



Green speed – time for a rethink?

For any turf and training related queries, talk to the team at NZ Sports Turf Institute.

The recent Covid 19 shut down has put many things in perspective, not least of which the robustness of our golf courses. During recent webinars, a major concern was how the golf courses and particularly the greens would cope – as it happens very well in most cases.

When golfers return to the golf courses next week, you can be sure green speed will be the last thing on their mind – they will be extremely glad just to get out and hit a few balls.

Consequently, is this the time to revisit the green speeds that we provide – should we continue on the treadmill of keeping up with the course and superintendent down the road in a quest for yet faster greens?

How did the green speed race begin?

The quest for yet faster greens largely happened by accident – many things fell into place at a given time. These included:

- TV golf – which for probably the first time made green speed a major issue for golf in New Zealand.
- Golfers asking for greens to be prepared (mown) on playing days – including the weekend.
- During the 80's, Poa annua dominated many green surfaces. The issue with Poa in the bad old days was that Poa provided inconsistent and bobbly surfaces. Turf managers learnt that by cutting lower and more frequently this puffiness was managed.
- Regular professional tournaments here in the 80s and 90s played on faster than usual greens.
- Overseas (particularly US) influence where most clubs were focused on increasing green speeds.



Floating bobbly Poa surfaces, so common in the 80's and 90s, which ultimately contributed to the present speed race.

These factors saw the start of the speed race.

Should we have slower greens?

Firstly, let's get green speed in perspective:

- Each club should have a defined speed range that is suitable for their intended client base. Speed should be based on a defined expectation and not just a continual ratchetting up as often occurs – to keep up with the club down the road.
- The primary focus should be on trueness of ball roll and consistency between greens. Green speed is not the sole driver.
- Slow doesn't mean 7 foot greens (although for some this is probably very acceptable) – we are talking for club play, surfaces running at 9 to 10 feet. This allows the ball to take borrow and roll out.

Recent events should provide motivation to re-assess things – slower green speeds would have multiple benefits and help you to PROVIDE MORE ROBUST GOLF COURSES!

The main benefits from lower green speeds will be:

- Faster rounds of golf – this may be very important in the coming weeks with limitations on how golf can be played
- A game that is more appealing to golfers of average or lesser ability – the main type of member!
- Make game more attractive to new golfers – no one feels good after multiple attempts to sink the ball.
- Healthier turf – less susceptibility to disease, less fertiliser required for recovery, reduced water requirements
- The preferred species browntop / creeping bentgrass will be more competitive and easier to maintain

Slower green speeds would have multiple benefits and help you to provide a more robust golf course.

