balls has a good 'roll' and does not 'pull up' quickly or rapidly deviate from its path.



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