

1989 USGA Day

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AS SUMMER approaches, golfers everywhere begin to assess the talent in the pro and amateur golf ranks, and speculate on who will win the Open and Amateur Championships. Anticipation and excitement run high, especially at the host clubs of USGA championships. Questions on course setup and conditioning are put to the club from all directions. With this in mind, those responsible for course conditions often ask for help. To assist the superintendents at these clubs, the USGA offers them guidelines that can provide the finest conditions possible. The USGA takes the view that a firm and fast golf course will help determine a worthy champion.

Course preparation for USGA championships is quite different from the routine for daily play, and it requires time to reach peak conditions for the event. Although most of the American golfing public equates fine playing conditions with lush, deep green, manicured turf, this is not true. The simplest way to describe championship conditions is to say, **GREEN IS NOT NECESSARILY GREAT.**

To provide lush, green turf, plenty of water is a basic requirement. The more water, the greener the turf will be. Those looking for a lush, green golf course, then, are likely to have a soft, wet course as well.

For best effect, ground conditions for a championship should be firm and fast. Overwatering the putting surfaces, for example, produces soft greens and allows a poorly hit shot to hold. When watering is necessary, only enough water should be applied during the event to keep the turf alive. If syringing is needed, it should be done very lightly to avoid softening the soil. Hand watering should never be done to the point of causing runoff or creating small puddles of standing water.

The need for firm and fast conditions applies throughout the golf course, including the sand bunkers. Although bunkers serve as hazards, they should be conditioned properly. This means producing a firm surface to play from, without the concern of the ball burying in the face of a high sand bank, or end-

ing up in a fried-egg lie. The firmness of the bunkers should be consistent.

Firming the surface and slopes of sand bunkers is simple enough, but it does require a substantial amount of time if the sand is quite soft.

Begin by irrigating the bunker from a hand-held hose with a syringe-type nozzle, making sure to saturate the sand thoroughly. After any remaining surface water disappears, use the wheels of a mechanical sand rake to pack the sand by traveling back and forth and riding up and down any sloped areas. The weight of the machine, in combination with the knobs on the tires, will press down and firm the sand.

Another hint for encouraging the sand to settle: Spray the bunker with a liquid wetting agent at a rate of six to eight ounces per 1,000 square feet every four to seven days, a practice that helps reduce the tendency for the sand particles to "bridge" and remain fluffy.

Finally, the turf area that usually draws more than its share of concerns at USGA championships is the rough.

Players often claim the grass is too high, while club members and spectators claim it is not high enough. The height of the rough turf is decided upon by the USGA's Championship Committee at least one year in advance. The decision is based largely on the type of grass and the event being played. For the Open, which is regularly contested on cool-season turf, the height is usually four inches. When it is maintained properly, cool-season turf grown to this height will penalize a player about half a stroke for missing the fairway and intermediate rough.

The rough should not be so severe it eliminates a fair opportunity for recovery. To produce a uniform, dense, and upright stand of rough turf, up-front rotary mowers are best. The suction created under the mowing deck will stand up the turf and provides the desired results.

Although Open conditions aren't necessarily what you want for your club championship, keep these tips in mind when you're preparing your course for special events.

What happened to my ball?

