

First Impressions: TURF CONDITIONS ON THE TEEING GROUND

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Each hole in golf starts at the teeing ground, which is second only to putting greens in terms of “high maintenance.” While not all golfers play from the fairway, we all have to play from tees and, eventually, putt on the greens.

Poor tee conditions usually are the result of wear, but we also have to consider adverse growing conditions. Poor teeing ground conditions are due to the following factors:

- Tees are too small for the amount of play, resulting in excessive wear
- Poor soil conditions, such as poor drainage or the recent trend in “topping tees” with sand, and
- Unfavorable environmental conditions, such as too much shade.

Tees at older courses were built with small surfaces because the expected number of rounds was well under 20,000 per year. More golfers and more play resulted in severe wear on small tees. Newer courses are built with as many as six different teeing grounds, increasing the “usable teeing surface” on each hole.

The white and “forward,” or red tees, especially on par-3s, show excessive wear at many courses because of the increase in older men and women golfers. The forward tees were built small or were added to many courses.

Courses today need more or larger forward tees for seniors, women, and junior golfers. I would enjoy playing more from a senior tee — with a score of 85 to 90, rather than trying to struggle with 100 strokes from

the white tee — and maybe completing a round in fewer than four hours.

Newer, longer “championship courses” are designed with “high-rise tees” to allow a better view of the fairway. Steep slopes around these tees are difficult to mow, and some golfers have problems walking up slopes. Such tees could be rebuilt lower and provide more teeing area, or several tees could be combined into one for more tee marker locations and easier access. The latter would reduce main-

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tenance and the time required to mow tees.

Grass also does not grow well in poor soil conditions. Older tees often develop depressed areas, especially par-3s, because of divots removed over the years. A superintendent adds topdressing sand or soil to low areas to make teeing surfaces smoother. Heavy soil is often too wet, because of a lack of slope, for good drainage. Tees need about 1 percent slope to the “best side” to help drain surface water.

Many tees have been topped with sand in recent years. Sand keeps teeing surfaces drier,

but usually results in unfavorable growing conditions. The grass doesn’t develop a good root system and is more susceptible to wear.

Sand needs more irrigation than heavy soil around tees, and this results in the soil being too wet in places such as tee approaches. Water usually seeps from sand, and a “wet ring” develops near the top of the tee.

To help keep the soil drier, install drainage lines filled to the top with gravel, or even French drains, in lower areas around the tees. Your superintendent might incorporate organic matter or topsoil in aerifier holes to help improve the nutrient and water-holding capacity of the sand to improve growing conditions. Another idea is to install small sprinkler heads so that the top of sand-based tees can be irrigated as needed, without applying too much water to the area around the tees.

Tree shade on tees is a major problem. Shade reduces sunlight needed for good turf growth, especially for bermudagrass. The best solution is to remove trees, but many clubs cannot politically do so because of membership concerns — or because the trees are not on course property.

Zoysiagrass often is used as sod on heavily shaded tees, resulting in better quality turf in the Piedmont areas of both states. Bentgrass is planted on some shaded back tees in the western Piedmont. But this technique only works on more sparsely played tees.

Overseeding tees with perennial ryegrass can cause severe competition in the spring growing season, resulting in poor turf quality in early summer. Many courses overseed only par-3 tees and fill divots with sand containing ryegrass seeds to help maintain the best quality turf possible.

Your superintendent does the best he can with the resources available to him to provide the best teeing ground possible. I can provide more information on managing teeing grounds, if requested.

➤ CGA staff agronomist **Leon Lucas** is available to help CGA member clubs with their turfgrass dilemmas. Contact him at (919) 779-3241 or llucas@carolinascgolf.org.