



*Grooming is important to enjoyable play.*

# Requirements for Play – The Professional's View

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**F**IRST, I'D LIKE to mention what a pleasure it is to have an opportunity to speak to such a distinguished group.

I must say that speaking to a group this size is a very exciting experience — especially when you realize that my normal audience is one person somewhere out on the practice tee.

The subject I will be talking about is "The Golf Professional's View of Golf Course Conditioning." I'm going to point out some of the conditions that are required for a golf course to play well. The emphasis will be directed mainly towards tournament play but obviously these same principles can apply to daily play as well.

If you were to ask several golfers how each of them believes a course should be prepared, it is likely that each one would answer differently. This would certainly be the case among professionals, especially if you caught them leaving the

18th green after a particularly bad round. After all, it's much easier on the ego to blame the golf course, the weather, or the spectators, rather than yourself. I have found, though, that at more rational times a good many of the pros have certain feelings in common.

Only by competition on a difficult golf course can the best player be determined. I believe, therefore, in one over-riding rule: a golf course should be set up so that a skillful performance is rewarded and a poor effort is penalized. In order to do this, a number of factors must be considered.

## **DESIGN IS IMPORTANT**

The first of these is design. To have a true championship, you must begin with a good golf course. The organizations which run major championships — the USGA, the PGA Tour and the PGA itself — are very careful in selecting their courses. They



will not choose a course which needs extensive remodeling. You begin, therefore, by taking a golf course as the architect designed it. Perhaps it needs a little tightening. This can be done very easily by narrowing fairways through proper use of rough. Members probably will resent any change from the normal, but in time most of them will enjoy the challenge. American golf courses belong to two principal schools of architecture. The majority of our courses are based on the concept that there is a prime position for each shot and any straying from it is likely to be penalized. In other words, you play from point A to point B to point C, and the area for each shot is restricted to some degree. Pine Valley, in New Jersey, is a fine example of this type of course. However, there is a limiting factor here. I have played in only one event that caused an uproar among the professionals. The design of four holes was questionable. One was a par 3 that demanded a perfectly played 2-iron to the green, or else you were in water right, left, long, or short. If you missed the green, you had nearly the same shot over again. I believe the eighth hole at Pebble Beach would be an example of a better design philosophy. You have water short and right, and bunkers and rough, long or left. Particularly on long, difficult holes, the penalty should be more severe on one side than the other. The better players should be able to control their misses to a specific side and thus incur a lesser penalty.

The other school is a small one. This school gives you considerable freedom on the way to the green, but once you arrive in that area, you find the green and the hole protected to the extreme. There are examples of this design at Augusta National where there is ample room off the tee,

but conditions become very severe on and around the putting green.

### **TURFGRASS CONDITIONING IS CRUCIAL**

The second factor is producing championship turf. I do not have the expertise to do this, but I can tell you some of the desired results.

**1. The teeing ground.** The grass on the tee should be short, ideally about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch for both bermuda and non-bermudagrass. Most short holes will be played with irons, and players don't want grass between the clubhead and the ball. Tees should be firm and level. Superintendents must be careful not to topdress tees with too much sand before a tournament, otherwise the footing will be poor.

**2. Fairways.** The importance of close-cropped fairways cannot be overemphasized. The possibility of fluffy lies should be avoided. Players detest them, and with good reason. Where fairway grass is long, there is no way to eliminate the possibility of fliers and a player can't show his true skill. A proper watering program is an important factor in assuring good fairway lies. Too much water can be a real problem.

**3. Greens.** Firm greens, a little dry, offer the best test for both approach shots and putts. An approach shot should stay on the green only because of the skill with which the player has struck it — not because the greens are soft. The great tendency is to overwater in order to keep greens soft and green. This is usually bad for the long-term health of the green. Sound water management and topdressing programs can generally help produce excellent greens. There is a famous old quotation — "You play golf on turf, not on color."

*The rough should impose some penalty and its presence should be foreboding enough to make a player want to avoid it.*



**4. Rough.** First, the rough should be severe enough to demand a well-played shot to recover from it. Second, it should reward the player who is skilled enough to stay out of it. Third, some penalty should be extracted in making the recovery shot. To illustrate the first point, look back to the 72nd hole of the 1976 U.S. Open at the Atlanta Athletic Club. Jerry Pate drove to the right. Fortunately for him his ball was sitting up pretty high in the bermudagrass rough. Normally the shot would have called for a 4-iron, but Pate believed he could reach the hole with a 5-iron because of a flier lie. His decision was more difficult because of a water hazard just short of the green. He gambled and used the 5-iron — the combination of his knowledge and skill paid off. He hit a perfect shot and was rewarded with a birdie and the Open Championship.

There are specifications for mowing heights which are sent to all tournament sponsors for the purpose of fairness, continuity and also for providing a good test. They are based on material used by the USGA which has been developed over the years. These specifications are summarized below.

**5. Bunkers.** A timetable is of utmost importance when it comes to bunkers. Sand too often is dumped into bunkers just before a tournament in a crash effort for preparation. The result is needlessly unfair lies. Fresh sand must be put in bunkers at least three months before a competition is played. Time is necessary for the sand to become well settled. If there is inadequate rain to pack it, then it must be watered artificially. Suitable sand includes what is known as plaster sand, mason's sand, or brick sand. The sand must be able to pass through a 1/8-inch sieve opening and must have had the silt and very fine sand particles removed by washing. This will help to resist packing. Sand particles which are round in shape tend to shift under a player's feet whereas sand with angular particles is more stable. Sand in the face of bunkers must be shallow enough and firm enough to prevent a ball from becoming lost in it. The sand on the Monterey Peninsula golf courses is generally accepted as being especially good. It offers a definite penalty, but it will reward the exceptional bunker player. Players should not be able to putt from greenside bunkers. To prevent this, the lips

should be about three or four inches high on the bunker edges nearest the greens. There should be no lip on sides or rear of bunkers, otherwise balls might settle against them and become unplayable. Also, bunker rakes should not leave deep furrows.

**6. Practice area.** Practice areas are important to tournament players. They should be maintained similarly to comparable areas on the course. Practice areas should be mowed at the same height as fairways. Practice putting greens should be cut and kept in the same manner as the greens on the course. Cups should be changed daily. Also, there should be an area from which players may chip to the practice green.

### **TOURNAMENT PLAYERS LOOK FOR CONTINUITY**

The third area of concern in preparing golf courses for competition is to achieve some continuity in conditioning. Much time is spent by the sponsoring organization, club officials, golf architects, the professional and the superintendent to determine the proper conditions for play — what tees to use — how the fairways are to be outlined — and how to treat the area around the putting green. Each hole must be studied individually — each shot must be studied individually. Care must be taken not to favor the hooker or the fader. Also, you want to require each player to use each of his clubs.

The PGA Tour has these same objectives in mind. However, by the very nature of the Tour, achieving consistency and uniformity is extremely difficult. The Tour begins in January and runs most of the year. Tournaments are played over different kinds of terrain, on various kinds of turf, in various climates, and in all sorts of weather. The USGA Green Section offers a great deal of help in this regard. Tournament contracts call for the tournament sponsor to obtain competent outside agronomic advice, such as the Green Section provides. The Green Section agronomists deal with hundreds of superintendents and are trained in turfgrass science and management. When you're getting ready for a championship, they are able to communicate to you not only their knowledge, but the practical experience of hundreds of superintendents.

	HEIGHT		WIDTH
	Non-Bermuda	Bermuda	
<b>Fairway Areas:</b>			
Fairway	1/2 to 3/4 in.	1/2 in.	30 to 40 yds.
Collar off fairway	2 in.	1 1/2 in.	4 to 6 ft. a) don't want severe ridge b) minor penalty if just miss fairway
Rough — primary	4 to 5 in.	2 1/2 in.	
<b>Putting Green Areas:</b>			
Putting Green	3/16 in.	3/16 in.	
Collar off green	1/2 to 3/4 in.	1/2 in.	30 to 36 in.
Light rough off collar	2 in.	1 1/2 in.	2 to 6 ft.
Rough — primary	4 to 5 in.	2 1/2 in.	