



Onsite Visit Report

Cripple Creek Golf & Country Club Dagsboro, Delaware

Visit Date: June 9, 2020

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The USGA Green Section develops and disseminates sustainable management practices that produce better playing conditions for better golf.

Executive Summary

It is always a pleasure to visit Cripple Creek Golf & Country Club. I thought we had a productive tour on June 9, 2020. As usual, we toured nearly the entire golf course with a free-flowing agenda. We discussed several topics ranging from the differences in push-up putting greens (Number 18) and USGA method construction (short game). We also looked at the hydraulic leak across Number 1 putting green, which was sodded shortly before our visit.

While walking from Number 18 putting green to Number 1 tee we walked over the short game practice area and looked at how healthy the Latitude 36 bermudagrass is. Overall, I thought the short game was in excellent condition. The health of the fairway showed the advantage of improved variety grasses and good construction methods. The only conversation that we had on the short game was *Poa annua* control and Spring Dead Spot. Honestly, both will be challenging to manage. Not that they cannot be managed, but *Poa annua* is always going to be an issue, just as it is on every other golf course. Spring Dead Spot will also need to be treated for every year because it is one of the few diseases that affects bermudagrass, especially Latitude 36 bermudagrass.

Lastly, we toured Number 4 and discussed everything to do with the potential project from new fairway bunkers to tree removal to drainage and fairway realignment. Hopefully, this project is approved and completed, I think it will be a tremendous enhancement to the golf course.

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Putting Greens

Observations

1. **The only new topic of conversation on the putting greens was a hydraulic leak that stretched from one side of Number 1 green to the other.**
 - Hydraulic leaks are an unfortunate occurrence that happen from time to time. Mr. MacDonald said that his equipment is aging, however, I have seen brand-new equipment spring a hydraulic leak too.
 - The damage was repaired with sod from the nursery. At the time of our visit the sod was not quite at putting green height. Mr. MacDonald would like to achieve putting green height this season, but he is well aware of the challenges lowering closely mown bentgrass presents heading into the heat of the summer.

Recommendations

1. **As you lower the height of cut on the sod, do so very carefully.** If the weather cooperates you can probably achieve putting green height, but if the temperature continues to get hotter and there is less than normal rainfall then you do not want to place unnecessary stress on this sod.
 - Lower the height of cut very [slowly](#) in increments of 0.010 – 0.020-inch at every reduction. You must treat this area like a grow-in situation and not be in a rush to lower the height of cut. Otherwise you risk lowering too quickly and either scalping surface imperfections that are difficult to detect or going too far too quickly and stressing the grass to the point where there is noticeable decline.
 - Follow each height of cut reduction with a very light layer of sand to smooth surface imperfections and protect plant crowns that are likely elevated because the grass has been allowed to grow higher than putting green height of cut.
 - It might also be necessary to apply very light rates of nitrogen just on the sod to maintain active growth for quicker recovery.

Short Game Fairway

Observations

1. **The bermudagrass fairway on the short game was much cleaner than I anticipated.**
 - Golf courses from Philadelphia to Virginia Beach are all experiencing more *Poa annua* this spring from a mild winter than they have in recent memory.
 - Controlling *Poa annua* generally requires both pre-and post-emergent herbicides, which can be challenging for Cripple Creek because the short game fairway is overseeded every fall with perennial ryegrass. Most pre-emergent herbicides that you would use for *Poa annua* are indiscriminate of grass type. In other words, once you create a pre-emergent herbicide barrier that barrier will eliminate growth from everything including grasses and weeds.

- In the same vein are post-emergent herbicides. There are myriad herbicide options for controlling *Poa annua* growing in bermudagrass, but all of them will also kill perennial ryegrass. Depending on the *Poa annua* population in any given year, it might be worth killing the perennial ryegrass in the spring or early summer to also control *Poa annua* so that it does not spread further.
- 2. There was some Spring Dead Spot noticed, which is not unusual for Latitude 36 bermudagrass.**
- Spring Dead Spot is observed in the spring but is active in fall and winter.
 - Mr. MacDonald applied two preventive applications last fall. Again, depending on the winter weather, even two preventive applications might not control the disease entirely.
 - What looks damaged will typically recover during summer. Bermudagrass is a warm season grass and, thus, requires hot weather for optimum growth. As the grass resumes aggressive growth, it will simply grow into the affected areas.

Recommendations

- 1. If you are concerned with *Poa annua* continuing to spread on the short game, it would be worth considering a pre-emergent herbicide later this summer.**
- Research from [Pace Turf](#) suggests that pre-emergent herbicides can be applied closer to overseeding than labels suggest. Their research found that applying either 50 – 100 pounds per acre of Ronstar® G or less than 2 pounds per acre of Barricade® 65G can be applied four to eight weeks before overseeding with no damage to emerging ryegrass. Again, this is rate dependent. Increasing the rate and applying in a tight window can result in ryegrass decline.
 - Their research also showed promise with split applications of Ronstar applied at 50 pounds per acre anywhere from four to eight weeks before overseeding and 100 pounds per acre applied 14 weeks later.
- 2. From a post-emergent perspective, I would apply Prograss® a rate of 0.5 gallons per acre during winter in the following spring.**
- Prograss, although highly variable, will generally not damage perennial ryegrass. As I said earlier, there are several herbicides that you could use to control *Poa annua*, but most of those will also kill perennial ryegrass.
 - It may be worthwhile to at least consider not overseeding once every three or four years so that Mr. MacDonald and his team can apply whichever herbicides they feel necessary; both pre-and post-emergent. The bottom line is you do not want to allow *Poa annua* seed to continue to build in the soil. Obviously, the more seed that is in the soil, the greater the opportunity for outbreak.
- 3. Controlling most of symptoms of Spring Dead Spot is possible with two well-timed applications of a preventative fungicide in late August and early October.**
- The cheapest product that will provide acceptable results assuming you do not have any DMI resistance issues is tebuconazole. Again, I would apply tebuconazole at the fullest allowable rates sometime around late August or early September and again in early October. These applications must be watered-in to the active rootzone to control the disease.

- Golf courses are reporting very good results with the fungicide Velista®. This herbicide is more expensive than tebuconazole however, you are treating a relatively small area, so spending the money on a better fungicide could be money well spent. Timing does not change, and I would still apply the highest allowable rates according to the specimen label.

Tree Management

Observations

1. **Tree management, both planting and removal, is always a good topic at Cripple Creek.** Mr. MacDonald and his team in conjunction with the green committee had done a good job identifying trees that do not necessarily affect play, but they do, however, affect plant health. Those trees appeared to be removed with little fanfare.
2. **While touring the golf course we did find some areas where it would be worth discussing planting trees.** Fortunately, everyone on the visit is open to plant selection and placement. In other words, everyone understands there are very few appropriate trees for golf courses anymore. Selecting an appropriate species and planting them in an area where they will not cause any unnecessary traffic stress or be a hindrance to playability are top priority.
3. **We identified one tree between 3 green and 4 tee that should be removed.**
 - There are two trees growing into each other, a much larger tree supporting a smaller tree. I am not an arborist, and therefore I cannot comment on tree health or safety, but we all had our suspicions that the smaller tree being held up by the larger tree did not appear to be anchored by much.
4. **While taking a broad overview of the potential project on Number 4 we identified several trees for removal.**
 - To highlight the beautiful specimen oak on the left side of the fairway it would be best to remove a few evergreens behind it.
5. **There are several other trees on Number 4 and the adjacent holes that should be removed so that a bunker can be added or the fairway line recontoured to open views to the bay.** An example of this would be the many clusters of pines on both 4 and Number 6.

Recommendations

1. **I strongly encourage you to remove at least the smaller tree growing into the much larger tree on Number 3 or perhaps remove them both.**
 - If you have questions regarding the health and safety of either tree, it would be in your best interest to consult with a certified arborist who will be able to better determine if one or both of the trees should be removed. Honestly, because neither of the trees come into play or provide any strategic value, removing them both would be the simplest option.
2. **Remove as many evergreen trees as you are comfortable with in the area that separates Holes 4 and 8, and the two or three individual clusters on the right side of Number 6.**
 - The evergreen trees between Numbers 4 and 8 are in an area where drainage is very poor. There will likely be some earth moving and drainage installation in this area and therefore trees will need to be removed anyway.

- Opening the cluster would allow Mr. MacDonald and his team to establish better grass and it would highlight the specimen oak tree on the left of Number 4 for the beautiful tree that it is.
- We identified at least three evergreen trees if not a couple more on Number 6 that need to be removed to improve playability.

Summary

Overall, I thought everything looked very good during our visit. Mr. MacDonald and his team have done a wonderful job managing golf course conditions in a very difficult time and circumstances. Mr. MacDonald said he is still short-staffed and at the time of our visit was unsure if he would be able to hire anyone. Cripple Creek is not alone in this situation, but it is important that golf courses who are faced with budget constraints or reduced staffing in 2020 prioritize goals. In other words, maintaining the golf course should be utmost priority, more so than landscape areas or other features that do not come into play.

An example of this are all the new landscape beds on the golf course and parking lot. I know Mr. MacDonald and his team pride themselves in what they can accomplish, and I too am impressed. However, with six or more people missing from the staff this year it is important that focus be on the most critical areas like tees, greens and fairways. Edging and weeding mulch beds and landscape areas should only occur when people become available.

Of course, if you have any questions regarding this report, anything else we discussed during the visit or anything else you would like to discuss in general, never hesitate to reach out to me.

Respectfully submitted,



Elliott Dowling, Agronomist
USGA Green Section

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Additional Considerations

The USGA appreciates your support of the Course Consulting Service. Please visit the [Course Care](#) section of [usga.org](#) to access regional updates that detail agronomist observations across the region. Also, please visit the [Water Resource Center](#) to learn about golf's use of water and how your facility can help conserve and protect our most important natural resource.

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First started in 1953, the USGA Course Consulting Service permits individual facilities to reap the benefits of on-site visits by highly skilled USGA agronomists located in Green Section offices throughout the country.



For questions regarding this report or any other aspect of the USGA Course Consulting Service, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

