



A one-year-old green needing tile lines (and probably much more).

Building Golf Holes for Good Turf Management

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Since World War II, we have all witnessed the phenomenal growth of new golf courses. They have arrived in all sizes, shapes, and descriptions. Unfortunately many of them (including those with good design) also arrived by way of poor construction methods.

It may take only a year to build a new golf course, but if the work is not properly done, it may take the next eight to ten years to untangle the mistakes and put the course in manageable order. Often, initial errors can never be corrected.

Why is it that the "here and now" of construction invariably captures the attention of golf course developers, while the most important economic consideration of all — the untold years of maintenance that lie ahead — is hardly given a thought?

The problem of poorly-built golf courses probably stems from one of these three sources:

- 1) A number of golf course architects, knowledgeable in the field of design, have generally failed to show a real understanding of fundamental turfgrass requirements.
- 2) Some totally unqualified individuals have entered the field of golf course architecture. They are superb in salesmanship, but basically lacking in an appreciation of design, golfing values, course construction and maintenance.
- 3) Key men behind the development of golf courses, those with an investment to protect, frequently believe wrongly

that to do anything well exorbitant costs are necessary and can never be recovered. In effect, they choose to compromise with the future.

Sources of the Problem

Let's take a closer look at these problem sources.

Golf course design and construction is not easy work, especially if it is to be done correctly. However, a close look at golf courses built during the past 20 years only strengthens the contention that experienced architects have been more concerned with layout and design than with the basic and essential agronomic requirements of their work. The point is easily illustrated.

Not many years ago two rather renowned golf course architects in the United States collaborated on a published article discussing the relationship between golf course design and turfgrass management. They wrote in part:

"High quality turf is essential for good play, but it receives only casual player recognition if design is faulty and uninteresting."

Good turf, they are telling us, will not compensate for poor design. Of course, the exact opposite is also true!

The architects' statement may have some validity if applied strictly to championship courses throughout the country. But the architect authors have overlooked the fact that the majority of golf courses in the United States today are not championship courses. Not every club member or every golfer would want them that way. On the non-championship-type courses, of which there are so many, good turf has, and will continue to compensate for questionable design.

For proof, look only at the renovation and rebuilding work now going on. In nearly every case it is being done to correct agronomic deficiencies of early architecture, not design deficiencies. The man paying most of the golf bill, the average golfer, has constantly demonstrated his interest in a green, well-groomed and well-turfed golf course. It is totally unfair to contend that he only "casually recognizes" golfing turf.

The Case of Merion

This should not be construed to mean that design is unimportant or architects unneces-

sary. Beyond question they are essential in the development of any golf course. Furthermore, we believe they should be given complete freedom in design. But the architect is not omnipotent; he is not all-knowing, and particularly not in agronomic matters. For the good of golf he must devote greater attention and more effort to the construction phase of his work.

The professions of golf course architecture and construction have had an additional problem in recent years. At a time when golf courses are being built so rapidly it is inevitable that incompetent and basically unqualified individuals will become active in the field. After all, one is not necessarily a "golf architect" just because he is a scratch golfer, a retired professional, a superintendent or a landscape designer.

There are untold examples of so-called "architects" through haste, lack of knowledge, lack of supervision, indifference, and in some cases through greed, leaving a new club with problems that must be solved another day. Anyone involved in developing a new golf course should be alert and aware of this dangerous situation. Two examples will amplify the point.

A feature article appeared in a major newspaper in the Southwest recently devoted to a "young and promising golf course architect." During the interview the young man was asked how much formal education was required to become a golf course architect?

"None, if you know enough bulldozer operators," he replied. "It just takes practical knowledge."

Merion Golf Club, one of the great courses in America, was built in 1910 by "amateur architects." They were a group of businessmen and golfers interested in developing a new golf course, and they spent two energetic years in planning and construction. One of their members spent over two months in England and Scotland studying and sketching renowned golf courses there. This group may have started out as "amateurs," but they spent over two years putting together the elements of strategy, construction and design in building this outstanding course. And then, they were fortunate enough to have the assistance of Joe Valentine, one of the earliest and finest golf course superintendents in the country.

Merion proves that amateurs can do the job. But it takes certain qualities not in the possession of everyone. Qualities such as inherent talent for design adequate time and financing, an understanding of golf, dedication and self-sacrifice. It takes much more than merely knowing several bulldozer operators!

Question of Costs

Finally, there is the question of costs. Every experienced architect has had a client with 130 acres who wants a championship 18-hole course measuring 7,000 yards. The client also wants 100 homesites developed on the property, a clubhouse with adequate parking, a driving range, roads, a 10-acre lake and some service buildings as well. And he wants the course built for \$200,000, including an automatic irrigation system!

Of course, it can't be done. It's unreasonable of any client to expect an architect to build a cheap palace. Similarly, it's unreasonable of any architect to overdesign and overcharge for good construction. In any under-

taking, certain basic costs must prevail, and compromising these costs for expediency or profit is not the answer; it is the crime.

If it is too costly to build a green correctly, it will be far more costly to build it incorrectly. In the long run, the cheapest way of doing any job is to do it right the first time. If nothing else, I hope that one point will stick in your mind:

Economy in golf course maintenance can best be achieved by doing a job right the first time.

Progressive golf course architects recognize that sciences and arts other than pure design are involved in planning golf courses today. When good design principles are blended with golf strategy and accepted agronomic techniques a proud product is produced.

Golf is played on grass. Grass responds to good management. Good management begins with good construction. It is in this context that we say, "Economy in Golf Course Maintenance means doing the job right the first time."

The most economical way to do any job is to do it right the first time.

