

# CHALKBOARD

## TIPS FROM THE PROS

### THE ART OF STRIPING TURF WITH TRIPLEX MOWERS

A real star quality turf is often just a cut above an ordinary-looking turf—a cross-cut, that is. Nothing stands out more than a natural turf sports field or golf course than the beautiful striped or checkered pattern created by mowing. It takes both a quality mower and an experienced operator to give a sports field or fairway this professionally finished, “made-for-TV” look.

For stellar cutting quality, nothing beats a properly sharpened and adjusted reel mower. The shearing action of the reel blades against the bedknife gives a clean cut that heals quickly, is less susceptible to disease, and helps keep a fresh, green appearance. What’s more, a reel can easily cut in the one-inch-height range without scalping, even if there are a few surface irregularities in the field.

In most cases, one triplex reel mower with 62-to 84-inch cutting width is adequate for cutting from one to several sports fields or an average-size 18-hole golf course. One triplex can cut all the turf in a stadium in less than two hours. A smaller walk-behind reel mower is often used on major league baseball infields, making it easier to vary the cutting height.

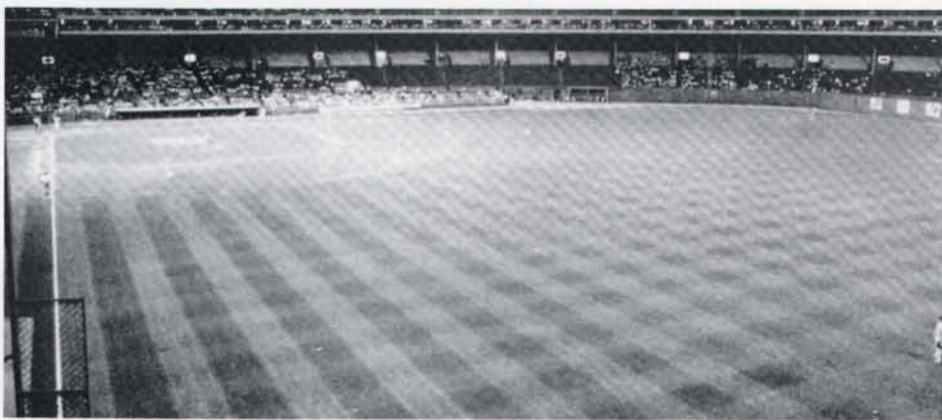
The attractive striping appearance is achieved by the unidirectional cutting action of the reel, followed by the rolling action of the rear roller, which orients the grass in one direction to create a striping effect.

Football fields are the easiest to stripe, by reversing the direction of cut between succeeding five-yard markers. Most triplex mowers require three passes to cut each five-yard-wide section. A golf course takes more effort to stripe, but the stunning effect makes it worth while.

To get an attractive checkered pattern on a baseball field, a cross-cutting mowing pattern—with each pass of the mower coming back against the grain of the prior pass—is established parallel to one foul line. Next time the field is cut parallel to the other foul line, crossing the first day’s pattern at a 90-degree angle. By maintaining the same direction of cut throughout the season, the checkered pattern becomes highly pronounced.

The secret to maintaining an even pattern across the field is to line up precisely with the foul line on the first pass. A parallel mowing pattern is established with this first mowing by maintaining a consistent amount of overlap on succeeding passes.

Midway through the first mowing, the operator will correct the pattern if neces-



A striped mowing pattern highlights the quality of natural sports turf.

sary, by sighting down an imaginary line running through second base from either first or third base while mowing on from the outfield. Any irregularity in the pattern is caught and corrected at this point, and a renewed effort is made to maintain consistent overlap throughout the remainder of the cut.

Once the mowing pattern is established with the first two cuts, the operator simply “drives between the lines” on subsequent cuttings. Some turf managers will vary this pattern when the team is out of town to prevent excessive grain build-up that can allow long grass blades to lay down and escape being cut.

The ideal mower for striping should have several features for optimal performance in cutting fields or golf courses. Out-front reels help ensure a quality look by cutting grass before it is flattened down by the mower’s wheels. Catchers are needed to collect clippings during fast grass-growth periods.

Large turf tires distribute the mower’s weight evenly and keep ground pressure low to avoid compaction.

“Floating” reels—where the cutting unit is supported by front and rear rollers and allowed to conform to ground contours—are also important. These mowers cut smoothly over surface variations. On baseball turf, they float over any lip that forms between the turf and the skinned area. “Fixed” reels without front rollers often bite down into this lip, scalping the turf.

For accurate striping, the outside reels of the mower should be positioned in front of the operator. This makes it easier to maintain a consistent overlap on each succeeding pass, since the operator can focus on the mowing path ahead without looking off to the side or rear. Out-front reels, along with a relatively low seat, help the operator

line up distant objects with the outside reel to maintain a straight-line cut.

A skillful operator on an efficient machine makes striping look easy. But on each cross-cutting turn, the operator must steer, adjust traction speed, and raise and lower the reels—all within the space of a couple of seconds. Today’s state-of-the-art triplex mowers make all of this possible, while at the same time providing the smooth, uniform, precision-quality cut that quality sports turf and fairways demand.

Hydraulic reel-lift allows straight-line striping all the way from the infield to the warning track on a baseball field. The cross-cutting turn is made on the dirt, eliminating any potential turf marking from quick, sharp turns. In order to use both hands for steering, a foot-controlled hydraulic reel-lift is especially helpful.

Powered reels can be damaged from overheating if grass is not passing between the blades and bedknife, acting as a lubricant. To avoid damage, reels should shut off automatically when raised and start up again when lowered to resume cutting.

Mowers without convenient reel-lift and automatic off/on systems must stay on the grass during turns to avoid overheating damage. This eliminates the straight-edge striping pattern at turf edges, and requires the operator to slow down on turns to avoid turf damage.

With healthy grass, a skillful operator, and an efficient triplex reel mower, any sports field or golf course can be given the “ready for prime time” look so familiar to all TV sports viewers. The striking, aesthetically pleasing pattern assures everyone—from spectators, players, and club members to team owners, superintendents, and school board members—that *this* is professionally maintained turf. 