

The International Flavor of Golf Course Management

by JOHN SEGUI, CGCS

President, GCSAA, Waynesborough Country Club, Berwyn, Pennsylvania

IF ONE KIND OF TURF is truly international, it's got to be a golf green. When you think about it, for anyone who plays golf anywhere today, a green is defined at a glance by just a few humble things: a small piece of earth, a hole in the ground, and a modest flag that belongs to no nation. I think that kind of common link is a rare commodity in today's world. It speaks well for the game, and it reflects well on all of us involved in the game, whatever our particular contribution.

The growing popularity of golf around the world demonstrates it is among the most universal of games for adults. Nor is its popularity confined by national borders, language barriers, or particular customs of a country. Just look at the growing interest in golf course construction in such different countries as the Soviet Union, China, Turkey, Portugal, and in the game's more traditional venues as well.

I visited USGA headquarters, in Far Hills, New Jersey, last November, and spoke to a delegation of five Russians who came over to look at some American golf courses. As you might know, Russia once again is in the planning stages of its first golf course. The site is located about 30 miles from Moscow. Although we spoke to one another through an interpreter, it was obvious the Russians had a feel for golf and understood our meaning. It was a great experience for all of us.

During my time as President of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, I have shared a taste of golf course management overseas, as well as in this country. In conjunction with a meeting of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association, in Scotland, last year, I visited clubs in Scotland and England, where the game originated, and played a couple of courses. One that stands out in my mind was Belle Isle, a course of great natural beauty and challenging rough.



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For me, both as a superintendent and a golfer, it was deeply thought-provoking to see the differences in management practices between Britain and the United States, and to hear the reasons for those differences. One interesting example I recall was at the Woodbridge Golf Club, where we played in a tournament. After decades without trees on the course, the members have become concerned because some have sprung up recently, and many of them have grown to unaccustomed height.

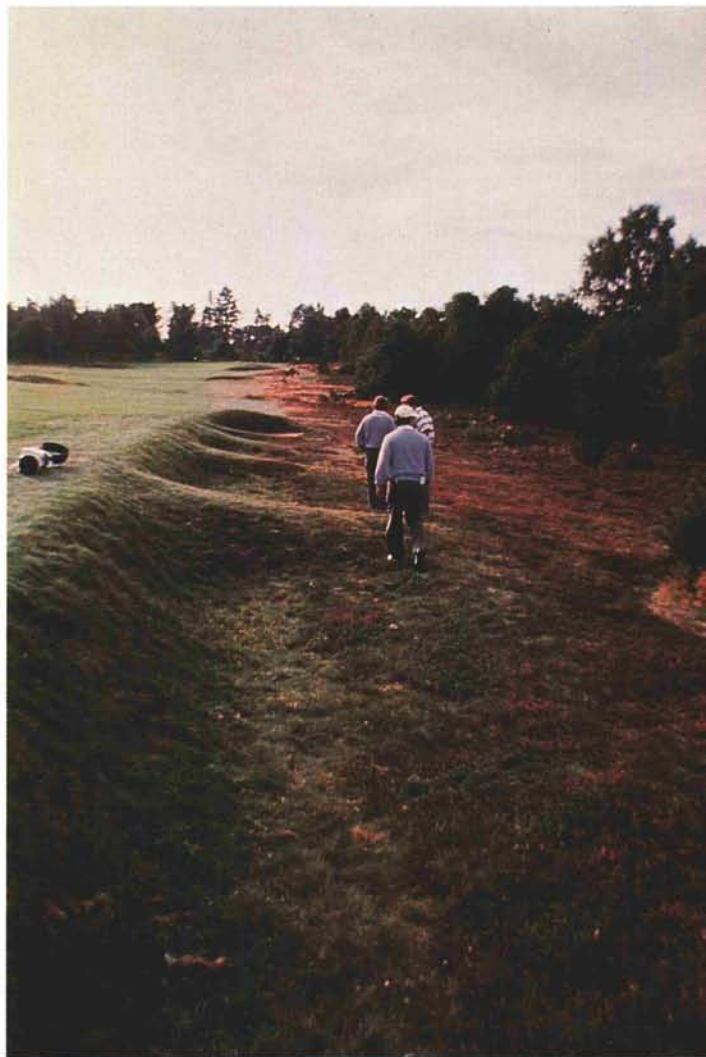
How they became established is an interesting story. For many years there was a great abundance of rabbits in that part of England, and the rabbits prevented trees that grew naturally from surviving because they ate the leaves off the seedlings as soon as they broke ground. About 15 years ago a disease epidemic killed about three fourths of the rabbits, and as a result the trees gained about a year's growth before the rabbits recovered. Now the club has what the members consider an overabundance of trees, and it appears the club wants a tree-removal program to put the golf course back to its original state. Isn't that something? In this country we try to grow trees, while over there they cut them down.

I learned recently that construction work has begun on an 18-hole championship layout in Ismear, Turkey. This course, which will be the country's first full-sized high-quality contemporary layout, is also the first one built to accommodate Turkey's already booming tourist industry. If all goes as projected, it appears that additional regional development could bring new courses to Istanbul, Ankara, and the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts.

During my stay in Scotland and England I met many superintendents from all over Europe, and the same boom in golf course construction is occurring over there. They are building golf courses as fast as they possibly can. England is about to get its first all-bentgrass golf course. The plan calls for the course to be maintained in what they consider the American style. It will certainly be a change for them.

Switching to the other side of the world, Japan continues to take up the game at a rapid pace. In Hawaii I met Ken Ogerly, who represents Japan's equivalent of our National Golf Foundation, and he told me the Japanese are blowing away the sides of mountains to build courses. On another course, the completion of one hole requires a tram ride to the next tee. The Japanese are truly ingenious. It will be very interesting to follow the evolution and development of golf course management in these unfamiliar sites during the next decade.

Even though course management practices affect golfers' attitudes, and operating budgets often differ greatly from country to country, the feeling of camaraderie among those responsible for maintaining the courses as well as those who fancy themselves to be golfers have been much the same wherever I traveled. Those feelings truly give course management an international flavor today. I know I enjoy the feelings I have during and after a good round of golf with friends, whether I play well or not.



(Above left) And you thought your rough was tough!

(Above right) Don't miss the fairway on this hole.

(Left) Golf is a common bond among players throughout the world.

I also get a good feeling from the job I do as a golf course superintendent, maintaining a course so that others can enjoy it. In speaking with members of other superintendents associations around the world, I have found that more and more of us share those same sources of enjoyment. It is a common denominator that bonds us all. The place of our courses in our communities and the contact with people are inseparable parts of the joy of the game. Let's hope we can continue to cultivate this good feeling for the game as we improve the maintenance practices on our courses in the years ahead.