



*The first hole on the Ocean Course, Olympic Club, San Francisco, California.*

# The Golf Course Superintendent and Maintaining the Integrity of the Course

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**T**HE OLYMPIC CLUB in San Francisco, has been the site of four United States National Championships. The memories of the 1958 U.S. Amateur and the U.S. Opens of 1955 and 1966 were certainly equalled in excitement and drama by the 1981 Amateur Championship, which was decided on the 37th hole of match play. I remember the gallery climbing the hill behind the 18th green to the first tee, with the match even at the end of 36 holes, and my own little moment of drama when I finally realized I'd

assigned the course ranger to pick up the flagsticks following the afternoon round. Anyway, we found the flagstick for the first hole, and as you all know, Nathaniel Crosby won the Championship.

The decision to conduct a USGA Championship brings with it an enormous commitment on the part of a club, its membership, and staff. Our commitment was extended to include both the Ocean and Lake courses because of the size of the field at 282 players. The seven-day event included two days

of practice rounds, two days of qualifying by stroke play, with the field cut to 64 players for the final four days of match play on the Lake Course.

Certainly, much has been whispered about the USGA philosophy of course operation and the stringent demands placed upon a club and its superintendent in preparing for a championship. Contrary to that belief, my two years of involvement with the Green Section Staff and Championship Committee offered an unusual opportunity for professional advancement and insight



on "championship conditioning." I found Al Radko, Billy Buchanan, and Don Hoos to be true professionals with a wealth of knowledge, realism, and good common sense.

Let me take a minute to extract from the course preparation reports a few of these so-called stringent demands I received during the two-year preparation period:

1. Establish firm, keen greens. Do not overwater.

2. Establish firm, dry, level turf on tees. Do not overwater.

3. Eliminate hard and soft spots on fairways.

4. Avoid high applications of nitrogen. One-third to one-half pound per month should be sufficient.

5. Avoid fluffiness.

6. Fertilize rough only where necessary.

7. Sand on faces of bunkers should be shallow and firm. Remove excess.

8. Avoid overuse of fungicides. Integrate applications of potassium to aid in root development and increase disease resistance.

9. Apply light but frequent applications of topdressing to create firm and true putting surfaces.

10. Remove any artificial direction or distance markers.

11. Tee signs need not be elaborate; they need only provide the necessary information in a neat, clean style.

**S**OUNDS MORE like a lesson in fiscal responsibility than an agroeconomic report. If one were to view these recommendations as stringent demands, he certainly would need to take a closer look at his operation. There's a great lesson for all of us to learn here, particularly in this age of rising costs and inflation.

"Overgrooming really is overspending." If moderation is the key to successful preparation for a major championship, surely moderation should play a key role in developing our philosophy on everyday course maintenance. Our major responsibility as superintendents is the daily preparation of the stage on which the game of golf is played. We must never forget that the game is what counts, and that all else is secondary. Nowhere is this statement more true than at a USGA event.

There is an old adage that states, "Get involved with the people involved." The week of the Championship allows ample time to meet with officials, staff and contestants, and to seek their comments on course conditioning.



*Nathaniel Crosby winning the 1981 United States Amateur Championship at the Olympic Club, San Francisco, California.*

You'll find the USGA Committee members and staff to be a hardy bunch, on the job early in the morning and in the evening after the matches have ended. The superintendent assigned to a championship site would do well to note that his time to relax is while the competition is in progress. The early morning and late afternoon are sacred to course preparation.

Perhaps it was the size of the field, which required starting times beginning at 7:00 a.m. through 2:30 p.m., but I found much of the planning for the course set-up was accomplished on the evening before the matches, and finalized the next morning. Following the last match of the day, I would join up with the Green Section representatives and Championship Committee officials on their rounds. Tees were checked and the selection of tee placement made and marked. Greens were checked for firmness and resilience to foot traffic. Hole location was given considerable attention and discussion. The criteria was based on the following:

1. Length of the shot to the green and how it would be affected by probable conditions (i.e., wind, fog), and also by the holding quality of the green.

2. The opportunity for recovery if a reasonably good shot just missed the green.

3. Changes in the degree of slope on the green.

4. Balance of hole locations for the entire course with respect to left, right, center, front, and back positions.

5. And last, selection of six difficult hole locations, six that are somewhat less difficult and six moderately difficult.

After selection was made, each cup location was measured, marked with a golf tee, and verified the next morning before the cup was moved.

Post play maintenance in the afternoon included fairway, tee and collar mowing, plus daily mowing of the six-foot wide intermediate rough surrounding fairways and greens. Divot repair on the par 3s and the drive areas of the par 4s and 5s was also an afternoon assignment.

Morning duties included dew removal on the fairways, double mowing of the greens, plus practice putting greens, recording of green speed, maintenance of the bunkers, and a final check on hole locations to insure that the hole is cut as near vertical as possible and that the hole liner is at least one inch below the putting green surface. During the week of the Championship, fairways were cut to 1/2-inch, putting greens to 1/8-inch, intermediate rough at 2 inches, primary rough at 4 inches, and tees and collars at 3/8-inch. Width of the



fairways varied from 28 to 40 yards in the drive area, depending on the difficulty of the hole.

**A** FEW COMMENTS on green management during the tournament are in order. The first and most important requirement is consistency (i.e., consistency from one green to the next). Greens should putt at approximately the same speed and receive a well-struck ball with the same action. Herein lies the basic need for firm greens. Consistency was the main reason for the development of the Stimpmeter. It is a very simple but precise instrument for measuring green speed, and a very useful tool in preparing for a tournament and maintaining consistency during play. During the Amateur, green speed approached 10 feet during the practice and qualifying rounds, and leveled out at a reading of 10 feet, 6 inches, for the four days of match play.

Mention should also be made of the very fine line that exists between firm and hard. I recall the first day of qualifying. Visibility was so bad on the Ocean Course that we had an hour delay because of the fog. Then conditions changed rapidly and the winds blew to 30 miles per hour. What proved to be firm in the morning became hard as the day progressed. The officials debated the idea of watering the greens. The final decision was for no water and it proved to be the correct one. The next day normal San Francisco weather prevailed. It would have been easy to put the water on, but hard to take it off. So, we can draw from this analogy that just as the tools are available for the superintendent to deal with adversity, the shots are in the bag for the golfer to deal with it as well. The reward in both cases goes to those who make their choices wisely.

I've written briefly about grooming a golf course; not overgrooming, but grooming to develop quality playing conditions. There is no need for one-upsmanship in our business. The rule is simple: maintain the integrity of the golf course. It is certainly one of the duties of the golf course superintendent. Perhaps it can best be summed up by saying the goal of any golf course is to have but one rule, and that is, "USGA Rules apply."

*The famous 18th hole, Lake Course, Olympic Club, San Francisco, California.*

