

With a Good Mechanic, It Will Run Forever

A great mechanic is not a substitute for regular replacement of equipment.

BY CHRIS HARTWIGER

Golfers may not know their golf course mechanic can fix anything. However, they will see less than top-quality turf if a mechanic is required to spend an inordinate amount of time repairing old, worn-out equipment. Constant repairs mean that preventative maintenance and quality-of-cut tasks are deferred, delayed, or skipped.



A tour of a golf course maintenance facility with substantial quantities of equipment in need of replacement often yields the following comment by a course official, “Don’t worry, our mechanic is fantastic. He can fix anything.” This is great news. Or is there another side to the story?

THE COST OF FIXING

When a mechanic spends the day perfecting his ability to fix anything, there are both direct and indirect costs to the maintenance operation and to the golfers who enjoy the golf course. The first cost is in decreased productivity. Every time a piece of equipment breaks down, the golf course mechanic must shift his focus from preventative maintenance and quality of cut issues to repair. Not only is a broken machine not out on the golf course working, but the mechanic delays, defers, or omits other tasks.

The second cost is an increase in money spent on equipment parts and an escalation of the maintenance and repair budget. Replacement parts for golf course equipment are expensive. I have seen courses using outdated equipment spend upwards of six figures per year on maintenance and repair. Compare this with the maintenance and repair costs for a fleet of equipment leased or replaced regularly, and one can see that constant repairs are a hindrance to the budget.

A final and indirect cost involves the golfer in the form of lower quality playing conditions, and it eventually comes full circle back to the maintenance staff in the form of a poor perception. It has been said many times that to golfers, the golf course is only as good as it was during their most recent round. If the mechanic who can fix anything spends his days fixing everything, what happens to turf quality on the golf course? It suffers.

Heroic repair efforts are not visible at all to golfers. They just see the disruptions to the conditions they have come to expect that result when older, less reliable equipment is used. Maybe the greens are not getting a good cut, the rough is higher than normal, or the fairways are scalped. This can lead to a negative attitude toward the entire maintenance staff. Does this change the fact that the course employs an incredible mechanic who can fix anything? No, but it does reinforce the fact that the condition of the equipment is not sufficient to reliably produce expected conditions.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK?

Every golf course has some type of equipment replacement program. The effectiveness of the program may be another story. Below is a series of questions to assist course officials in determining if the existing equipment

replacement program is meeting their needs.

Does your course have an equipment inventory list with current age and a recommended replacement date? The notion that your superintendent will let you know when something needs to be replaced is not a viable replacement program. An inventory list with equipment age and desired replacement date is a prerequisite before developing a replacement program.

Can expected course conditions be attained consistently with the current fleet of equipment? If the answer is no, then refer back to the section on direct and indirect costs and begin a plan to revamp the current program.

Are maintenance and repair costs increasing faster than the rate of inflation? If the answer is yes, then the current

equipment replacement program is not meeting your needs and is costing you serious money.

Have the different approaches to fleet management, including scheduled replacement by purchase and replacement by leasing, been thoroughly reviewed? Although it is above and beyond the scope of this article to differentiate between these two methods of fleet management, it is advisable for each golf course to study and contemplate its approach to fleet management. An excellent article by Gilhuly and Gray, entitled "Fleeting Moments," that appeared in the September/October 2008 issue of the *Green Section Record*, is a worthy reference for those studying equipment replacement options. The article can be accessed online at http://www.usga.org/turf/green_section

[record/2008/sep_oct/fleeting_moments.pdf](http://www.usga.org/turf/green_section).

CONCLUSION

Golfers today are fortunate to enjoy the game in an era when turf conditions have never been better. Excellent playing conditions do not happen by accident, and hope is not a plan to create them. All the components can be in place for success, but if the equipment is not in place to carry out the tasks, the course will underperform. A great mechanic is of tremendous value to any golf course, but ultimately the regular replacement of equipment will allow his talents to be seen on the golf course.

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Preventative maintenance is a daily requirement. Repeated repairs of old equipment significantly drive up parts and repair costs. A great mechanic at a course with a solid equipment replacement program will have lasting impact on turfgrass quality.