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# Know your greens

How the types of grass used on golf courses can affect your game

Anyone who's played golf in Japan will know that many clubs have two greens on each hole.

**A lot** of those golf clubs have yardage markers on either side of the fairway, but which are at different distances from the respective greens. If you take your bearings from the wrong marker, it can easily mess up your game.

The two greens are known as "korai" and "bent", which refer to the types of grass that each has been seeded with. And they are very different from one another.

Originally, the need for two greens arose from the extremes in temperature in Japan — from freezing conditions in the winter to the intense heat of summer. Korai is a summer grass, while bentgrass can better withstand Japan's winters. However, advances in biotechnology have led to hybrid grasses that can survive in Japan's climate, which is

why newer courses tend to have only one green.

"Creeping bentgrass greens will usually be smoother than korai greens — that is, the ball will roll more smoothly across a bentgrass green than a korai green," Dr Micah Woods, of the Asian Turfgrass Center, told *Eurobiz Japan*. "That's because the korai leaf blades are more rigid, and the bentgrass leaves are more flexible."

So how does this affect your putt?

"On a fixed gradient, the ball will roll more and will break [turn downhill] more when the green is 'faster'," says Dr Woods, who once worked as a greens-keeper in Japan. "A faster green is usually mown to a shorter height, and it may also be rolled to make the surface smoother

The speed of the greens on a golf course will be uniform, and can be measured by the ubiquitous Stimpmeter, a simple device that has a ball to run down its short slope on a flat part of the green. The distance the ball rolls — six feet will give you a six rating — allows you to calculate the speed of the green; the higher the number, the faster the green. But if you're putting on a korai green, the speed of the ball will also depend on the resistance from the grass. Bentgrass is softer and offers less resistance, so is more uniform in speed. Korai, on the other hand, is thicker, giving the green a "grain," so putting against the grain will inevitably slow down the roll.

Sounds complicated? It's probably less difficult at Shizu

## "the need for two greens arose from the extremes in temperature in Japan"

and to increase the distance a ball will go."

Bentgrass greens are faster than korai greens, and, on a gradient, gravity will come into play as there is less resistance from the surface. In other words, the ball will roll more on a fast bent green.

Hills Golf Club, which was originally built as a reversible course — meaning you could play it in both directions, as you can the Old Course at St. Andrews — with 18 holes of bentgrass greens going in one direction, and 18 korai greens going in the other. ●