

The Lone Ranger Rides Again

by **TIM P. MORAGHAN**
Agronomist for USGA Championships



Armed and ready with a smile and helping hand, the trained course marshal is a friend in need to the players and an important asset to the golf course superintendent and professional.

THE ANNOUNCER in the tower behind the 18th green has informed the television audience that your blind recovery shot from under the tree in the deep rough has rolled to within two feet of the hole. As you stride confidently to the green, the crowd roars with appreciation of your shot. You realize making this putt will win you the Open Championship, and your dreams will become reality. The final putt is on line to the hole. As the ball falls into the cup, you hear, "Hey, Bozo! Your foot glued to the brake pedal? Come on, move it!" You snap to attention to see that the traffic jam that has trapped you for hours is breaking up and now you can head home. Why do they call it rush hour traffic when nobody moves?

After a week of fighting traffic and hustling through that special project for the boss, all that is on your mind is that 9:20 a.m. starting time at Peaceful Hills Golf Course. No waiting, no hassles, a place where you can play your fantasy round. Saturday morning is here, and off you go to meet your friends and enjoy a leisurely round of golf and finally relax.

Clubs on the cart, you head to the first tee to look down that sea of green, ready to pound your drive. What's this? No movement, carts backed up everywhere. People yelling and screaming at one another, balls and turf flying in all directions, and no room to move. You were better off caught in rush-hour traffic. Your partner, sitting reading the latest golf magazine, states there are over 21 million golfers in this country. How about that. Hearing this, you wonder to yourself if they all aren't in the group ahead of you.

Your thoughts race. If there are police to move highway traffic, why isn't there a course marshal to move traffic here? If we had a course ranger program, maybe we could play a round of golf in under six hours. I played Pleasant Fairways last weekend, and they had hard-working, friendly, knowledgeable people moving play along without any congestion or stress. Why can't our club have a successful marshal program?

What would it take to start one and what type of person would be able to do the job? Perhaps they could help the

golf course, the course superintendent, and the golf pro.

All legitimate thoughts. So, what does a club look for in an individual who could be a successful course marshal? What personality traits are important, and what responsibilities would he or she have as part of the club staff? Developing a ranger program is often not as easy as it sounds. Perhaps a closer look is necessary, because properly trained people with the right personality and attitude can mean the difference between success and failure, whether your operation is public or private.

IF YOUR CLUB has paid employees on staff whose job it is to marshal the golf course, the job description can explain the club's policies, and the procedures and responsibilities of the marshal. However, many clubs, both public and private, may not have the finances for additional personnel. In this case, volunteer programs can be quite successful.

An incentive to boost volunteer involvement would be to offer compli-

mentary food and beverages, golfing privileges, or discounts on golf shop merchandise. Experience has shown that certain types of people are particularly well suited for this work, so concentrate your recruiting efforts on them.

The retired senior golfer who is willing to donate some time to the course is a good choice. Here is someone who has played golf his entire life, and enjoys sharing his experiences and his respect and love for the game with others. This affection for the game can rub off onto junior golfers, and can add to the club's activities, as well as encourage yet another person to play the game for life.

The young golf enthusiast who is the first one at the course in the morning and the last to leave at night is another prospect. He is always looking to fill in when one of the scheduled group doesn't make his starting time. He is often found asking the superintendent, golf pro, and general manager about course operations or career opportunities, in addition to helping each one if the need arises.

The individual who has a knowledge of the golf course layout is an asset for multi-course operations. Someone with solid working knowledge of the rules and the game, and who is friendly to the people who play regularly is required. This is especially true at daily-fee courses, where success or failure depends on drawing repeat customers.

In summary, course rangers should be friendly, courteous, patient, and firm in times of stress. They should be quality mediators for on-course decisions concerning slow play, rules disputes, and disorderly conduct, and should not be afraid to get their hands dirty on occasion.

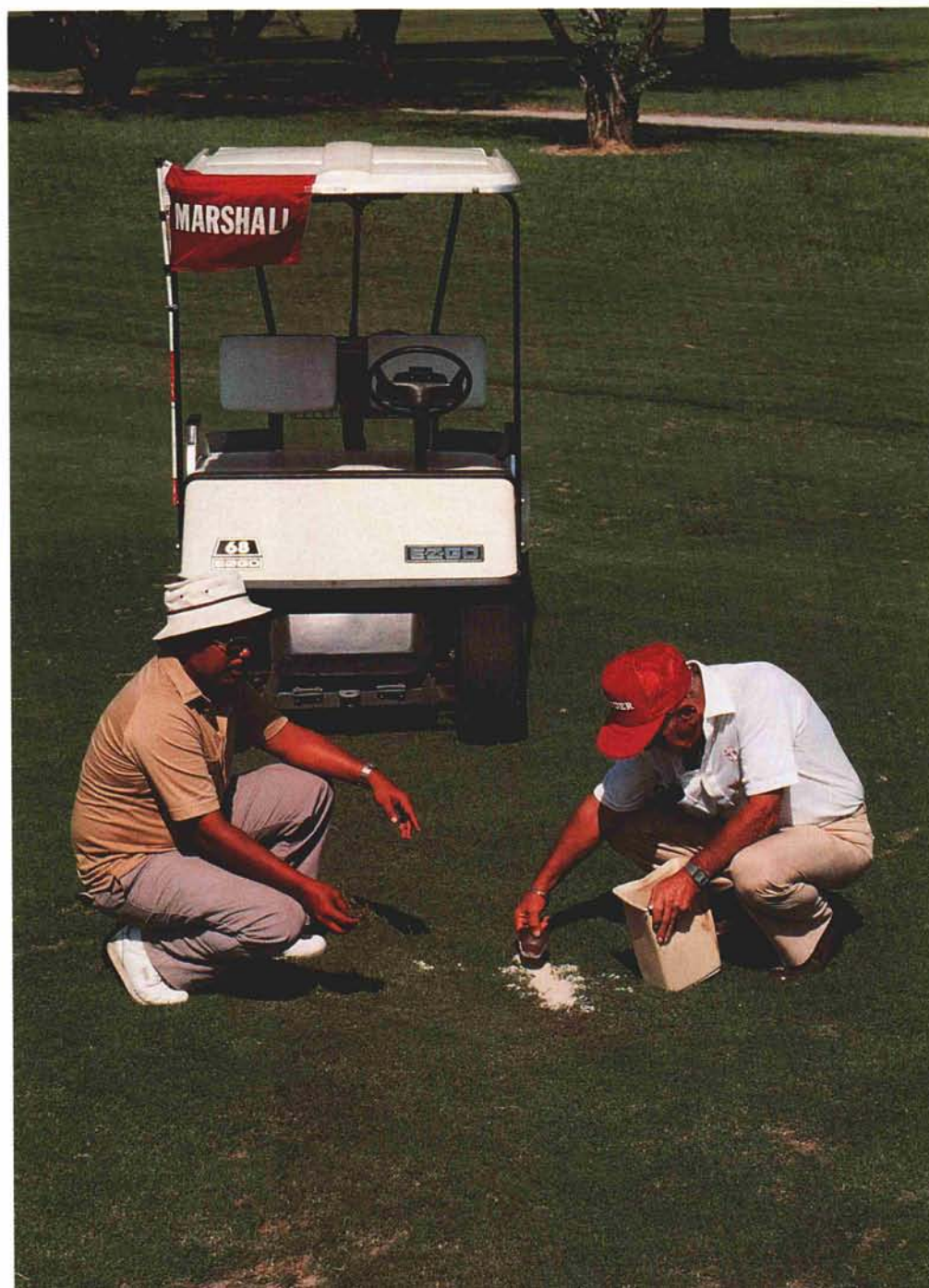
ONCE A STAFF of rangers is established, a training period can begin that should include what their responsibilities will be to the golf course superintendent and golf professional. Since play can be intense at one time and slow at other moments, the ranger should be trained to handle both situations. There is more to the job than just moving people through the course at an even pace of play; a good ranger can serve some important needs of both the golf professional and the superintendent. At clubs where the ranger is paid, these duties can further justify his position.

For the golf professional, the ranger can help provide quality service and pro-

mote the course. He can be seen as an extension of the golf shop in many ways. Though the professional will have policies on course operation dealing with what is right and wrong, safe and hazardous, he cannot always be out on the golf course to enforce them. A properly trained marshal, then, can be an on-course extension of the professional and his operating procedures.

Maintaining pace of play is what most people see as the main function of the ranger. Golfers at their home club or at a resort, come to enjoy golf and get away

from confusion and backups. As members or guests, they reserve a starting time and expect to play at the time they requested. If the ranger and starter are not moving people off the first tee and around the course, there will be a log jam of impatient guests in the golf shop berating the whole operation and demanding their money back. For those who are on the course playing a comfortable round in under 5½ hours, it means no waiting, and time to enjoy their game, as well as other activities of their stay. Good service means return customers.



DURING the busy season, an extra hand is always welcome around the clubhouse. Helping guests find their carts, showing them where the first or tenth tee is located, and even loading the players' bags onto the cart reflects the concern of the golf professional that the guests be treated to quality service.

Being an on-course representative, the ranger can help promote and advise players of what is available in the golf shop concerning merchandise and equipment. Some serve as a roving food and beverage service, with a cooler of cold

drinks and small snacks. Carrying a small first-aid kit can help with minor bumps and bruises.

When schedules are established and the routine becomes familiar, the course ranger will see the entire course during his travels. With proper training from the golf course superintendent, he can follow through with many light and easy tasks to help maintain quality playing conditions.

Though not a trained professional, the roving ranger can be a valuable extra set of eyes for the superintendent. The

ranger who is at the course early in the morning and well into the evening can take note of and report any unusual property or turf damage, such as broken tree limbs, fences, gates left open, or irrigation leaks. At times the late shift ranger may see a vandal driving a car across a green or tee. Though they cannot do anything to stop the damage, they may get a good look at the car and the license number of the vehicle.

The ranger can check each green and fix ball marks. His cart should have a small bucket of soil/seed divot mix available to fix many of the unrepaired divots. Also, he should carry a bunker rake to smooth out the footprints of careless players so the next group will have fair conditions. By fixing and repairing some of the everyday damage, the ranger sets an example of care for the course, which when witnessed by the golfers will carry over to them.

If your par-3 tees are small and the course receives heavy play, the ranger can move the markers either five yards ahead or behind the existing point to help preserve the turf. If time permits, he might take a quick check of the practice range to be sure the markers or bag racks are in place, and bring the empty ball buckets back to the shop.

On those long rides around and through the course, the ranger should be on the lookout for fallen or missing out-of-bounds and hazard stakes, and take appropriate action to have them replaced. At many courses rope is used as a barrier and a direction marker. During the course of the day much of this rope either falls down or is run over by carts. Carrying a small hammer for repairs, a ranger can keep ropes and stakes in place to prevent further wear and tear on the turf.

When there are on-course restroom facilities, the occasional backup or breakdown of the equipment can cause much aggravation to the emergency victim. In addition, the shortage or absence of needed supplies can be a cause of great concern among the guests. By keeping a constant watch for these mishaps, fewer people will suffer. Good service means return customers.

For many golf courses, a well-trained staff of polite, thoughtful, hard-working marshals could mean the difference between success and failure. Having rangers whose responsibility it is to insure a pleasant and safe round of golf is a valuable asset to any club. It helps make the game an even greater pleasure for everyone involved.



(Opposite page) Filling fairway divots, the ranger trained by the superintendent can ease the burden of daily maintenance and set an example of golf course etiquette for the players.

(Above) On the lookout for forgetful golfers, the ranger can provide fair playing conditions.