

Did You Know - September 2020

Our Favorite Greens

This DYK will follow up on last month's discussion of our greens. Several of our members responded to this question: which green is our "most interesting and challenging to putt."

The results were emphatic. Most members who responded believe that two of our greens are well ahead of any of the others in terms of interest and challenge. Our members' clear first choice is #14 green, and their second is #16. Each received way more votes than all the rest of our greens combined. Most of our greens garnered no votes. Of the members who did not choose either #14 or #16, a few picked #4, and a few more chose #5. The only other greens mentioned were #8 and #10, with one vote each.

This result is consistent with the relative slope on these greens. Undulation makes putting more interesting and challenging. I find that uphill putts rolling over a high point and then going downhill are the most difficult to get the speed right. Maybe that's why #14 green was our first choice.

Interestingly, the greens we consider the most challenging are not as they were originally when the course opened in 1929. Four of our greens have been completely renovated over the years. These are nos. 4, 5, 14 and 16. In each case, the new green resulted in more slope when compared to our original greens. Over the next few months, DYK will describe how and when these each of these four greens were rebuilt.

Why is it that our original greens had less slope? Langford & Moreau knew how to design greens with large undulations. Some of their other courses had greens with lots of slope. Did Joseph Brewer – our club's founder and the driving force behind the decision to create a golf course – want greens that were easier to putt? Probably not. I've uncovered nothing to support such a theory. Why then are original greens fairly flat?

Perhaps the answer is that Langford & Moreau were not in charge of the green contours during our construction in 1927-28. The decade of the 1920's was the "golden age" of golf course design. It was a very busy time for golf course architects. L&M were undoubtedly quite busy until the stock market crashed in late 1929. Just before the crash, when they designed and built Blythefield, they had several other golf courses under construction. Their other courses in process were across the east half of the United States, in Arkansas, Florida, Nebraska, and the upper peninsula of Michigan, plus two each in Illinois and Wisconsin. Travel back then was mostly by train or automobile. It took days to arrive at each course, which meant that they could not be on each site during much of the construction.^[i]

Our original, relatively flat greens have become more challenging as the years have gone by. Increasing green speeds have done the trick. Greens back in the old days were so slow^[ii] that putting was a much different style. Golfers used to "pop" their putts with short, wristy strokes. Over the years, mower heights were lowered, light-weight green rollers were invented, and other maintenance practices improved (verticutting, aerating, etc.). These greatly increased green speeds and reduced grain, which will make some

putts much slower. Faster greens resulted in a changed putting style, with strokes using more shoulders and arms but less wrist.

Our fairly flat greens that had little or no break back when they were built now need to be read and putted carefully because of subtle breaks. In fact, when the speed of our greens gets very fast, even the flattest-looking putt will often have enough break to miss if played dead straight. Despite this, our most challenging and interesting greens are not our originals. Stay tuned next month for more information about our greens that have been renovated over the years.

Brent Rector

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[i] One L&M course constructed during this time was the Lawsonia Links Course, near Green Lake in central Wisconsin. Lawsonia is regarded as L&M's best work ever. The greens there have lots of undulation.

[ii] There wasn't a "stimpmeter" back then, but estimates are that greens in the 1930's would have stimped at about 6 or 7 feet. According to the USGA research, green speeds were still slow 40 years later. In the 1970's, a fast green was only 8.5 feet and slow greens were like putting on molasses, only 4.5 feet. For a brief history of the stimpmeter, see <https://www.gcmonline.com/course/environment/news/green-speed-history> .