

Quality Playing Conditions



and Budgeting

A better quality turf may not be as expensive as you think.

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THE FIRST reaction of those who plan pursuit of quality golf turf may bring fears of an astronomical increase in the operating budget. This is not always so, especially if the current operating budget is realistic. Although any operation requires a significant amount of money for the maintenance of the golf course, many courses could economize if they would place more emphasis on developing a good playing surface and less on aesthetics.

Before deciding that the budget is inadequate, carefully examine present management methods. Significant strides in improving technical knowledge of the playing surface, such as the development of the USGA stimpmeter, have been achieved in the past few years. These efforts must be continued, and more emphasis should be placed on conditioning the playing surface above all other considerations. You may be surprised to find that quality playing conditions can be maintained at reasonable cost.

Quality turf is not a soft, succulent, solid-green grass cover. Quite the contrary. Some people today care more

about how a course looks than how it plays. Past USGA President Frank Tatum once stated that the courses in this country are being designed and maintained in such a way that too much of the game is played in the air. As golf originated, and is still played on the links of Scotland, the player is required to calculate a good deal of bounce and roll while planning a shot. On some courses today, the game tends to be a matter of hitting the ball a precise distance through the air because of the assurance that it will stop reasonably close to where it first makes contact with the turf.

One practice which produces poor quality turf is excessive irrigation. Overwatering has been peculiar to golf in this country for a long time. As golf here came more and more to be played in the air, heavily watered courses became easily justified. Only a few years ago, believe it or not, managers and superintendents judged the standard of a course by the quantity of water the system could deliver in the shortest period of time. Golf became a game of play from one soft lie to another,

featuring soft greens that would hold almost any shot and could be putted with impunity because any putt, no matter how badly stroked, would not roll very far past the hole.

TO PRODUCE good playing surfaces we must reduce the amount of water applied and encourage the option of pitch and run in the game. Good players will then be rewarded for a well-played shot. Good players can stop a ball on a firm putting surface from a tight fairway lie. If the player mis-hits from the fairway or rough, he should not expect to be able to stop the ball on the putting surface. The course should reward only well-played shots.

Aside from less water, other items are important to providing quality playing conditions at reasonable cost. With modern-day labor-saving equipment, such as riding verticutters, spikers, and topdressers, most routine operations can be accomplished in less time and with less manpower than in the past. For example, a small boom sprayer mounted on the back of a vehicle driven across the green and teeing

ground will save time. One operator can spray more evenly and faster than two men using a gun and hose. Labor-saving equipment releases workers for other operations without increase in budget.

In most cases, consistent quality playing surfaces demand a schedule of frequent, light topdressings. Though an increase in the budget may be needed for this time, it is not overpowering because the amount of material required remains the same; it is merely applied more often. If applied with a pull-type broadcast spreader, it is surprising how fast light applications can be made.

Vertical mowing is also essential to a good putting surface. Vertical mowing controls grain. Vertical mowing reels that are attached to triplex mowers will substantially reduce the time required when compared to the single-unit verticutting or dethatching operations. A triplex unit can verticut greens in about the same time that it takes to mow with a triplex mower.

Similarly, labor savings can be realized by using one of the new riding-type aerifiers and spikers. In many cases two or three passes with these machines can be made over an area in less time

than it takes to go over the area one time with single-unit aerating machines.

QUALITY TURF on the fairways and tees is also required. One way to cut some of the costs of maintaining fairways is to reduce their width. In recent years more courses have developed contour mowing patterns that produce a curving rather than a straight line border between fairway and rough. If performed with care and good planning, contour mowing will challenge the good player without significantly affecting the higher handicapper. Maintain a wider landing zone for the high-handicap golfer and a narrower one for the low-handicap player. If fairway acreages are reduced, the costs of mowing, fertilizing and pesticide applications can be reduced. Try cross-cutting fairways on a slow day. It may take slightly longer, but it is worth the effort because of the improvement in the lie obtained. Also, mow when the grass is dry; wet grass does not mow as neatly. In summary, fairways should be closely and frequently mowed, lightly fed and sparingly watered. The principal objective is to provide a good playing surface, not to see how much hay can be produced.

Although tees normally have been maintained similar to greens, in some cases tees could be managed like fairways. Tees should be firm, closely cut and as level as possible. Tees should be large enough to comfortably accommodate the play they receive.

The rough is another area where some saving is possible. Roughs can be maintained at a higher height of cut and mowed only as needed. Rarely does anyone mow fairways back to the teeing surface anymore. An area of rough is often maintained for 75 to 100 yards from the front tee to the fairway, thereby reducing the number of acres needing more costly maintenance as fairway turf. Also, consideration should be given to growing the grass around bunkers to rough height. This will save hours of hand trimming.

Golfers want good-quality conditions, though many do not really know what they are. It is up to us as managers, superintendents and club officials to provide and encourage quality playing turf. If you need help, contact the USGA Green Section. Then initiate a program and budget plan that encourages quality conditions for all to enjoy.

Citation of Performance Award Presentation

AN IMPORTANT feature of the Annual Green Section Conference is to honor superintendents who exhibit the ability to produce turf conditions judged to be of championship quality for USGA Championships played during the past year. The USGA and the GCSAA have an agreement on policy for presenting citation awards at this Annual Green Section Conference for several reasons, not the least of which is that both associations feel strongly that it is important that deserving superintendents be so honored at a function with large peer attendance. What could be more appropriate a gathering than this week's joint GCSAA and USGA Green Section conferences and an attendance that fully appreciates true turfgrass excellence for golf.

At this point GCSAA President Melvin B. Lucas, Jr., presented awards to five deserving superintendents for 1980 Championship performance as follows:

JOSEPH R. FLAHERTY, Certified Golf Course Superintendent, Baltusrol Golf Club, Springfield, New Jersey, site of the U.S. Open Championship;

SHERWOOD A. MOORE, Certified Golf Course Superintendent, Winged Foot Golf Club, Mamaroneck, New York, site of the U.S. Senior Open Championship;

DOUGLAS PETERSAN, Certified Golf Course Superintendent, Prairie Dunes Country Club, Hutchinson, Kansas,

site of the Women's Amateur Championship;

FRED REESE, Golf Course Superintendent, Virginia Hot Springs Golf and Tennis Club, Hot Springs, Virginia, site of the Senior Amateur Championship;

STEVE SEIBEL, Golf Course Superintendent, Edgewood Lake Tahoe Golf Course, Stateline, Nevada, site of the Amateur Public Links Championship.

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