



An effort should be made to keep all of a golf course's greens consistent and firm enough to force the player to put spin on the ball. 1979 U.S. Amateur Public Links Champion Dennis Walsh in his semi-final match with Jodie Mudd at the West Delta golf course.

A Golfer's View of Maintenance

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EVEN THOUGH maintenance is important to the golfer, I don't believe any golfer walks to the first tee with the attitude that he's going to look for all the things wrong with the course. He's excited about playing golf. His thoughts are on his swing, who his partner will be, how many strokes he will get, and what the stakes are going to be.

A golfer's feelings about the course and its maintenance develop while he

is playing, and they are summed up in his comments during and after the round. The way a player plays and the condition of the golf course affect the attitude the golfer has when he leaves the course. How a player plays can also affect his attitude toward maintenance on the golf course. Those who play well usually have less to say about conditions.

You all know that you can't satisfy all the golfers who play your golf course.

They all have certain preferences in greens (speed, firmness), mowing heights of fairways and roughs, and the length of the holes, among other things. Different types of facilities have different types of players, and, therefore, different maintenance practices. For instance, a public course may have a little slower greens and less rough than a private course.

Generally speaking, a golf course should be maintained as near as possible

to what your players want, while keeping in mind the health of the turf plant.

For the sake of organization, I have separated the rest of my remarks into three areas which affect the view of a golfer toward maintenance. These are:

1. Consistency
2. Definition
3. Challenge

No matter how you maintain a golf course, the program should be consistent. All of the mowing schedules should remain the same throughout the season. For example, if greens are mowed five or six times a week, the days the greens are not mowed should remain the same. That way a golfer knows what to expect when he comes to play.

AN EFFORT should be made to make all of a golf course's greens consistent. The greens should putt at approximately the same speed and receive a well-struck ball with the same action. Golfers become very frustrated when one green is slow and another fast, or when a ball bites on one green but bounces off another. Also, this isn't fair to the players. The USGA's Stimpmeter can help improve the consistency of speed of your greens. Longer rough on one hole compared to the rough on another hole is unfair to the player who hits a bad shot on one hole and is confronted with a more difficult shot than a player hitting a similar shot on a different hole. Comparative bad shots should result in the same difficulty when the circumstances are the same.

Bunkers should have sand of a consistency that will eliminate plugged or bare lies. All bunkers should have adequate rakes!

Try to do major maintenance activities (aerifying, topdressing) at the same time of year (weather permitting). Post your activity schedule far enough in advance so that the golfer can be prepared for the inconvenience.

Grooming a golf course beyond normal conditions for a tournament can be upsetting to the players. You might hear, "Why can't the course be like this for us?" If a consistent maintenance program includes good grooming practices, the golf course will always be well received by the players and will appear to be in tournament condition.

The second area that affects the golfer's view of maintenance, which I called "definition," answers the questions: Where does the player go? How does my ball lie? How do I proceed? Am



I or am I not out of bounds, or in a hazard or a bunker?

When a player stands on the tee, can he tell the direction he is going? Do the tee markers point the golfer at the fairway, or are they aimed toward the rough or bunkers or water? Is the mowing pattern in the correct direction? Does the hole have rough, bunkers, water, or trees to show where the hole plays? Even a light rough gives a hole definition. A few trees planted in strategic places can give a plain hole direction.

All hazards, bunkers and out of bounds should be well defined. Poorly edged bunkers and poorly marked hazards and out of bounds frustrate the golfer if he cannot tell where he is. Poor definition can also lead to cheating. Many players will play the ball without taking a penalty, with or with-

out the approval of their playing partners. (A reason for having good definition during normal play as well as for tournament play.) Stakes should be visible from one to the other and close enough so the player can tell how his ball lies. Cart paths that are paved or graveled should be well defined so that the player knows he is either on or off the path. Any drop areas should be well marked.

DEFINITION is an important part of every hole, and it enhances the beauty and playability of any course.

The third and last area is challenge. I believe challenge puts the greatest demand on the golf course superintendent. How should the course play? Hard? Easy? What is hard, easy, fair?

Should the course be firm and fast, soft and lush (dark green) or somewhere



Do tee markers point the golfer at the fairway? A view of hole 16 east tee in the process of being correctly aligned at Winged Foot Golf Club.

in between? Some golfers feel dark green is good. I know the neighbors who live around the City of Portland courses feel dark green is best. Every year when the unwatered areas start browning out, our office receives calls complaining about the condition of the golf course, or the park across the street. I am not arguing the pros or cons of dark green, but I feel what is best for the turf is also best for playability and challenge.

Golf played at every level should demand something of the player's skills. These demands can be made through the design of the course and the maintenance of the course. This is how I believe maintenance can provide this challenge.

Originally golf was played in an area with no maintenance. In those days, you teed up within a few feet of the hole on dirt taken from that hole. Imagine what

that putting surface looked like and the condition of the edge of that hole.

Visualize yourself playing under these conditions: No mowed grass, unkempt hazards, the hole cut in the ground (and remains unchanged), and you tee off within a few feet of that hole.

Now bring in modern maintenance techniques and equipment (mowers, aerifiers, topdressers, chemicals, fertilizers). Mow the fairways, greens, tees, and roughs. Smooth out the putting surfaces.

Now visualize yourself playing this modern course. I believe we now have a golf course that rewards the good shots. A premium has been put on accuracy. You've said to the player, "Improve your skills and you can play from better lies. You will be rewarded for playing better. Your score will reflect the time and effort you put into your game."

What about the bad shot? Conditions have also improved for the shot that is poorly hit. Consistent height of rough, raked bunkers and smooth surfaces throughout the course have given better playing conditions throughout the golf course.

IN MODERN maintenance, the golf course superintendent can provide the challenge with his grooming methods.

The golfer should be challenged to hit good shots at all levels of play. Rough should border the fairways. Height of rough would depend upon the facility and type of player who uses it. Normally, courses being groomed for major competitions would have rough 4 to 6 inches high, but even a public course should have some rough to penalize the bad shot. Private clubs would have a little higher rough because, overall, they have far less play than most public courses.

Greens should be firm enough to demand some spin be put on a ball hit from the fairway if it is to hold. A thinly hit 3-iron that screams along five feet off the ground should not land on the green and stop within a few feet. Of course, if the fairway grass were long and the green hard, too much would be demanded. A player couldn't put the clubface on the ball to apply spin for proper stopping action.

Slow, soft greens don't offer a challenge. Despite what some players feel about soft greens for holding shots, there are negative aspects to this condition. Soft putting surface cannot remain true with the continual foot traffic. Soft greens vary in speed and cause short shots to react inconsistently.

Greens should be firm and fast enough to require some touch in putting. The sledge hammer approach requires little skill or finesse and is very uninteresting. Greens that are too fast cause play to be slow.

Thought should go into tee and hole placements so that the golfer receives as much variety as possible within the capabilities of your course. On each hole, develop a relationship between the forward, regular, and championship tees and move them together as you vary the distance of the holes.

Remember that the USGA Handicapping System helps equalize the players. A handicap will allow the players to put as much into their game as they wish and still remain competitive.

The golfer who doesn't wish to improve his game shouldn't dictate how



A golfer should know what to expect when he comes out to play.

the course is maintained. If a golfer wishes to have no hazards or rough, wants sponge greens, and doesn't want to think about the game, he should go to the city park or the beach for his walk, because a walk is all that he would be getting from his experience.

When a golfer walks onto the course, he should expect to be challenged by that course and to be rewarded for his good shots.

I remember a golf course superintendent saying in jest, "If it weren't for the golfer, I would have a real nice golf course." With a golf course that is consistently maintained, has good definition, and provides a challenge for the golfer, you would be very happy to have the golfer around. He is going to be your best friend.

Your maintenance program can challenge the golfer to make good shots. It can put a lot of excitement and interest into the player's game and force the player to put some thought into his play. In short, you can help develop a dedicated, enthusiastic golfer who can hardly wait to work on his game and get back on the golf course.

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