

Fitting the Pieces in the Golf Course Management Puzzle

January 30, 1993, Anaheim, California

FOR THE 12TH CONSECUTIVE YEAR the annual Green Section Education Conference was held in conjunction with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America International Turfgrass Conference and Show. This year more than 1,300 people attended the Green Section's program on Saturday, January 30, at the Anaheim Convention Center. James T. Snow, National Director of the USGA Green Section, introduced the afternoon's program of 17 speakers who addressed this year's theme, "Fitting the Pieces in the Golf Course Management Puzzle." Following are the full proceedings.

The Environment: Where Environment, Nature, and the Game Can Coexist

by ROBERT TRENT JONES, JR.
President, Robert Trent Jones II

I'M NOT SURE when the term was contrived — perhaps it was back in the teens or even before that — but many of our early golf courses were called "country clubs." Emphasize the word *country*. These early clubs and courses were located well out of the inner cities — out in the *country*. One reason they were there was because golf requires some space, to be sure, but mainly they were there because of the *environment* they provided for members and players of all ages. In those early days you went to your club in a horse and buggy, and later in a Model T with your clubs in the rumble seat. The streets of the city were festooned with horse manure and later with smoke-belching vehicles. The environment of the major metropolitan city was not all that delightful in those days, and some agree it is not much better or perhaps even worse today.

At that golf course out in the country, or that country club, all was bright and beautiful. One hundred acres or more could be



Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

found of green grass, white sand in the bunkers, and often a glittering blue sky as a backdrop. There were no horse droppings, no smoke, no noise, no clutter, no urgency, no problems . . . unless, of course, you consider a tricky downhill 3-footer a problem.

So, you see, greenkeepers were among the first environmentalists. Your fathers and grandfathers before you provided the foundation on which our game was built and the very platform on which it stands today.

Isn't it strange that the game that found its earliest roots in environmentalism is often attacked today by those who call themselves environmentalists? But let me caution against a violent knee-jerk reaction to these zealous people, the majority of whom want only for this world to be a better place in which to live. What we are talking about here today is the building of bridges from those of us who love the game of golf to those on the other side who don't truly understand or appreciate the game. Many of



(Left) The Chateau Whistler Golf Course was designed to incorporate the needed drainage channels and streams to handle runoff from the snowmelt during the spring and summer.

(Below) The environmental movement is here to stay, and golf will play a major part in it. Golf course superintendents work with professionalism and attention to proper maintenance methods.

these otherwise well-intentioned people see golf as an elitist game, one which is enjoyed only by the wealthy. They see it as a giant club with privileges not to be enjoyed by the populace. They see it as wasteful of land and water, and they see it as a residue of chemicals gone astray.

There is obviously some growing political and social misunderstanding here, and it is our mission to heal this void, to bring more true understanding to these detractors and to make them realize that we — all of us — are true environmentalists. It's not something new with us or the game of golf. That's where we started and that's where we still are. Golf course superintendents, with their absolute professionalism and sharp attention to maintenance methods, provide the best, clean, wholesome environment they possibly can.

We must carry the message to these critics that golf may once have been a game for the well-to-do, but now it is played by everyone. Take them out to our local municipal courses. Let them see the seniors play, the women, the juniors, the peewees, and the handicapped. Let them see the billions of recreational hours this game provides for some 26 million Americans year after year.

Let them see our strict adherence to tight regulations on chemical use, whether it be a fertilizer or a pesticide. Show them that we follow the rules. We often do better than what is regarded as standard practice. We are



where we have always been, with a long history and with thousands of golf courses to prove it. We are dedicated environmentalists, and we are getting better at what we do with each passing day.

Then explain to them that the game has grown just like the country has grown. Many of those golf courses and clubs that once were out in the country have now been enveloped by sprawling suburbs. Here in

Southern California, the Santa Ana Country Club was once surrounded by orange groves. When Rancho Park G.C. was first built in Los Angeles in 1921, it was a pack trip from downtown. Riviera was even further away. What better proof is there that golf courses preserve open space than the greater Los Angeles basin? The next time you fly into or out of LAX, just look out the window and check those green jewels amid all the asphalt

and concrete, and then try to convince me that golf courses are not good for the environment.

Whether public or private golf, it also pays its own way. How many other recreational or environmental endeavors can claim that? In fact, many counties and municipalities use the net income from golf operations to pay for athletic fields, tennis courts, picnic areas, and so much more.

Golf courses provide not only a pleasing sight for the eye, they actually produce oxygen, a commodity often in short supply in some parts of Southern California. Golf courses also are the centerpieces for reclamation and restoration projects from the tops of our mountains to desert and valley locations that are actually below sea level. Let me give you some examples.

At Whistler, about an hour and a half north of Vancouver, we have just recently completed the Chateau Whistler course. This is one of the world's great ski resorts, and you can imagine what the runoff from snow melt is like in the spring and summer. We improved the streams and drainage channel dramatically. The use of chemicals has been constrained. We have used our turfgrasses to filter the runoff. The water is now much cleaner, and fish and plant life are thriving in this improved environment. We see deer and bear all the time — some say more than before the course was built. The golf course and the fact that we cleaned up a major portion of the forest have minimized the danger of fire to the village and the resort. Whistler is now a year-round vacation destination, and the golf course, in this location, has improved the environment for all kinds of living things.

Some 500 miles away, in a totally different setting, but no less beautiful and no easier to put together, we went through an enormous environmental maze to produce the Links at Spanish Bay. For more than 40 years that very fine white Monterey sand had been shipped out of the northernmost portion of the 17 Mile Drive. For high prices, much of this gorgeous stuff found its way into cigarette urns in upscale hotels and ritzy nightclubs, and don't we wish some of it was still available for the bunkers at shrines like Cypress Point, Spyglass Hill, and Pebble Beach, as well as Spanish Bay? When the sand mining operation was concluded, the "moonscape" that was left was ugly, to be sure, and a scar crying for a new life. The concept of a Scottish-style links course and a new and more modern version of the Lodge at Pebble Beach was suggested. I enlisted Tom Watson, a five-time British Open champion, and former USGA President Sandy Tatum to work with us in the design and construction of a true "links" on the California coast.

It's a much longer story than we have time to tell, but we brought in a conveyor belt. We transported material, not that fine white sand to be sure, but a mongrel combination of sand, decomposed granite, and just plain dirt, and we actually rebuilt the dunes of years ago. We used what remaining white sand we could collect to cover these new mounds as well as possible. We planted a myriad of native plants. We built a wetland marsh and a bird sanctuary. We also built 18 hard and fast-running holes that will take you back to St. Andrews, Turnberry, Troon, and the rest. When the bagpiper comes out to play at sunset and you are trying to land that sand wedge close to the hole on Number 18 into a sharp ocean breeze, let's just say that "Golf in the Kingdom" is indeed close at hand.

On the other side of the map, in Vero Beach, Florida, there is another new course called Windsor. It's a totally different location and an enormously different set of circumstances, yet the same overall result.

This is the once absolutely flat site of an old grapefruit orchard, a desolate and most uninteresting piece of ground. Setting humility aside for the moment, we have designed and built a truly elegant golf course on a once down-and-dirty piece of real estate. More important, this has been a complete dedication to restoration. With all the rainfall in Florida, we actually collect the runoff, and our plant life truly filters out chemicals and residual nitrates. In fact, we even used two very specific types of wetland plants — *Spartina bakeri* and arrowhead — that are most efficient in the cleansing process as drainage is filtered into the adjacent river and from there to the Atlantic Ocean.

Back to the mountains once again, in a cathedral-like setting at the bottom of Squaw Valley, once the site of the 1960 Winter Olympics, we have yet another reclamation project. It is called the Resort at Squaw Creek, and we think it is magnificent. We took the remnants of the old parking lot for the Olympics and turned it into a stunning wetlands masterpiece. The approval process for this endeavor was all but impossible, and the list of mitigations was endless. But with total dedication and a very firm pursuit of purpose, we prevailed and made it all work. In fact, we actually maintained a test green on the floor of the valley for two years to examine, in minute detail, the potential leaching effects of turfgrass chemicals into a shallow aquifer that provides the local water supply. There also was concern about the pristine flow of the Truckee River, Reno's drinking water, a treaty with the Indians, and the fish life in faraway Pyramid Lake.

We probably doubled the wetlands area of the valley in the building of the golf course. We actually improved the water quality. With "constraint" as the watchword, golf course superintendent Carl Rygg has made quite a name for himself in presenting a marvelous combination of mountains, wetlands, and golf with the absolute minimal use of chemicals and painstaking attention to detail.

One of the most interesting new projects is the Orchards Golf Course near Detroit, Michigan. It is set upon a natural gas storage field, and Michcon is producing natural gas golf carts. In addition, Ron Dalby, the owner with Michcon, and golf course superintendent Ted Woehrle are insisting that the maintenance center be twice the square footage of the clubhouse for this public golf course.



Now, that's the way it should be for all you golf course superintendents in our environmental era.

So, the message for today is loud and clear. The environmental movement is here to stay, and we are a major part of it. We always have been a part of it. As devout and dedicated as we have been in the past, we can be even more so in the future. It's not always necessary to move a million cubic yards of material to build a golf course. Perhaps we need to work harder to lay the golf course into the land as did Ross, Mackenzie, Macdonald, and my father, Robert Trent Jones, Sr. We have learned how to be lean and very careful with our chemicals. Golf course superintendents, with the new highly sophisticated irrigation systems, are using water more efficiently than ever before. Even here on the dry, warm West Coast, the water consumption for a single round of golf is only that necessary to produce a single steak at the local restaurant. The economic value gained per gallon of water used on a golf course is far better than even the best of agricultural crops. We now have new and different kinds of grasses and plant life to use in a variety of ways to make our golf courses more beautiful than ever, cleaner and neater than ever before, and more playable for those millions who love the game as we do.

The golf industry demands that we be good at what we do, because there is no place for us if we aren't. Certainly superintendents prove how good they are every day, just as the golf professionals do on the tour. And, just as those talented players have the best equipment with which to play the game, we



Chateau Whistler Golf Course, hole #15.

The remnants of a parking lot from the 1960 Winter Olympics (below) were reclaimed into what is now the Resort at Squaw Creek in Squaw Valley, California. Working through countless mitigations and approvals resulted in an enhanced environmental combination of mountains, restored wetlands, and golf.



also have remarkable tools and pieces of machinery to help us with our work.

We desperately need more golf courses, especially on the public side. There are thousands upon thousands of seniors and young people, too, who would love to play our great game if only it were more available to them.

We are the answer to that need. This is not the time to rest quietly on our achievements of the past. It is a time to stand up and be identified, to attend those city council or board of supervisors meetings, and to speak out on that new golf course proposal. And, when the question is asked, it is especially the time for each superintendent and all of us together to stand tall and proclaim that golf is not an environmental problem. Golf is an answer, one of the best answers we have to make this world a better place in which to live, a place to play, a place to enjoy a clean and healthful outdoor environment. As I always say, a golf course is a place to learn life's little lessons of humility!