



Delegate responsibility to the people hired to assist you. The day-to-day operations of installing the drainage system can be overseen by the assistant superintendent.

The Journey Continues — More Maintenance Pitfalls

by **ROBERT A. BRAME**
Agronomist, Mid-Atlantic Region, USGA Green Section

THE TECHNIQUES and strategies for maintaining golf course turf continue to be better understood and improved as time passes. Some of this learning is the result of formal research done at universities, yet much of our practical knowledge comes from field experience and observation. After all, we often learn more from our mistakes than from the activities that turn out well. Let's face it, an important aspect of improving ourselves is recognizing our mistakes and then learning from them.

Each facet of a golf course maintenance program overlaps and ties in with all the other components. Nevertheless, each problem area needs to be identified, evaluated, and considered individually before it can be combined with others and seen as a package.

An article in the September/October 1992 issue of the *Green Section Record* discussed the top 10 maintenance pitfalls of golf course superintendents (see Table 1) as identified by the USGA Green Section in a survey of its staff. The article received lots of response,

with the most common question being, "What are the second 10?" The staff was surveyed again, and the results follow:

11. Time on the Golf Course

The golf course superintendent is hired to supervise the maintenance of the golf course. Sounds like an obvious statement, doesn't it? Well, it's amazing how often the agronomics of golf course maintenance takes a back seat to the many other hats worn by today's superintendent. That is, of

course, until problems develop. Then, everyone wants to know what's happening to the turf, and the primary focus, once again, is the agronomics.

Very few superintendents have the time or take the time to walk their golf courses daily to closely observe turf conditions. It isn't because they don't want to; most are simply pulled in too many directions. Many golf course superintendents will acknowledge they are spending more and more time on the job with each passing year, but less and less time is spent actually on the course. "When I got into this business I didn't have to put in this many hours with non-turfgrass-related activities," is a common response.

Is this a young man's profession? Or is it time to simplify and get back to the basics, and if so, how can we do that?

How about playing the game? How can a superintendent prepare the golf course for play if he or she does not play regularly? How can solid decisions and diagnoses be made without spending some time carefully scouting the course? To accomplish this, it takes more than the superintendent just being aware of the need. It requires an owner, president, or green committee chairperson becoming involved and encouraging, or even mandating, that the superintendent play weekly or at least walk the course on a regular schedule. The superintendent also needs support to hire specialty staff, like a secretary, a good assistant superintendent, an experienced foreman, irrigation and/or spray technicians, which allows for a more realistic workload so that quality time can be spent out on the course. We cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that golf course maintenance still is a "hands-on" profession.

12. Documentation

Documentation involves a systematic program of recording activities of importance. Record-keeping practices we see range from very good to non-existent in golf course maintenance operations. In a world that is scrutinizing pesticide usage more and more, it is vitally important to record every detail leading to and including the decision to actually apply a chemical. The days of making notes on a desk blotter concerning pesticide usage are long gone, or they should be.

With the computers available today, pesticide applications, inventory status, and payroll and budget tracking all can be done quickly and professionally. Every operation is different, and the use of a computer can be as simple or complex as a particular operation may need. That's the beauty of today's personal computers.

Nevertheless, there are relatively few operations that are using computers to full value. Some control their irrigation systems

Table 1
The 10 Pitfalls of Golf Course Maintenance

1. Communication and Public Relations
2. Overwatering
3. Fast Green Speeds
4. Excessive Use of Pesticides
5. Continuity of Course Officials/Green Chairperson
6. Pesticide Storage and/or Maintenance Buildings
7. Tree Management
8. Amount of Play
9. Labor: Not Enough and/or Under Qualified
10. Equipment: Not Enough and/or Poor Quality

Table 2
The Second 10 Pitfalls of Golf Course Maintenance

11. Time on the Golf Course
12. Documentation
13. The Bandwagon Syndrome
14. The Rules of Golf and Marking the Course
15. Lack of Outside Interests
16. Test Plots
17. Staying Current with Technology
18. Long-Range Planning
19. Training and Delegation
20. Managing Carts and Cart Paths

with computers, but most golf course maintenance operations have not tapped into this valuable resource. Computers are somewhat like golf carts — they are here to stay. If you cannot use a computer to its full potential, either hire someone who can, or take time to learn.

It is not uncommon to visit a golf course and see a nice improvement project that has been completed by the superintendent and staff. Projects like bunker renovation, tee additions, and even the construction of a new putting green are clearly over and above routine golf course maintenance. The documentation of improvement projects with pictures or video can be very worthwhile when, a few months later, the golfers forget what it used to look like and who actually made the improvements. A camera can be an excellent tool to help document the work being done on a golf course. It is amazing how valuable pictures can be when budgets are being considered or salaries reviewed.

Documentation is a lot like communication — you are doing it all the time. It is either planned or done by default. It will either work for you or against you. Review what you are doing in this area and take the time to lay a positive foundation for the future. Document what you and your staff actually do!

13. The Bandwagon Syndrome

The "Bandwagon Syndrome" refers to those times we do something or try something just because the golf course down the road is doing it or someone told you he was. Does it really work? Is it agronomically sound for your course? It must be — isn't the highest budgeted/best golf course in town doing it? It must be the right thing to do!

An example of this would be the use of the new "lightweight rollers." It is amazing how many course officials ask about rollers. In most cases, they have heard the course down the street is using them.

"Will they make the putting surfaces faster?"

"Absolutely," is the quick response from the course down the street.

"Is there danger of surface compaction?"

A frequent answer is, "Possibly, but we haven't seen any problems yet."

Let's hope your course won't be the exception to the rule. As with most everything in our industry, rollers are tools which can be used or abused.

What about chemicals, soil amendments, plant growth regulators, or bio-stimulants? Too often, the same reasoning is applied: If the well-known course or superintendent is using it, then it should work for us. However, you should ask yourself if university testing has been done. Also, has the testing been

repeated enough in the field to suggest that it will work equally well at most sites? What do the Green Section agronomists think? The "Bandwagon Syndrome" can and has led to wasted time and money. In a few situations, both turf and jobs have been lost. There are no miracle cures in golf course maintenance. Look carefully before you leap, and be very sure of your information source. If you are not sure, be conservative and wait and see. Never hesitate to ask questions about new products or procedures. Avoid jumping onto bandwagons too quickly!

14. The Rules of Golf and Marking the Course

What value would our highways and interstates be if drivers did not follow the laws?

Can you imagine what would happen if people were allowed to make up their own rules while driving their cars? It is not a pleasant thought. Golf is similar in that golf without rules is something other than the game we all love. If you do not play by the rules, you are not playing golf. It follows, then, that to properly maintain and mark the course on which the game is played, a golf course superintendent must have a working knowledge of the rules.

What is the difference between a "hazard" and a "lateral hazard"? What are the options for putting a ball back into play when it has been lost in a "hazard" or "lateral hazard"? What is the procedure when a ball is hit into a pile of grass clippings waiting to be removed? Is it possible to have an illegal hole location? What is the difference be-

tween illegal and unfair? How about the so-called "winter rules"? These are only a few examples of questions every golf course superintendent should be able to answer. This is not an area that should be left just to the golf professional. Knowing the rules and staying current with changes is something we all need to actively pursue.

15. Lack of Outside Interests

There are no perfect golf courses, either in design or maintenance. As such, the job of maintaining and conditioning the golf course is never completely finished. There is always something that needs attention, and this is why the golf course superintendent is such a key component in the game of golf. Yet, no one can work 10-plus hours every day of the week for months on end without

Lightweight rollers are a tool in putting green maintenance. As with any tool, they can be an asset or a liability. Make sure they fit in your maintenance operation — don't jump on the "bandwagon."





There are a variety of ways to stay current in the turfgrass industry. University field days are one of the many possibilities.

paying a price. The price may be “burnout,” lack of effectiveness on the job, or eventually the pursuit of a different career. Marriages have failed and families have been shattered by the pursuit of a perfectly conditioned golf course. Every superintendent knows he/she must leave home to go to work, but how about leaving work to go home? Are you living to work or working to live?

Take a day off every week. Have and pursue some type of hobby or non-golf-related interest. Spend quality time with your spouse and family. Take time for refreshment and revitalization so you can meet the needs of your family and yourself.

To accomplish these things, every golf course superintendent needs the support and encouragement of management. Green chairperson, owner, course official — do not allow your golf course superintendent to burn the candle at both ends. Do not allow the short-term conditioning of your golf course to cloud the long-term picture or the personal life of your superintendent. Con-

tinuity over the long run is more important than course conditioning on any one day.

Take or make time to rest, relax, and recharge your batteries and relieve stress. It will make you more effective, and remember — golf is, after all, a game.

16. Test Plots

The value of on-course testing cannot be overemphasized. How can you know that a new product or technique will work in your maintenance program without doing some controlled evaluations? Controlled means working with enough area to obtain a fair evaluation without affecting the budget or the playability of the golf course. A turf nursery is a very good place to do controlled testing. Every golf course maintenance operation should have at least one turf nursery.

Leaving control (untreated) strips when making applications on the golf course is another good way to determine the effectiveness of the product. This makes it possible to determine if the pesticide applica-

tion was really needed. Nobody particularly likes leaving control strips, but it is the only way to really know what degree of success you are achieving from a product or procedure.

Take the time to do on-course testing. Keep the boss and others who need to know informed of the results. They, too, will be interested in what is happening on their golf course. The information you gather should help save time, money, and aggravation the next time the application or procedure is carried out.

17. Staying Current with Technology

Attend local, regional, national, and even international educational conferences, field days, and seminars. Subscribe to industry magazines and read them while they are reasonably current. Take advantage of publications from the USGA, GCSAA, and others. Give the Green Section Turf Advisory Service a try if you are not already a participant. The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary



The value of testing products on your golf course cannot be overemphasized. Blanket applications can yield more results than you bargained for!

Program for Golf Courses can be of tremendous value in balancing the maintenance of a golf course with the surrounding habitat.

These are only a few examples of ways a golf course superintendent and course officials can stay current with this fast-changing industry. A tremendous amount of information is available, but you have to take the initiative to take advantage of it.

Too often, the demands faced by today's golf course superintendent will affect his/her ability to stay involved with the information-gathering process. Course officials need to make sure that both time and money are available for the superintendent to stay current with the fast-changing technology of our industry. Do not allow the hectic pace of day-to-day golf course maintenance to prevent you from staying informed about tomorrow.

18. Long-Range Planning

As the old adage says, "When you fail to plan, you plan to fail." This is true for course improvements as well as for maintenance.

Long-range or master plans allow the superintendent and course officials to establish obtainable goals and objectives. This makes it possible to establish realistic budgets for both maintenance and course improvements. A well-thought-out master plan that has been approved by those in authority can help bridge the gap in continuity when superintendents or course officials change. As a matter of fact, a good master plan can help increase the longevity of the golf course superintendent simply because he/she has a much better idea of what is expected and where the operation is headed. Everyone benefits from this combination.

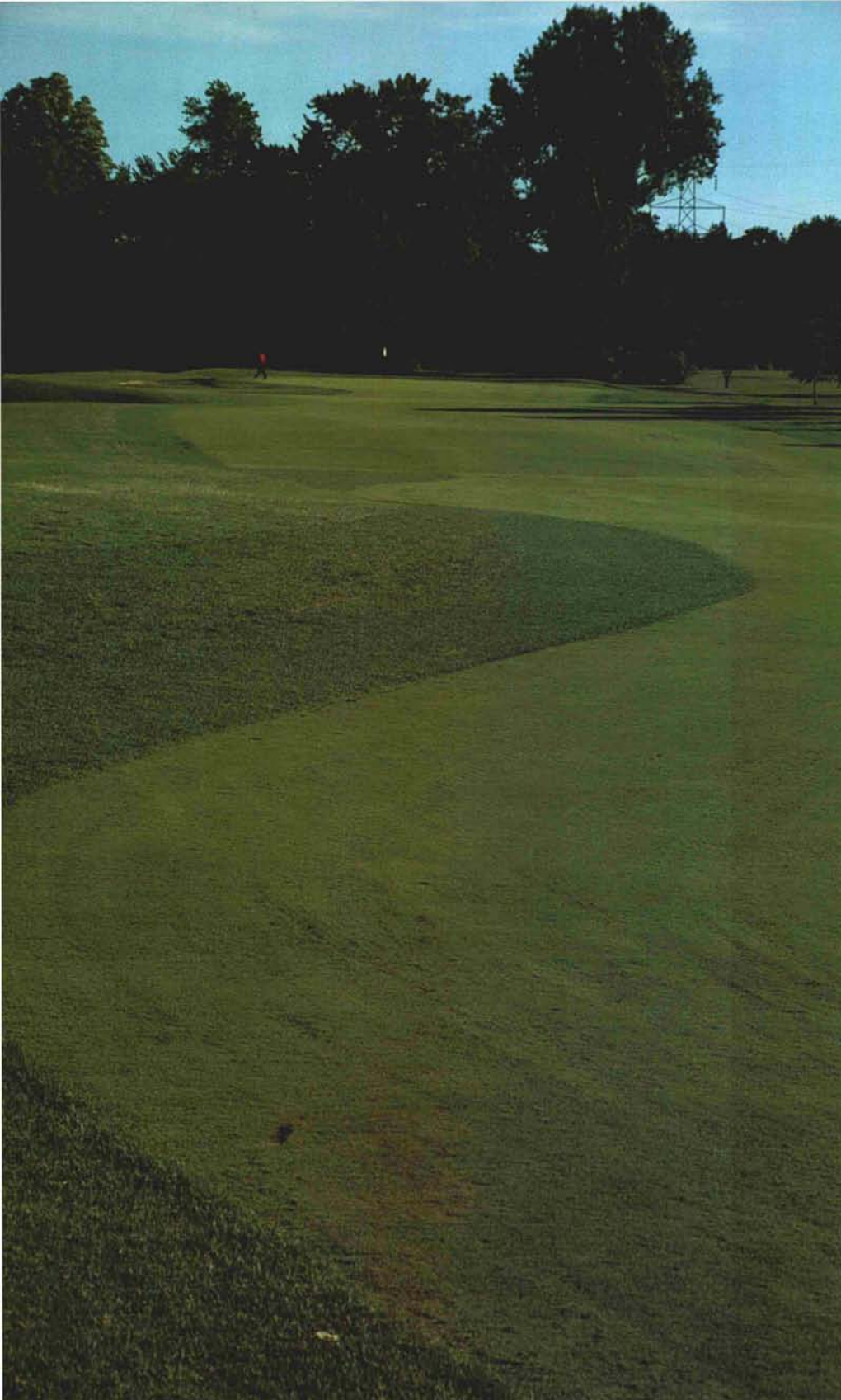
Long-range plans can include time being set aside for the greens to be aerified each year, allowing golf events to be scheduled around maintenance activities without deferring maintenance work or eliminating it altogether. There are no surprises; everyone knows when the work will be done and what to expect. The continuity and direction that are established through long-range

planning pay dividends in a better-managed golf course.

19. Training and Delegation

A good indication that a potential problem exists in this area is the need to have a pager, cellular phone, or two-way radio in constant use. If it is that critical that you are reachable every second of every day, maybe it's time to spread some responsibility to other key employees. This also ties in with the need to have outside interests and low-stress personal time. If the superintendent is carrying the entire load alone, sooner or later something will snap.

A good rule-of-thumb to follow in training key employees is to help that person learn to do all that you do. Don't be insecure about this. It takes a person with confidence in her/his ability and the capability of seeing the big picture to delegate authority. Investing in people is what life is all about. A supervisor who is good at training and delegating is respected by his/her staff and



Long-range planning allows for better scheduling, realistic budgets, continuity, and establishing obtainable goals and objectives.

usually enjoys life a lot more. Improving the skills of training and delegating is a never-ending task. We all can improve in this area.

20. Managing Carts and Cart Paths

This ties in very closely with the eighth pitfall. That is, *Amount of Play*. More and more maintenance operations are installing tee-to-green golf cart path networks. While no one likes the idea of having paved surfaces on a golf course, a well-built golf cart path offers the best wear control and maintenance options where heavy cart traffic exists. Ropes, signs, and fencing can be used to help control golf cart traffic and wear, but these usually offer less than ideal results and increased maintenance costs. It is amazing how people ignore signs and ropes!

In designing a golf cart path network, begin at the 18th green and work backwards around the course. If there is a problem area where golf cart traffic is hard to manage, begin the network design at this point. It is important to locate the cart path where it will be used. However, try to stay at least 30 feet, or 10 yards, from a green or fairway. Where possible, avoid ball landing areas, though no path location is immune to shots hitting the surface. Under the Rules of Golf, relief is given from an artificially paved surface. On the other hand, no relief is allowed from the bare ground or thinned turf that often results from concentrated golf cart traffic.

Be sure to construct a golf cart path with a good base, and preferably it should be eight feet wide. This allows maintenance equipment to use the paths and makes it possible for one cart to pass another without leaving the paved surface. Properly built and located cart paths also can be used as channels for surface water runoff when pitched or sloped or with curbing installed.

Give serious thought to the current and future usage of golf carts at your course. While cart paths do involve some cost initially, over the long run they can pay for themselves in increased cart usage, especially during inclement weather. When the course is wet but playable, the sign would read, "Golf Carts Restricted to Paths." Isn't that better than, "Course Closed to Golf Carts"?

Conclusion

This listing of the second 10 pitfalls (Table 2), follows in the footsteps of the first 10 (Table 1). The intent has been to discuss maintenance pitfalls, as seen by Green Section agronomists. Once identified as a concern on your course, a strategy can be developed to make the necessary changes. It is never too late for change!