

# Ball Mark Repair Guide

BY GORDON SELIGA, © 2003, 2017

## Part I: Introduction

### The Horse is Still Standing!

As many of you know, over the past few years I've been on a campaign to educate the membership on the proper method to repair ball marks. Recently someone told me that "**getting the membership to repair ball marks is like beating a dead horse.**" Well I believe that this Clydesdale is far from being dead and I'm going to need some help to finally put this issue to rest.

It's amazing how many of us will go to some lengths to protect our automobiles from the little dings and scratches, when a little ding or scratch doesn't affect the performance of the vehicle at all. To the contrary, the little dings and scratches we leave on the putting surface during a round of play directly affects the performance of the putting surface. Over the past few years I have spent a considerable amount of time repairing already repaired ball marks and I've come to the conclusion that our dilemma isn't that people aren't fixing their ball marks but that they are simply doing it improperly.

In most cases it would be better if they didn't fix them at all! Countless times I've listened to complaints from members about people who don't fix ball marks only to have those same people walk away leaving behind a horrendous repair job themselves. Even worse, they go about performing this same bizarre form of surgery on other abandoned ball marks, creating a twisted form that Picasso would have trouble duplicating. How many of us actually go back the following day to see how the ball mark we repaired the day before looks? As superintendent I get to monitor the progress and I know we can do a lot better.

It's very frustrating to know that properly fixing a ball mark is so easy, yet so many people are struggling with the concept. If I could only get the membership to do it better, I know it would make a significant difference in the quality of our putting surfaces.

How do I get this message across to the membership? By myself it certainly is like swinging uselessly at a Clydesdale, but if I had some help I know we could at least get the horse to stagger a bit and hopefully make some progress in our battle against ball marks. So who wants to help? Oh, I forgot, everyone does know how to fix a ball mark correctly, it's the Raccoons foraging for food at night causing those ball marks. A lot of you reading this are probably thinking "**it's not me causing those ball marks, I certainly know how to fix a ball mark!**" All I'm asking is that you reevaluate your methods. After you fix your ball mark, walk away, after a few steps go back to the spot where you fixed your ball mark. If you repaired it right you should really have to search to find it. **A properly repaired ball mark, no matter how large the depression, should be almost indistinguishable from the undisturbed turf next to it.**

Come on all you golf enthusiasts! I need volunteers to come to the golf course and spend about an hour with me repairing ball marks. This exercise will enable you to really understand the true problem and perhaps with this understanding you could help me communicate to others and spread the word about the **proper way to fix a ball mark.**

## **Part II: Repair Tools**

Before we even make a ball mark the odds are stacked against us. The pro shops and golf supply houses are eager to sell or even give away those fancy ball mark repair tools that often double as money clips and ball mark holders. The last thing these little trinkets are good for is repairing ball marks and you'd be better off using a butter knife or even your elbow to fix a ball mark. The closest thing to a

good repair tool is the small one the Pro Shop gives out during the opening day tournament. Although they're not perfect, with a little use or even better, a little sharpening, they'll do the job just fine. The best repair tools are those which are sharp and narrow with slender prongs. Those similar to the tools on the far right in the photo below work the best.

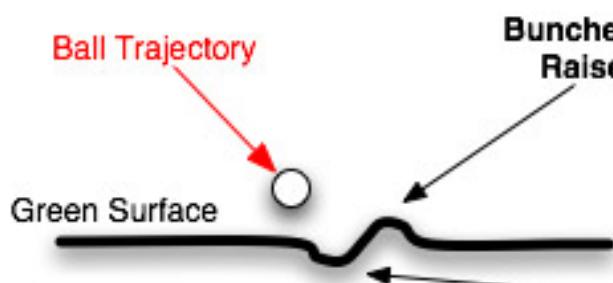
As beings of instinct it is our first notion to pry up when repairing a ball mark. After all, the ball mark pushed the turf down, why wouldn't it make sense to pry it back up? That would be the case if the ball



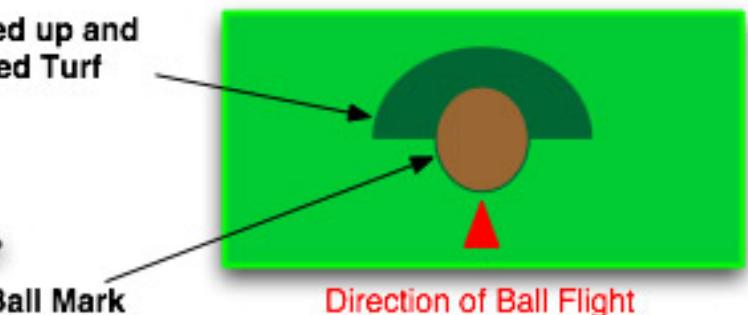
impacted the green surface from directly above at a 90 degree angle from the surface but this is rarely the case. The ball has a forward trajectory and impacts the green surface at an angle, thus pushing the turf to the rear and sides of the ball mark.

If you look closely at a ball mark, the turf is compressed and slightly raised above the putting surface directly behind and along the sides of the ball mark. To add to the problem, if the raised turf is not pushed back into the ball mark, it remains above the clip plane of the mowers. The next time the green is mowed this area

will be scalped, not to mention the fact that the turf was not put back where it came from in the first place.



**Cross View**



**Overhead View**

This scenario is very common as many of us are prying up, leaving the pushed up turf in the raised position, ready to be scalped by the mower. The final result is large brown patches of dead turf all over the putting surface.

### Part III: Example Repairs



This photo is a perfect example of how **not** to repair a ball mark. Unfortunately after a typical day of golf, 20 to 50 of these abominable marks can be found on almost every one of our putting greens. In this photo the ball mark repair tool indicates the flight direction of the golf ball. If you look closely you can see the compressed turf at the rear of the ball mark. It's very obvious that the golfer who fixed this ball mark pried up with the repair tool totally ignoring the perfectly good turf that was displaced and compressed by the impact of the golf ball.

The photo above was taken the morning after the opening day tournament. Believe it or not, this is how the golfer left it after his or her attempt to repair this ball mark. During good growing conditions, this poorly repaired mark will take as much as 30 days to heal completely.

The photo right is the same ball mark as in the first picture. After a proper repair as described on this web page, this mark will be virtually unnoticeable and completely healed in less than 48 hours.



**There is still enough turf left to finish the repair**



The image above is another example of an improperly repaired ball mark. Although the person who fixed this ball mark had the right idea, he did not complete the repair. This repair is not complete until nothing is showing but green turf. This is accomplished by pushing good turf from the rear and sides toward the center of the ball mark.



The image above is the same ball mark as the third one above. By continuing a proper repair, what was once a blemish on the putting surface is now indistinguishable from the surrounding turf.

Which one would you rather putt over?



**Holes left by repair tool.**

The ball mark above was obviously repaired with one of those large logo type repair tools. The holes created by the repair tool are just as bad as the damage caused by the impact of the ball. Again, this is typical of how golfers are leaving their ball marks for the golfers playing behind them.

Repairing a ball mark in this manner is a complete disregard for the game of golf as well as being inconsiderate to the people playing behind you!

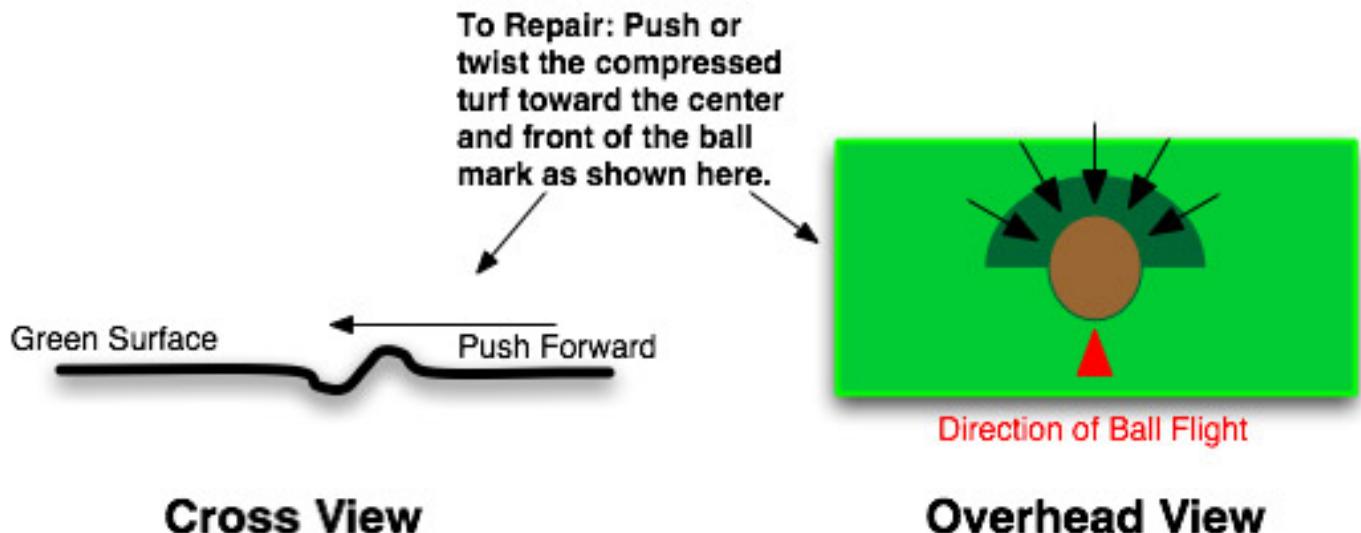


The photo above is the same ball mark after it was repaired with the proper tool in the proper manner. Again, in contrast to the ball mark above, a properly repaired ball mark will heal in as little as 48 hours.



The image above is a side view of a ball mark. If you look closely you can see how the adjacent turf is slightly raised above the mowing surface. To pry up while repairing this ball mark only accentuates the condition. Many people do not tamp the ball mark firm enough after their repair. As described earlier, this raised area will be scalped by the mower if it is not pushed back into the ball mark.

## Repairing a Ball Mark



## Part IV: Those Little Scraps

Sometimes as a result of the impact of the ball, a piece of turf becomes completely dislodged from the ball mark. In an effort to make a repair, many people are retrieving this small piece of turf and returning it to the depression. Ultimately this piece never survives and its replacement only impedes the recovery of the ball mark.



The photo below shows a dead piece of turf that was dislodged from the ball mark and then retrieved and replaced back into the ball mark.

**NEVER replace the piece of turf that becomes dislodged from the impact of the golf ball.**



The photo above is the same ball mark shown above with the dead piece removed. Look closely and you will notice that there is green turf growing in the spot where the dead piece was. The turf is pliable enough to fill the void with the turf adjacent to the ball mark.



The graphic above shows the same ball mark after a proper repair was implemented. As you can see, it is hardly distinguishable from the surrounding turf. A good repair job almost always ensures a smooth putting surface. If everyone would repair their ball mark in this manner we would not have any ball marks on any of the greens!

## Part V: Step-by-Step Repair

The following graphics show the proper procedure to repair a ball mark.

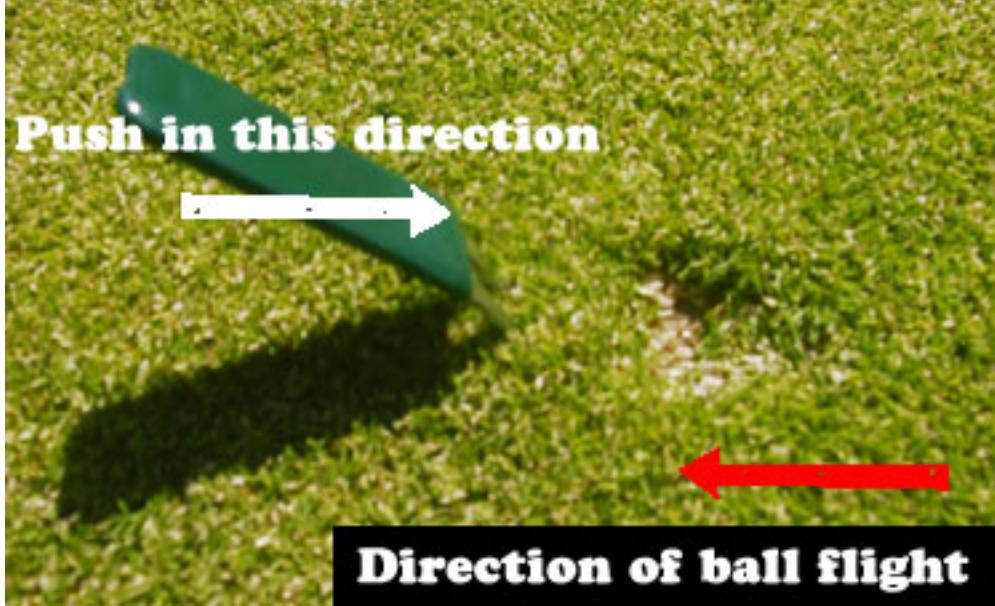
## **Fresh - Undisturbed ball mark**



## **Direction of ball flight**

**Step 1:** Push the ball mark repair tool into the green directly behind the ball mark. Push the displaced turf toward the center of the ball mark and against the direction of the ball flight. **Do not pry up!**

**Without lifting up, push the turf toward the center of the ball mark.**



## **Direction of ball flight**

**Step 2:** Move the repair tool slightly to one side in a clockwise direction and continue pushing the displaced turf toward the center of the ball mark. **Do not pry up!**



**Step 3:** Move the repair tool slightly to one side in a counter clockwise direction and continue pushing the displaced turf toward the center of the ball mark. **Do not pry up!**

## Direction of ball flight



**Step 4:** To finish, move the repair tool to the front of the ball mark and push the turf toward the center of the ball mark. when finished, firmly tamp level with your foot or a putter. **Do not pry up!**

## Push in this direction



## Direction of ball flight

**Voilà Indistinguishable!** By following these simple steps a ball mark can be easily repaired in a proper manner. If you repair your ball mark properly, it should be difficult to distinguish it from the undisturbed turf surrounding it.



As Golf Course Superintendent, it is my responsibility to provide the members with smooth, defect-free putting surfaces. In order to do so, I need the help of the membership. If everyone would repair their ball mark correctly, ball marks would be a thing of the past. Could you imagine putting on a ball mark-free green? Wouldn't that be nice!

I understand that ball marks in a singular sense are trivial, but when viewed in terms of "rounds of golf" ball marks make a significant impact on the quality of the putting surfaces. The average number of rounds of golf on a typical golf course in our area can exceed 25,000 rounds. This equates to a potential of 25,000 ball marks on any given green during the course of a golfing season. Multiply that by 18 greens and you have the potential for 450,000 ball marks. Most of which are completely avoidable if they are repaired properly.

Please do you part and use the information provided within this manual to help us provide an enjoyable round of golf for everyone.

In, conclusion, I would like to thank you for taking the time to review this guide to ball mark repair. Hopefully you will now have a better understanding of how to correctly repair your ball mark.