

# “The Good Book”

A pocket-sized grounds department information booklet can be a big help.

BY DAVID OATIS



*“The Good Book” is a 25-page booklet with laminated covers that will easily fit in an employee’s back pocket. Keith Bartlett (right) and Tom Kinsman annually review the booklet to provide new and improved information for the staff.*

**H**ave you ever stopped to think how much information there is to know about your golf course and the processes and procedures required to maintain it? Most superintendents have been in the business for many years before they become superintendents; consequently, most of the day-to-day maintenance processes and procedures become second nature to them. They may even have their own names or abbreviations for different tasks, materials, and parts of the golf course. The jargon, the abbreviations, and the jobs themselves make sense to an experienced superintendent, assistant, or staff members, but what about the new, inexperienced staff members? What about the seasonal help and the non-golfers?

To rookies, a golf course and the tasks to maintain it can be extraordinarily complicated and confusing. Even with extensive training, mistakes are common. Additionally, training new and existing staff requires an inordinate amount of time and energy, and the training process never really ends. Think about it — how much time do you spend training, retraining, and

correcting your staff? How much aggravation do you experience when maintenance procedures are not done to your satisfaction? More important, how much aggravation do your golfers experience?

Regardless of how good the turf is, the presentation of the golf course is tremendously affected by a host of small details, and the perceived quality of the course can be taken up or down several notches based on how well the staff attends to these details. These details all reflect directly on you and your ability to manage the facility.

Now consider some of the other unforeseen things that can happen on a golf course. For instance, does your staff know precisely what to do when there is an emergency? Suppose one of them suffers a serious injury, or perhaps a golfer suffers a heart attack. How will the staff react? Do they know who to call? Do they understand how to call an ambulance and guide the ambulance to the accident scene? A mistake in this situation could cost a life. Or, what if the injury isn’t life threatening, but is not reported? Missed work and lawsuits can result.

The truth is, the lowliest employee can be the weakest link in a maintenance program. A little mistake can kill turf or detract from the playability or appearance of the golf course. A big mistake can get people hurt or fired.

It really doesn’t matter if you have nine holes or 36 or more, or whether you have nine employees or 36 or more. Golfers’ perception of your golf course is heavily influenced by course presentation. The turf could be terrific, but if there are piles of clippings, or if they can’t find a bunker rake, or if an approach isn’t mowed, the effects of all the positives are erased. Many golfers only remember the things that irritate them.

Most turf managers agree that growing the grass represents only a fraction of what is required of today’s golf course superintendents, and the importance of all the other things is enormous. That’s why I think this turf tip is so significant. *The Grounds Department Information Booklet* or “The Good Book,” as I call it, is a small, simple, and inexpensive way to vastly improve your communication and maintenance programs. It comes from

Keith Bartlett, golf course superintendent of St. Georges Golf and Country Club in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, host of the 2010 Canadian Open Championship.

*The Grounds Department Information Booklet* will dramatically increase your chances of success and reduce repetitive training time. It is a terrific tool for establishing employee accountability, and it will help you to produce a cleaner, neater golf course that is set up more consistently on a day-to-day basis. Perhaps most important, it will reduce the chances of your staff making all types of mistakes, both small and large, and, when mistakes are made, this booklet makes it easier to determine who is responsible.

Here are some facts about the booklet and a small sampling of what it contains:

- 25-page booklet with laminated covers
- Course map
- Individual hole maps
- Definitions (i.e., greens, tees, fairways, etc.)
- Map key:
  - Describes where to drive, where not to drive, and where to park equipment
  - Identifies bunker rake placement
  - Indicates reference points to determine proper mowing direction
- Mowing instructions for all areas
  - Mowing routes for normal, weekend, and tournament play
  - Direction of cut
  - Clipping disposal directions
- Job responsibilities and specific directions for
  - Hole changers
  - Bunker raking
  - Traffic management
  - Driving range
- Required equipment lists
- Employee rules
  - Safety
  - Equipment guidelines
- Emergency response information
- Contact information

The booklet is laid out in an orderly, logical fashion, much like a golfer's yardage booklet, so it is easy to carry and reference. The information is presented in brief, outline form with only the necessary details.

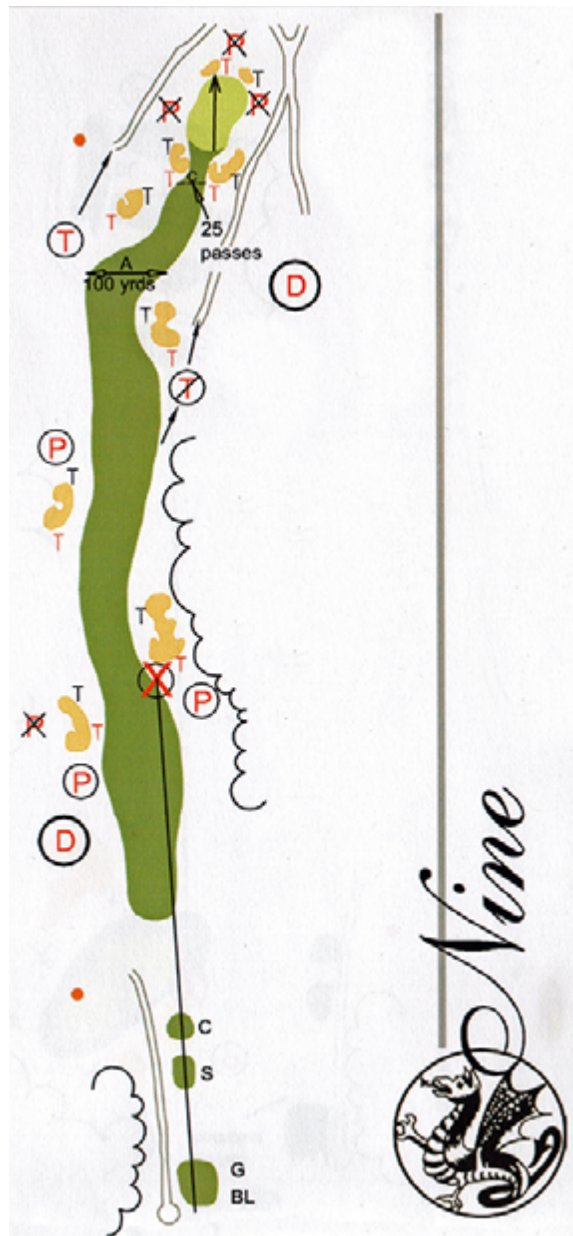
Keith's favorite detail is with respect to bunker rake placement. Rake locations are clearly identified on the individual hole maps. This helps ensure a minimum number of rakes are used and that they are placed properly for speed of play and to minimize chances of impacting play.

Employees are required to keep the *Grounds Booklet* with them at all times. In fact, it is considered a part of their equipment. When it comes to accountability, the booklet is tremendously valuable. When a job is not done correctly or when a bunker rake is out of place, the responsible staff member can be quickly identified. Perhaps best of all, the "I didn't know," "I didn't understand," or "you never told me" responses are taken out of the equation.

Keith developed his first maintenance booklet a number of years ago, and it has evolved and been improved considerably over the years. When Keith and St. Georges hosted the Canadian Open this summer, the booklet proved especially helpful for the many volunteers who all were provided a copy.

If you want a simple, inexpensive tool to improve your maintenance and communication skills, I recommend developing your own "Good Book."

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*The Information Booklet includes a course map and diagrams each individual hole. Each hole map contains information on where and where not to drive and park maintenance vehicles, bunker rake placement, and designated areas for clipping disposal.*

**KEY:**

- ⊗ = Reference point to determine proper mowing direction
- Ⓟ = Parking area for maintenance vehicles
- Ⓣ = Preferred traffic pattern
- Ⓣ = No traffic
- Ⓧ = Clipping disposal area
- T = Bunker rake placement
- ⓧ = No parking