

Ball Marks: The Latest Trends

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Ball marks on bentgrass putting greens are a source of frustration at numerous golf courses and questions continuously are asked regarding the best approach to repair these scars. This can be even more of a concern during the winter months when the bentgrass growth slows. Recently, we gathered many ideas about ball mark repair and would like to share a few of the best ones with our readers.

Back in 1993, Mr. David Oatis of the USGA Green Section wrote an interesting article on ball marks and highlighted two popular repair techniques, plugging and reseeding. A small soil probe and ice pick to knead the hole were state of the art technology in those days. Today, many golf courses have modified these ideas and it seems some are gaining popularity.

A New Ball Repair Method

Repairing the old ball marks with colored sand is a popular trend. Some golf courses have even come up with a special sand coloration recipe that seems to work out well. At one famous golf course in the south, the superintendent mixes three different colored sands together and dusts the ball marks after coring them out with a small soil probe. The colors are orange, brown, yellow and also some green and they blend them to match the current turf color of the putting greens. Other courses just use green sand after coring out the old ball marks. The crew typically cores out about 10 ball marks a green every day with the 3/8" soil probe going about 1/2" deep and afterwards the staffer pinches it back together with a ball mark tool and dusts it. The staff person pays extra attention to any ball marks noted around that days hole location.

Other Popular Trends

Some golf courses simply plug out slow to recover ball marks with a 1/2" coring tine probe and then roll/mend the surrounding turf into the hole with a stubbed off ice pick or repair tool. However, the ice picks and mending help to a point but care is needed by the staff to decrease instances of a big mess if this person has poor technique. Nothing earth shaking, but a few each day before mowing keeps the ball marks manageable. If done daily by the mowing staff, it can be a plus with good techniques.

A modification to this approach is to use an ice pick (with the round metal shank) to press the pitch mark down into the green. This creates a hole about 1/2 inch

deep (the length of the shank) to about ½ inch wide (the width of the shank). The staffer then fills the hole with green divot mix.

Some superintendents slightly increase mowing heights to make the ball marks less noticeable and do a rolling program in a target manner. This does seem to help from observations to improve putting quality and to reduce labor for the ball mark issues.

Ball mark repair campaigns are always a plus. We remember several years ago when Mr. James Moore of the USGA Green Section took a picture of a putting green with tees sticking up everywhere an unrepaired ball mark was observed. It was dramatic to see the number of ball marks he had in this photograph. This idea works out well usually for any ball mark repair campaign. We also heard a tale at another course where the superintendent sent his entire crew out to repair ball marks on ‘Ladies Days’ since “the men don’t repair their ball marks.”

Conclusion

We hope this article has been insightful and can be useful at your golf course. Luckily, most golfers don’t hit the greens in regulation when playing golf or this issue would be even bigger today. The best player on the PGA Tour last season hit 74.1% of the greens in regulation. Guess who? Who else but Tiger Woods! The #194 on the money list was Brad Faxon and he hit 58% of the greens in regulation. The average golfer is luckily to hit 10% in regulation. Golf course etiquette would ideally have all golfers repair their ball marks, but hopefully the update will provide a few ideas to ponder regarding this historical problem.

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