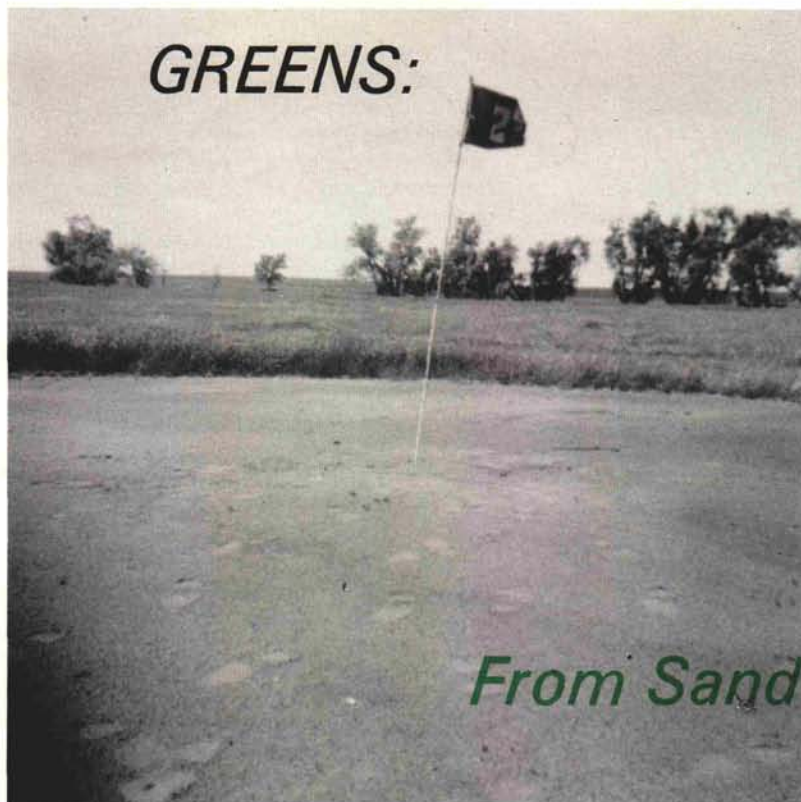


## GREENS:



## *From Sand to Grass*

*Sand greens at the Lennox Country Club in South Dakota. This club has just recently converted to grass greens.*

by **GENE REITER**, Member, USGA Green Section Committee

**S**outh Dakota is perhaps one of the last states to have sand putting greens on a sizeable number of its golf courses. Approximately 90 golf courses are within the state, and about half are still playing on sand, although the number is constantly dwindling.

The retention of sand greens is due to the varying weather conditions in the state. The majority of sand green courses can be found in the central section, extending from the north to the south borders and from just east of the Missouri River to the Black Hills region. Maintenance on all of our golf courses, whether they have sand or grass greens, also varies with the regions of the state, and again this is due to the varying weather conditions.

Minnehaha Country Club came into existence in 1905 and was the first golf course in the state. It wasn't much of a golf course and the weeds were mowed by sheep. The greens, so-called, were dirt. A stick with a rug on it was used to smooth the surface before putting.

Not long after the club's formation a desire for something better developed. In 1914 the club acquired land for a new clubhouse and course. Grass greens came into existence with a new nine-hole layout. Additional ground was acquired in 1921 and another nine holes were constructed to form the present course.

The club has had its ups and downs. There were rough days during the 30's when drought and depression caused the membership to fade away. The club weathered the storm, however.

### **Our Unusual Conditions**

There is another reason, other than dry weather, why large numbers of sand greens were developed in the state. With small populations in our cities and towns, it was impossible to get the money needed to build and maintain grass greens. Because so many liked to play golf, sand was the only alternative. I cannot

speak as an authority, but from what I have been told sand green maintenance is very simple and inexpensive when compared with the complexities we encounter in maintaining bentgrass greens.

Every spring, several of the members would get together and prepare the greens for the season. This meant getting a supply of oil (used crankcase oil preferably) and washed concrete sand. The members would mix it as best they could and then apply it to the greens and level them for play. Most sand greens were small in size, varying from 1,000 to 1,500 square feet. Their cost depended on the amount of donated labor and materials, but was usually from zero to a few hundred dollars.

The maintenance cost of a sand green was practically negligible. The same could almost be said for fairways and tees; their only requirement was mowing. Fairways were unwatered, and in many cases the grass was buffalograss, which requires very little mowing from July on.

It has not been too many years ago in South Dakota that many of our golfers learned to play the game on sand greens. I can recall past State Championships that were held at our club where the entrants were from sand green golf courses. They entered because it gave them the opportunity to play on bentgrass greens. They marveled at the playing conditions of bentgrass and hoped that some day they would play the same conditions on their own golf course.

That day is slowly but surely coming. Every

year a few more sand courses follow the trend and convert to bentgrass greens. I know that if the federal government continues with its Recreational Loan Program, with the increase in the number of players each year, and with golfer demands, the sand green will soon enter a past era in our state.

Of course, maintenance requirements for grass greens is much more involved and requires many additional practices. Penncross and seaside bent are the most commonly used grasses, with Penncross predominating. In the larger population and resort areas, watered fairways have come into being during the past few years. The grass cover for fairways continues to be mainly bluegrass; there are no bentgrass fairways in the state.

We find that as the years go by the players are asking for a better golf course and they seem willing to adjust to the necessary budget increase. The smaller courses in the more rural areas, however, are forced to hold their budget to the lowest possible level, and, therefore, maintenance and watering is restricted to greens and tee areas only.

I have to wonder what the old-time sand green players must think of sand on our present day golf courses. They played their game on nine sand greens that probably measured 1,000-2,000 square feet in size. Today's golf courses have 50 or more bunkers, many of which are twice the size of the old sand greens they used to play.

### HOW TO BUILD SAND GREENS

1. Spade up the old sand green, including top sand and old bed. Work over this spaded material and smooth it down.
  2. Mix some good clay with this old bed to get a good, firm base. Smooth off the base with a scraper and light roller.
  3. Take some used crankcase oil and use an ordinary sprinkling can. Go over the newly-prepared bed with a good and thorough cover of this oil. Let the oil soak in.
  4. Then, with some good screened sand and more oil, mix these together in an ordinary mortar box or cement mixer and spread this on the prepared bed to a thickness of three to four inches.
  5. Next, work this sand over efficiently, with a scraper, until a nice level or flat surface is procured. Work this over again with a light roller for a fairly firm green.
  6. Using a heavy weighted carpet, as a mop, roll the green, or mop it; start from the center and mop to the outside of the green in a circular motion.
  7. The final step is to apply a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch layer of sand for the finished green surface, which is mopped only. Do not roll this or the finished green will be too hard.
- Any washed sand must be worked back onto the green, after a heavy rain in order to even it up.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gene Reiter gives us an insight to a bygone era. The golf course superintendent at Minnehaha Country Club, Sioux Falls, S.D. since 1957 and a member of the USGA Green Section Committee for many years, Reiter also sent along

the foregoing recipe for reconditioning, or with slight changes, actually building new sand greens. The information was furnished to him by Cliff A. Anderson and Ed Livingston, both deceased.