

Management Makes a Difference — The Budget

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NOTHING HAS more effect on golf course turf, from a playability standpoint, than the club budget. There is no question that a larger budget gives a golf course superintendent many more options with his maintenance program than a superintendent who works with more limited resources.

The following options directly affect turfgrass quality:

- (a) A schedule of frequent mowing of greens, tees, fairways and roughs.
- (b) Preventive disease and insect control programs.
- (c) Extensive grooming of sand bunkers, around trees, on hillsides, around ponds and streams, in out-of-play areas.
- (d) A schedule of frequent aerating, topdressing, verticutting and spiking of greens and tees.
- (e) Extensive annual renovation or overseeding of fairways, including *Poa annua* control.
- (f) Wall-to-wall automatic irrigation system.
- (g) An extensive network of drainage systems.
- (h) Annual expenditures for major course improvements, including cart path construction, sand bunker renovation and tee enlargement.
- (i) A large labor force and a plentiful supply of quality equipment.

These generally have a positive influence on turfgrass appearance and quality. Clubs financially able to develop these programs fully should be in a position to assure themselves consistently fine playing conditions. There is, however, much more to a good maintenance program than having all the things money can buy.

Last summer, for example, I visited a golf course in New England. I toured the course with

Why maintain areas out of play? Weeping love grass not only provides a picturesque scene but requires no maintenance.



the superintendent and several members of the Green Committee, and along the way we discussed their maintenance programs. Their greens were in excellent condition; they had good speed, they were uniform, and they had a high percentage of permanent grasses. The tees were all adequately large, level and had a dense turf cover. The fairways were somewhat off-color in a few areas, but they provided a consistently good playing surface. Their management programs were well-conceived and were working well. Near the end of the day, the superintendent casually mentioned the size of his maintenance budget. I was surprised; it was about half what I would have guessed. As we talked more about his maintenance schedule, the reasons for my mistake became clear. Through a program of carefully setting priorities and developing a list of long-range goals, this club has been able to get the most from its maintenance budget.

The greens are first on their priority list, and they are given royal treatment — aeration, monthly topdressing, weekly spiking or light verticutting, daily mowing and a practical fertilization and irrigation schedule. The tees come next. They are given whatever is necessary to keep them in good playing condition, including periodic aerating, spiking and overseeding. The fairways are third. They are mowed five times a week, sprayed for insects and disease (but, on a curative basis only), aerated each year and, when necessary, are overseeded in the weak areas.

To maintain this schedule with a limited budget, the club plans carefully where each dollar

should go. Occasionally it has had to make sacrifices in some areas. For example, it makes maximum use of mechanization by employing a small but well-trained crew and maintains a limited but up-to-date equipment inventory. By narrowing fairways and allowing roughs to exist for 50 to 75 yards between tee and fairway, the total area that requires intense fairway management has been reduced by almost 40 per cent. Roughs are usually mowed once a week, and out-of-play areas are mowed only once a year.

This program concentrates its resources on maintaining quality turf on the greens, tees and fairways, the most important play areas on the course. Through careful management this club uses some of the most progressive and rigorous maintenance programs found on any course, while saving money by doing without many of the extras found at more wealthy clubs.

These organizational principles are not unique to this club, but they can and they should be used by every golf course, regardless of budget size. Success begins with a thorough understanding and proper application of the principles of turfgrass science and management. This, together with a knowledge of golf and of what the club membership is willing to spend, forms the basis for developing a budget which takes best advantage of every maintenance dollar. Money plays an important role in providing the finest quality turfgrasses for golf, but management certainly does make a difference.

It is important to concentrate on maintaining the playing areas, all else is secondary. Shinnecock Hills Golf Club during the 1977 Walker Cup Match.

