

BOLAND BOWLS
GREENS MAINTENANCE NEWSLETTER: NOVEMBER 2022

MOWING:

A useful starting point is to note that, from a botanical point of view, mowing can be harmful to the grass plant. This is because it

- causes a temporary stoppage of root growth
- reduces the production of carbohydrates (food)
- creates opportunities for disease-causing organisms to enter through the cut ends
- increases the loss of water from these cut ends.

That is why the GKP has to compensate by providing nutrition (fertilisers) and irrigation.

Machinery: Critical to good mowing practice is the maintenance of ones' equipment. The bottom blade needs to be replaced when nicked or blunt and the cutting reel should be sharpened regularly. If this is not done, the mower will start tearing the leaves, drastically affecting the health of the plant.

The setting of the mower also needs to be checked regularly. Movement from the store to the green can often undo the balance of the cylinder. This results in an uneven cut, with one side cutting lower than the other.

Mowing height: Each turfgrass has its own levels of tolerance regarding height of cut. If one continually cuts too low, the grass will be put under stress, and weeds will start to appear in the stressed areas. The extreme version of low cutting is called **scalping** where the cutting blade actually exposes bare earth.

Where one cuts too high, the turf becomes puffy and limp and definitely not suitable for a good bowling surface.

With experience, most GKPs will know what height they can cut at without causing stress. A number of GKPs keep the height fairly high (4 mm) and groom to provide a good speed. When a big event comes along, they will drop the height for that occasion, but revert to the higher setting afterwards.

An important point to remember: where a GKP has rested a green for one reason or another, and the grass has grown quite long, the initial cut should not remove more than **a third** of the grass shoot. In other words, if the height of the rested grass is 12mm, the mower should be set no lower than 8mm.

Mowing frequency: There is no right or wrong answer to how often one should mow ones' green. The GKP will be affected by the Club's programme i.e. the need for play or practice on certain days.

As a general rule, less frequent mowing results in a coarser but harder turf, needing less care (fertilising and watering).

More frequent mowing produces a finer surface but, because of the reduction in food mentioned in the opening paragraph, the grass needs more food and water.

To start some debate, I am not in favour of daily cutting. My ideal programme gives the grass plant two or three days a week to generate its own food without interference.

Another point to bear in mind. Our turfgrasses grow incredibly fast in summer. So where important events are scheduled for your green, ideally – and I say ideally – the green should be cut on the morning of the event or at the latest, the evening prior to the event. It is surprising how much speed a green can lose over a period of 24 – 36 hours.

Mowing pattern: Turf grass specialists use the term “keep the grass guessing” when they refer to mowing directions. This means that one should never mow in the same direction on successive occasions. Cut diagonally, parallel to the ditches and along the Nap line. The Level 1 Greenkeeping booklet provides a number of these options.

A cut parallel to the bank (sometimes referred to as a box cut) will contribute to a greater draw on both hands. This should obviously not be done in the direction of play on a particular day but at right angles.

The grass plant follows the sun and develops a grain or nap. This is quite prominent in the cynodon (Bayview and Kweek) grasses. It is advisable to do a nap cut every two weeks during the growing season. To determine the direction, place a pole upright on the eastern bank in the early morning and note the shadow it casts. A nap cut would then start at the south-western end of this shadow.

Always double cut i.e. out and back along the same line.

Because the 2m area bears the most traffic and therefore suffers wear and tear, many GKPs picture frame their green. This involves either single cutting the 2m border or raising the height of the mower when cutting this section.

Leaving the grass on this section longer will give the green extra protection. It can be cut shorter on competition days.

Clippings: A certain amount of the clippings are not captured in the bin. This is particularly the case at the coast where the wind plays a role. The GKP should keep an eye on this.

As the clippings contain nutrients, their presence on the green can have a positive effect. However, they can also contribute to a build-up of thatch, with all the problems that brings.

An occasional brushing after mowing should keep this problem under control.