Cold North Winds, Frost Delays & Course Etiquette

By Wayne Slaton, Golf Course Superintendent

It's that time of year again: north winds will start to have a colder bite, and the increasing chance of frost glistening on our playing surfaces when we have a clear sky and mid 30 degrees in the morning. Central Texas may deliver all four seasons in one day, but winter's arrival becomes clear when the Bermuda grass turns it's yellow dormant color on the fairways that are not overseeded. Our Golf Course Maintenance (GCM) team has increased overseeded areas on our golf course: all greens, tees, collars, and select fairways on #1,3,6,7,9,10,12,13,14,16,18. As a result, we might experience a little longer frost delays than in the past to prevent turf damage from foot/cart traffic on our playing surfaces. We will need your understanding and patience to allow our overseeded areas time for the frost to melt off before play can start. We are doing this to protect the future conditions on our golf course. Hey, it's a good time to order some breakfast from Cork & Barrel while you wait, try that breakfast sandwich or any of the tacos. I like the green sauce on them (golf course superintendents like green 😊). Holes 10-18 are at a lower elevation and take longer to melt the frost off than the front 9, this is why in the wintertime we do not start play off the 10th tee during frost delay events. Also, frost in shaded areas will take more time to melt as you can see below at club house putting green and #9 green area.





🧊 Why Frost Delays Happen

We average **30–35 frost delays each year.** These delays protect the greens and other playing surfaces. Walking or driving on frost-covered or frozen turf can crush grass cells and cause season long lasting damage.

We often hear these questions:

- "It's 35°. Can we play now?" → **Not yet.** The frost must melt, and the top inch of the greens must thaw first.(As you will see our GCM team inserting a divot tool into surface of putting green to test if hard frozen under the top surface)
- "Can we start on the back nine?" → **Still no.** Because it sits lower, the back nine stays frozen longer.
- "I have to be at work by 1 p.m.!" → **Good news—you'll be early.** Play cannot begin until the turf is safe.

Please remember: **the golf shop and maintenance teams cannot control the weather.** A little kindness goes a long way. Mother Nature remains undefeated; we simply do our best to keep up.

🚜 Cart Traffic & Course Care

Dormant Bermuda grass is especially vulnerable to cart traffic during the winter months. Cart traffic can turn dormant Bermuda into hard pan in a few weeks. Also, we will be using ropes and stakes to protect newly overseeded areas. Once the overseeded fairways are establish, we will be changing the traffic pattern to allow more access to the fairways unless we see turf wear damage, and if we do, will need to limit traffic to the area again to keep playing conditions from the negative effect of cart traffic. I am excited about our new cart GPS system for the next fleet of golf carts. With modernized features on the new GPS system, the display will show golfers the restricted areas and it should help us to reduce the rope and stake traffic control. Our GCM team and all of us will be happy about less ropes and stakes in the way, yet it is necessary to protect our golf courses' playing conditions.

Consistent good cart etiquette would allow us to remove many of these barriers. Until then, please follow posted signs and stay on cart paths whenever possible.

📞 Plan Ahead

Under clear skies, temperatures can fall **6° before sunrise**. Because the course sits in a lower part of Leander, it is often **8-12° cooler than in town**. First-time visitors may be surprised, but regulars understand to **call ahead** before an early tee time. Also watch for email and text updates.

📚 Learn More About Frost Delays

- USGA Frost Delay Video

  https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/videos/2018/03/22/usga_frost_updatedl3rd-5756266521001.html

- “But There’s No Frost at My House” Article

  https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/course-care/green-section-record/61/issue-21/but-there-s-no-frost-at-my-house.html