

Quality Playing Conditions and Proper Equipment

by **RICHARD H. EICHNER**, Certified Golf Course Superintendent, Superintendent, Los Angeles Country Club, Los Angeles, California

IN VIEW OF all the technical sophistication that has occurred, I believe we sometimes lose sight of basic facts that we might well be reminded of from time to time. While we all seek to achieve a sometimes elusive target, there is a comforting amount of single-mindedness toward this objective in a well-managed golf course. The best playing conditions are the result of foresight and ingenuity in using the resources we are allowed. Since the golf course superintendent is involved with the day-to-day conditioning of the course, he is rightfully entitled to be supported in his decisions as to amounts and types of equipment necessary to maintain the golf course. The fine GCSAA Equipment Show provides some feeling for the complexity and magnitude the superintendent must face in sorting out the individual products for purchase for his specific operation.

Correct Equipment Selection: We all have access to the same products, so there must be a reason why some golf course operations produce better playing conditions than others. In my view the acronym CARE helps define the needs — C = correct equipment selection; A = adequate operator training; R = regular equipment service; and E = extra attention to detail.

Having the right tool for the job is a major step in accomplishing the work required. If, for example, your membership demands that fairways be mowed five times weekly, you must select equipment that will mow all fairways in one day or less. If your course is very heavily played, you will have to mow fairways ahead of play in the morning or follow the last group in the evening. This will require more machines and

more operators. Frequent close mowing is required for quality turf. Perhaps with inflationary pressures and increasing energy costs our methods will change, but for the present, sufficient attention must be directed to the need for considerable mowing and the equipment necessary to provide a quality playing surface. As for putting green equipment, the triplex mower has been both a boon and a nemesis to quality surfaces. On the one hand it has made daily mowing affordable on many courses that otherwise could not afford such luxury, while on the other hand the triplex mower has been accepted by many as an equal substitute for the single-unit mower. In spite of the many improvements in performance coaxed from the triplex mowers, I believe you will find that the truly memorable putting greens you've played will be those cut with the single-unit mower rather than with the triplex. If you strive for quality surfaces, you must include single-unit mowers in your program.

Adequate Operator Training: Any machine is useless without a properly trained operator. Manufacturers and distributors are happy to provide worker instruction and training programs for you. They want to see their equipment operating well, too. Insist upon this service; it will help you obtain maximum performance from machines and operators. It will also minimize liability if the operator is trained. In addition, manufacturers display their equipment at field days and turfgrass conferences. Several company representatives are present at these affairs to explain and show how to operate their equipment. Some conduct clinics that are extremely valuable in ensuring that you get the best out of every machine and operator.

Regular Equipment Service: Service is essential to effective utilization of all machines, especially power equipment. This requires close cooperation between operators and the mechanic and his staff. It is important to report irregularities before they become a serious problem in down time. A good golf course operation features a preventive maintenance program, not one of continuous major repair and rebuilding. Regular and faithful equipment service is essential to quality turf. Admittedly, it is tedious and least glamorous of a good management program, and superintendents everywhere will attest to the difficulty they have in finding a good mechanic. It takes a special sort of man to be effective in this job. Equipment continues to become more sophisticated and complex. OSHA regulations must be observed and the many safety devices and requirements that OSHA has promulgated must be maintained in order to avoid the strong sanctions possible under the OSHA regulations. The mechanic must be part technician and part witch-doctor, and have a concern for and a pride in his work.

The key duties are tedious and repetitive. He must be able to muster the same concern for seeing that the work is done properly the 30th time the same greens mower is lapped as he does for the first. When he calibrates sprayers, close is not good enough for applying a number of modern turf herbicides without the danger of turf injury. All of the manual equipment used on golf courses must be adjusted, sharpened, lubricated, painted and properly stored. Parts and supplies must be ordered and stored for times when they are needed, and sources of specialty items must be located from time to time. All of this responsibility

is within the province of the mechanic. He must have a fairly large resource of tools to do the job properly. His time is valuable, and he is generally among the highest-paid employees; therefore, it makes good sense to see that his shop is properly equipped and is a comfortable place for work. Set down on paper, the cost of an adequate set of tools, hoists, grinders, work benches, and other equipment of this nature adds up to thousands of dollars. These costs are easily justified and have modest impact when they are figured in terms of the club's total expenditure and the necessity of the services they provide.

Because of the premium placed upon the mechanic's time, it is essential to train the individual operators to perform the routine daily adjustments on

the equipment to which they are assigned. This makes good sense in that it allows the mechanic more time for specialty jobs, and it also gets the operator more involved with his tractor or mower. As a result, it will be treated with greater care. One should be aware, however, of the occasional overzealous operator who will want to maintain the equipment beyond his abilities, so his responsibilities should be clearly explained, well understood and enforced.

Extra Attention to Detail: The difference between an adequate and an excellent job in course preparation has to do in large part to the attention given to many small details — the attention of the operator to the

machine's performance and condition, the reporting of small irregularities he detects in the machine before they become extensive. He is responsible for reporting these defects to the person responsible for seeing that they are repaired. The operator of hydraulic equipment must be especially vigilant because of the disastrous results of hydraulic oil spills.

Thoroughness and attention to detail by the mechanic and maintenance staff are necessary for the proper functioning of virtually all pieces of power equipment. Whether the mower cuts properly or not is measured by the thickness of a page of the telephone book. The difference between average and superb quality maintenance is often measured in a few thousandths of an inch.

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