

Course Grooming

BY KEVIN DOWNING, CGCS

Willoughby, G.C.

Years ago when I started as an assistant superintendent at Doral C.C. in Miami, one of my principal jobs was to work with the four course foremen on issues that golfers would notice.

These individuals were great people who worked closely with the crew but really didn't focus on the issues that golfers notice. Providing them with small lists to take care of the little things was part of my job as an assistant, but the philosophy has stuck with me during my years as a golf course superintendent.

Since I usually play golf at least once or twice a week, my scorecards are always filled with notes written in the margins. My rounds are usually played late in the afternoon or sometimes early on the weekends before play starts.

Most of the time I either play with one other individual or just as a solo so I can concentrate on the course conditions. The next day these notes have either been incorporated into the daily assignments or scheduled into future work programs.

This year we have implemented a new

system so that the "little issues" are handled by the same individuals. I selected two part-time people off my staff, Larry Drew and Ron Schurk, who have demonstrated tremendous initiative and awareness of our course needs.

Not every course can set aside two men for these jobs, but the concept of "attention to the details" will make each and every facility more pleasing to the members and golfers.

Clean Cut: Mowing Techniques

BY JOE DOUGHERTY

Presidential C.C.

As any golfer knows, when a putt rolls true, or when your balls sits up on the fairway or can be seen in the rough, it's generally the result of good mowing technique, courtesy of the golf course maintenance department.

Although courses differ in levels of perfection, the ultimate goal is to get the job done well enough to make play more pleasurable and appealing to the eye. The three factors that make that happen are operating ability, a good and thorough mechanic and the superintendent with the plan, vision and motivation.

"An operator is as good as his equipment," they say, but experience wins out. A person who cuts fairways on the same gang-unit for ten years can hear and see when their machine is faulty and report it to their mechanic. A new operator must be trained to think this way, be attentive



Rob Haas, superintendent of Miami Shores C. C. with a walk-mowing crew member.



Presidential C. C. mechanic Jim Burns lapping greensmower reels.

and have pride in the job being done. Learning to communicate with the mechanic is very important to get the job done efficiently.

The mechanic must be thorough in their upkeep of the equipment and the sharpness and consistency of the reels and blades. Oil fluid checks, lapping, bearing checks and gauge reading will promote consistent results.

When lapping reels, grit density should conform to the cut (120 Gr/greens, 80 Gr/fairways and 50 Gr/roughs). A good reel man who does nothing but grind

reels and bedknives is a great asset if your budget allows it.

The superintendent's responsibility is to coordinate all of this and keep close watch on mowing heights and shape of cuts to promote visual delight. Mowing is more frequent during the rainy season, so define your cuts for the winter months in November.

Most courses use triplex mowers to cut their greens, but some still use walk mowers, which are better because they cause less stress to the turf and promote a faster ball roll.

Award-winning landscaper and former golf course builder for the Fazio Group, Rob Haas (my good friend and superintendent at Miami Shores C.C.), walk mows every day with four men doing five greens each with beautiful results. Our budget at the Presidential C.C. is somewhat lower, so we use two triplex mowers to cut the front and back nines. We have quick, true greens because our mechanic, Jim Burns, stays on a regular program of maintenance (checks fluids daily, lap weekly, bearings and tire pressure every 10 days, etc.)

On the other end of the spectrum is Mark Rice, superintendent at the Blue Monster at Doral C.C., home of the Doral Ryder Open. He maintains with walk mowers less than 1/8-inch height on his greens and double cuts every day for the tournament.

Keep the machines running clean and sharp, and motivate the operators to have pride in their work. Be creative, like my buddy Tony Ursoleo, superintendent at Bonaventure C.C. and Resort, who cuts a pro-walk from the tee to the fairway or a sweeping approach to the par three holes. Golfers always appreciate a clean-cut course.



Joe Dougherty, superintendent of the Presidential C. C.