

Preparing Merion for a Championship

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Merion has entertained six USGA Championships in my time as golf course superintendent, and yet Merion wears no special costume for a tournament. Merion is a championship course. No change in fundamentals has ever taken place for any tournament. Only small changes have taken place from year to year. In other words, we do not get a new shirt to look pretty on Sunday morning; we only need a clean one. We feel that we have the right answer in conditioning the course for a USGA Championship. In fact, the members feel that the course is always in championship condition at any time. We cannot see why it should be so different during championship play from when the members and guests play it. The players are playing the same game, even though the proficiency differs. Still, it should always be in good playing condition.

The players have a golf course that was brought to maturity with a sustained regard for the tradition of the game, a course that was not overglamorized for the occasion. The all-over aim was to open an inviting chance to the end that one who approached with circumspection should realize a happy return. Merion is a golf course that rewards precision. In other words, it is just like when you are playing a game of pool. You have to play for precision in order to be remunerated.

For a USGA tournament the only thing we do is mark the boundaries more clearly. That is to avoid discussions between plays. All water hazards must be clearly defined, not by the use of a white line but by small sticks painted white and they are spaced approximately 25 to 30 feet apart. Also, the start and end of a lateral water hazard must be clearly defined with sticks.

Most of the tees have to be roped off, as well as all the fairways. All of these things come under the tournament ex-

pense. The installation of public telephone booths must be provided for, as well as the phones for the press boys and the messengers.

The most important of all is to have men to take care of all the ball, as well as foot, marks in bunkers and on the putting greens for every match that has gone through. This means that someone must be there for every green or one can take care of two greens if they are near each other. These are a few things that we always have to take care of for the tournament.

After the tournament has been played, a certain amount of repair work will have to be done because of the wear and tear on the fairways. After all the work has been done and everything has gone through satisfactorily, the whole committee will receive all the credit and the superintendent will still remain an unknown man.

Prior to the Open Championship in 1950, we did carry out some renovation, not because of the championship but because the fairways really needed it. In 1948 we used some chemicals for insect control. The fairways were also reseeded, fertilized and aerified.

The first operation of the renovation program was aeration by using the Aerifier. Spoon penetration was to about an average depth of 2½ inches to 3 inches. I believe this was started September 16, 1948.

The reseeding consisted of a mixture of 40% Highland bent, some redtop and also we had a small percentage of Kentucky bluegrass. DDT was applied for grub control and fertilization was with a complete fertilizer high in organic nitrogen.

[From a talk by Joe Valentine. The most significant statement is to the effect that Merion does not have to be *groomed* for a major tournament — it is ready for one at all times.—Ed.]