

Perfection Is Not Attainable!

However, setting reasonable goals can allow for an objective evaluation of course conditions.

by KEITH HAPP

MANY GOLFERS comment that a well-struck shot should be rewarded. For example, when a well-struck shot from the teeing ground finds the fairway, the player then should have the opportunity to reach the green on a par-4 hole or the landing area of a par-5 hole with the next stroke. However, it seems that no matter where the golf balls may land, many golfers want to have a perfect lie from which to play. It is alarming that having level tees, great greens, and healthy, consistent fairway turf is not enough. It seems that there is an increasing emphasis placed on eliminating small blemishes in the rough or finding the perfect bunker sand that will minimize the potential for a challenging shot. Whatever happened to the saying, "Hit it, go find it, and hit again"? Isn't that what this game is all about?

We often hear the question, "What can we do about the condition of our rough? When my ball lands there I can't play a recovery shot."

I want to respond by asking the question, "What type of recovery shot are you trying to play?" After all, doesn't the lie of the ball dictate the type of shot that is to be played? Where is it stated that there should be no penalty for hitting a shot into the rough? Sometimes a great recovery shot is one that simply positions the player for the next shot to the hole.

As an example, perfection also seems to be a requirement for bunkers. When an errant shot finds a bunker, golfers expect the lie of the ball to be perfect. There also seems to be an increasing demand for absolute consistency from one bunker to another. In many instances, simply raking the sand will never elevate bunker playability to a satisfactory level. Sand may have to be removed, drainage installed, bunker contours may need to be altered, and then new sand can be positioned and readied for play. This is time consuming and, for some, cost prohibitive. Budgetary constraints must be considered so conditioning priorities can



Establish maintenance standards for the golf course. These guidelines provide direction to achieve conditioning goals. Guidelines will vary for day-to-day versus tournament play.

be established. However, establishing priorities is only the first step. Developing realistic and obtainable priorities is the challenge, and this task further identifies the fact that golf course operations are different. Just as the lie of the ball dictates shot selection, economic resources dictate course preparation. All too often an apples-to-oranges comparison is made regarding course conditioning. The manner in which one course is prepared may not be affordable for every course.

For those courses that have focused on elevating playability, agronomic strategies used on greens have been expanded to tees, fairways, and even rough. Tees are fertilized more heavily and are overseeded on an as-needed basis. Fairways are being topdressed so that they are firm and better able to support play, no matter what weather conditions are presented. Rough is being topdressed with composts to improve the quality of the soil in which the turf is grown. Now, all of these strategies improve the health of the turf, but they come at a cost. Not all course operations have the same budget under which to operate, so once again priorities must be established.

It is not possible to achieve the same level of conditioning every day of the year. There are too many uncontrollable factors involved in turfgrass management. Budgetary constraints factor into the programs that can be used throughout the property. Weather pat-

terns impact turf growth as well as course grooming activities. If funds are limited, the scope of what is an "important-to-play area" must be clearly defined. In other words, this may necessitate learning a few different shots when playing from the rough or learning how to play a bunker shot from a less-than-perfect lie.

What are perfect conditions for the game of golf? Webster defines perfect as "satisfying all requirements." This definition suggests that "the committee" needs to provide a clear, well-defined description of the desired course setup. Doing so could allow for a fair evaluation of the course and the manner in which it plays. More importantly, course maintenance resources could be evaluated to determine if playability requirements could be satisfied. If the committee constantly changes conditioning goals, then course conditioning standards will never be met. All things considered, no matter how high the bar is raised, expectations will continue to climb and this is further evidence that perfection is impossible to achieve.

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