

DON'T BE SHORTSIGHTED

IT IS AN understatement to say, "The game of golf has evolved a great deal." From the days of hickory shafts, we now have titanium and graphite. As this new equipment is developed, it is placed in pro shops and rapidly put to test on the course.

Along with the evolution of the playing equipment, course conditions have improved dramatically. Most courses today are maintained at a level that, not long ago, was thought to be obtainable by only a select few. In fact, today's courses are routinely maintained in a manner that would have been considered championship quality in the mid to late 1970s. Granted, resources play a key role in course conditioning, as does the level of expertise of the turf manager. And to meet the conditioning demands, surveys show that, on a cost-per-hole basis, a steady increase in the cost of course maintenance has occurred.

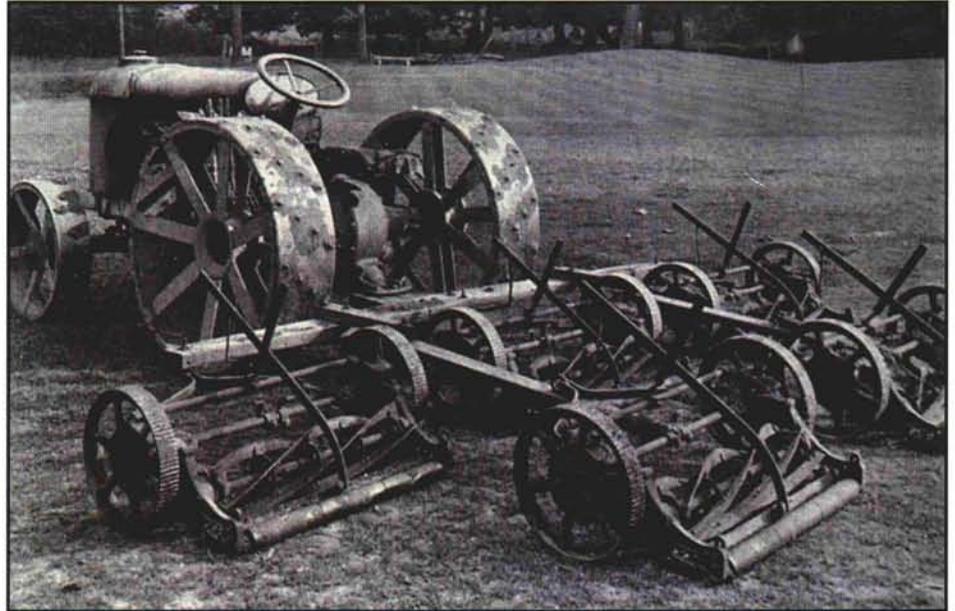
Many times, the level of turf management skill and the demands for perfection have increased at a greater rate than the purchase of equipment needed to meet the demands. Still, the superintendent will strive to produce more with less. Unfortunately, this level of effort often perpetuates an ongoing battle during budget meetings for capital improvement dollars.

In my travels, I encounter many golf course operations that produce tremendous turf conditions with equipment that is all but worn out and ready to be scrapped. However, when the request for new equipment is presented, the response is, "What do you need it for? The course looks great!" This type of shortsightedness can result in catastrophic consequences. If problems like scalping or hydraulic leaks develop, the faltering equipment will not be blamed for turf loss — the turf manager will bear the brunt of the complaints. Simply put, turf management equipment should be replaced at regular intervals, and the time frame should be determined by the level of intensity of equipment use.

Through the years, Green Section agronomists have promoted the development and implementation of long-range planning. The goal of a long-range plan is to identify, prioritize

Replacing equipment when necessary is an essential part of long-range planning for good turf conditions.

by KEITH HAPP



State-of-the-art in the early 1920s at Ashtabula Country Club (Ohio); it took 12 hours to cut 25 acres with this equipment.

and then fund projects or expenditures, on an annual basis, that allow for continued improvement in the condition of the golf course. I can't tell you how many times a superintendent prepares his or her budget for equipment replacement and is told that the funds aren't available. However, it is amazing how often carpeting, furniture, and clubhouse addition expenditures are approved by governing boards. The members come in contact with these things more frequently than they do with turf equipment, so it is easy to understand how they sometimes put their needs ahead of those of the golf course. When it comes to the course, the final product (turf conditions) is the main concern, and within reason, the methods and materials used to achieve the end result become secondary. This mind-set is frustrating to turf managers because, after all, the course is the main asset, isn't it?

Player demands have been a driving force behind the quest for both improved playing equipment and play-

ing conditions. Channeling these same demands into strategies that fuel regular equipment replacement programs could be equally beneficial for the game and the course. Mechanization with modern equipment can lead to a higher level of efficiency which, in turn, can help to control rising operating costs.

There is a saying, "Build it and they will come." I propose that, for turf management, the saying should be, "Maintain it and they will stay." In both cases, providing the proper tools is a must for player enjoyment and satisfaction. Don't be shortsighted and overlook the importance of replacing worn-out and tired equipment on a regular basis.

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The opinions expressed in "All Things Considered" are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the USGA Green Section.