

Quality Playing Conditions For Every Day

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THE UNITED STATES GOLF Association is an organization of member clubs. It is the governing body of golf in the United States. Its purpose, stated simply, is to preserve the integrity of the game as we know it. The USGA stands for good playing conditions and fair competition! Part of its program involves the Green Section, which is devoted to the cause of better turf for golf. From the outset, the objective of the Green Section has been to improve and provide the best possible playing conditions for the game. I concur, and I'm sure you do, with this philosophy and the objective. The Green Section's ideals and objectives parallel those of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, a fact that explains why the Green Section's Annual Conference on Golf Course Management was held at the GCSAA's Annual Conference and Show.

All this week we've been hearing about challenges: what they are, how do we meet them effectively, those that lie ahead, and of new research information that will help us cope with the changing times. I would like to begin our program today by discussing with you "Quality Playing Conditions for Every Day."

Probably every golf course superintendent feels that he strives to produce the best playing conditions possible every day of the week. However, I believe if you examine your operation closely, you may find that you gear the work schedule toward perfection on certain days each week. Perhaps it is the day the boss plays, the men of the club play, or on weekends when most members play. Do you really strive to provide peak conditions daily? I am

sure you have heard the comment that all work is done only on Ladies' Day.

Having had experience at public, private, and resort clubs, I suspect that quality playing conditions do not exist daily on most courses. From my observations, private clubs work toward peak conditions for particular days. My comments are directed as a challenge to you to reorganize your work schedules to offer the golfer, as nearly as possible, the same good playing conditions for every day. Certainly there will be differences, but strive to minimize them. Admittedly, the area that gives superintendents most difficulty is the challenge to keep roughs mowed uniformly. Roughs are last in the pecking order of mowing, and they usually cannot be mowed rapidly because of the acreage involved.

Probably the one factor that will limit us in producing the same playing conditions daily is manpower. Our society today is accustomed to having Saturday and Sunday off, and that makes it difficult for us to consistently do as effective a job of maintenance on weekends as on weekdays. But the golf course must be tended to routinely, not only for the good of the game, but for the good of the grass on which the game is played.

RESORT GOLF is quite different from private club and public course golf. Our typical golfer is a three- to four-day guest of the hotel, and he usually attends meetings for part of the day and then plays golf. He expects and is given quality playing conditions, and he pays for it dearly. Further, he is concerned with the course only during his stay. Consequently, two things must happen: (1) the course must be available, and (2) the course must be in good enough condition to sufficiently impress him and make him want to



play again. When this occurs, we can count on him to talk favorably of our facilities, which in turn creates new business.

One real difference between resorts and most private clubs is that resort courses aren't closed one day of each week. The Greenbrier has three courses available during the season and one available for most of the winter. We almost never close! If golf carts can maneuver safely, we are open. Seldom is the course closed to carts. We are a profit-making company, and we need both green and golf cart fees to succeed.

Obviously, we do have the problem of repairing golfer and cart damage that inevitably occurs during wet weather.

Another important function is to plan our work to insure player acceptance daily. I'd like to describe briefly how we work our maintenance people

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During winter, quality playing conditions still prevail at The Greenbrier.

to achieve a good, consistent playing golf course. We use a foreman on each course with a crew of seven to nine men, depending on terrain and amount of hand work. The fourth foreman has a "special project" crew of four. The entire labor force is union organized, which means that job classification, seniority, and other usual stipulations are in effect. Therefore, each course has tractor drivers, greensmen, and a truck driver. The special crew consists of a truck driver, an irrigation specialist, and two chemical spray/heavy equipment operators.

EACH COURSE is maintained by an assigned staff under the supervision of a foreman. They primarily mow the grass on the entire golf course, do the irrigation (36 holes manual systems and 18 automatic), and take care of raking

sand, changing cups, moving tee markers, and most routine maintenance jobs. Two persons on each course work a staggered work week, enabling us to perform the usual chores, plus the necessary work on weekends without incurring overtime.

The special crew takes care of larger special jobs, such as all the chemical applications, drainage work, top-dressing, landscaping, fertilizing, renovating, etc. Additionally, they fill in on other course work when necessary, due to vacations, sickness, special tournaments and other reasons.

Thus with our 29 men, plus four non-working foremen, we are covered most of the time and can accomplish our objectives. During the winter we use eight men, and somewhere between eight and 29 men during the spring and fall.

Briefly, our schedule is: greens are mowed daily; tees, collars, approaches, and fairways are mowed three times weekly; roughs are mowed about one and one-third times in a 40-hour week.

When grass growth warrants, an extra mowing sometimes is needed each week. Fertilization is kept on the low side to provide acceptable color but not lush growth. Fungicides are applied every two weeks to greens, tees and aprons and monthly on fairways. Our weather usually requires that we make a few extra applications per season; thus, about ten fungicide sprays are applied to fairways annually. Weeds are sprayed as needed. Preemergent herbicides are applied to greens, tees and fairways for crabgrass control and are sometimes followed by a second application at one-half the normal rate. Greens are topdressed lightly every three to four

weeks from April to November. Greens are vertically mowed in two directions prior to each topdressing, and usually in one direction 10 to 14 days later. The contoured greens on The Greenbrier Course are mowed daily with 22-inch mowers and are brushed three to five times weekly, except during hot weather.

COURSE RENOVATION: During the spring, we schedule our renovation for a slack period in August and September. According to the golf anticipated, we close one course at a time for four days for three successive weeks. It takes three days to aerify tees, greens, and aprons, to aerify fairways in two directions, and to apply necessary amendments such as fertilizer, etc. On the fourth day we irrigate and clean up to make the course ready for play on the fifth day. Manpower from our other courses is used when necessary. Following this annual renovation, and while golfers are playing, we drill-seed all fairways. Roughs are aerified during early winter after most golf has ended.

We successfully completed marking all three courses in 1980. We plan to keep them marked — and check the out-of-bounds posts, lateral and regular water hazard stakes periodically. We were inspired to get this job done as a result of the talk we heard at St. Louis last year, "Marking the Course," by Joe Black, president of the Professional Golfers Association of America.

This is what we do and, to some extent, how we accomplish it. Our purpose is to offer every golfer the best possible playing conditions every day of the season.

Picture this typical scene: A guest enjoys lunch on the porch overlooking the golf complex in a setting where all three of our courses' first tees and 18th greens are located. In between are six beautifully manicured acres of practice range, featuring a large tee and a practice putting green. This panorama, dotted with greens, spotted with colored flags, six small practice greens bordered by white sand bunkers, and trees and shrubs in every view unfailingly draws him onto the first tee for golf.

FROM THE FIRST TEE, he notices that there is no trash, limbs, grass clippings or other debris to mar his view. Also, as he tees the ball, he is aware of the contoured fairway bordered by dense blue-green turf and bunkers with white sand that seem to beckon errant drives. As he addresses the ball,

he notices firm, close-cut turf, and over to the side, a large, sweeping bunker raked to perfection after the previous day's play. As he judges the shot to the green, some 175 yards away, he notices red stakes marking both sides of an open ditch to the right of the green. Also, to the left and behind the green, white stakes mark the boundary. He has to hit it straight! He firmly hits a 4-iron to the green. While replacing his divot, he observes other soil-filled divot holes with grass growing in them. He had seen the same thing on the tee — many divot scars containing a soil and seed mix. That was the reason the turf on the tee was so firm and had allowed him a good solid stance.

Approaching the green, he notices alternating light and dark green stripes over which his ball has to travel. The green is close-cut, blemish-free, and appears to be fast. As he studies the putt, he observes the slight undulations confronting him, and when he's ready to putt, he strokes the ball solidly. The ball rolls true, without bouncing, catches the lip of the cup and spins out three feet away. His par putt finds the middle of the hole and he is off to a pleasurable round of his favorite game!

THIS IS WHAT it is all about! Our constant effort is to produce a dense, tight turf, firm underfoot for good shot making. We want the turf to be some shade of green not as the result of fertilizer or water, but because of the natural growth of the variety itself and the height at which it is maintained. We strive to present a beautiful landscape free of man-made contaminants.

We want the tees, fairways and greens cut often enough to be free of clippings, to be firm of foot, and grass cut short enough so the ball can be played to perfection. Greens must be smooth, true and relatively fast. I believe the best speed at our course is 8 to 8½ feet measured with the USGA's stimpmeter. Greens, in my opinion, can be too fast! We don't want our golfers to be slowed for any maintenance reason. We also want cart trails out of view but with easy access to landing areas. Hazards must be clearly marked so we know what Rule applies; there should be no surprises!

This is our goal at The Greenbrier, and these are the conditions we strive to furnish golfers daily. Quality playing conditions are not easily achieved. Quality turf is the result of a sound maintenance program based on proven agronomic principles, applied daily toward long-range objectives.

New Green Section Office to be Established

Effective immediately, responsibility for providing Green Section services to USGA Member clubs in the states of Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Utah and Wyoming is being transferred from the Mid-Continent Region to the Western Region. All other regional assignments remain unchanged. This Western Sub-regional Office will be established in the Portland, Oregon, area and will serve USGA Member clubs in the northern sector of the newly expanded Western Region. Tim Ansett, currently Northeastern Region Agronomist, is being transferred and will assume his new duties at the Western Subregional Office on or before April 15, 1981.

Ansett lived in the Portland area before he joined the Green Section Staff. He has had several years of experience in dealing with turfgrass matters in several of the Western states.

Special Announcement

All conference talks were recorded on standard cassette tapes. Those who wish to purchase talks in full as presented may do so from Eastern Audio Associates, Inc., Oakland Center, 8980 Route 180, Columbia, Maryland 21045.