Superintendent must communicate maintenance goals to the golfer

By STEVEN RENZETTI

How often has a golfer read a putt, prepared mentally, and played the perfect stroke, only to have the ball slide away from the cup at the last possible moment due to something irregular about the green? Possibly it is a spike mark, or an improperly repaired ball mark. In any event, who is to shoulder the blame? Who is to be judged and criticized for the frustration, the "blame" for such a putt?

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Steven Renzetti, CGCS, is golf course superintendent at The Wyghaji Country Club in New Rochelle, N.Y.

At issue: USGA lab protocol and the liability for failed greens

By STEVE McWILLIAMS

I was surprised in many ways by the article in the June 1994 issue of Golf Course News entitled "Soil labs far apart on pH in blind tests." As I understand the article, the USGA (USGA Guidelines and Lab Protocol) is funding a study that cannot achieve its stated goal of verifying that the labs are following the protocol. Blind testing will only show that labs are reporting the information required by the protocol, but it will not confirm the protocol was used to produce the reported values. The only way for the USGA to verify the labs are following the protocol is to observe the labs in the process of using the protocol to determine the required test values.

The Green Section continues to focus on the "numbers" and diminishes the more important aspect of the use of an agronomically qualified laboratory, which is the interpretive skill required to offer an agronomic opinion. I will follow the USGA, currently, the Cornell University from the USGA Green Section Record of March/April 1993: "Any individual who obtains these procedures and follows them to a T should be able to produce good numbers. You should realize, however, that they may not have the agronomic experience or expertise to provide an appropriate interpretation, or to deal with follow-up questions you may have."

The USGA acknowledges in its own publication the importance of agronomic qualifications. Mr. Snow's (U.S.GA Green Section chairman and director in our Golf Course News article) remarks will promote a false sense of security in the industry by implying the elimination of the "simple mistakes" will result in all the listed laboratories producing a credible agronomic opinion.

When does a "simple mistake" become the "simple mistakes"? Will all in the USGA intend to bear the liability of the validation of the competency of specific laboratories? It is time for an industry reality check. Currently, in England, Martin Martin, (now well-respected architect), is being sued for £7.8 million because of poor quality greens. I will quote an article from turf. AUS. Australia, May '94: "In denying liability, Hawtree has drawn the Sports Turf Research Institute into the proceedings as a third party, claiming the institute was engaged to advise on and test the soil laboratories; if not, then seriously pursue a program designed to verify that the labs are following and understanding the USGA Guidelines and Lab Protocol. The labs are widely divergent in their agronomic abilities to follow and interpretive skills of the industry chooses to manage a considerable portion of the liability of credential the experts. Most certainly, architects are increasing their potential liability by not verifying the credibility of the labs. However, you could make the argument the USGA has deferred a portion of the liability of credential verification to itself — by Mr. Snow's implication in his article that all the listed labs are either competent or will be competent by virtue of USGA training. It is not clear to me how the USGA intends to rectify the "simple mistakes," but the process would seem to include the assumption of a considerable amount of liability on the part of the USGA.

Given the seriousness of the current lawsuit in England and the potential for extensive financial damages, the industry need to have a high degree of confidence in the agronomic testing and interpretive skills of the laboratory. It is time for an industry reality check. Currently, in England, Martin Martin, (now well-respected architect), is being sued for £7.8 million because of poor quality greens. I will quote an article from turf. AUS. Australia, May '94: "In denying liability, Hawtree has drawn the Sports Turf Research Institute into the proceedings as a third party, claiming the institute was engaged to advise on and test the soil laboratories; if not, then seriously pursue a program designed to verify that the labs are following and understanding the USGA Guidelines and Lab Protocol. The labs are widely divergent in their agronomic abilities to follow and interpretive skills of the industry chooses to manage a considerable portion of the liability of credential the experts. Most certainly, architects are increasing their potential liability by not verifying the credibility of the labs. However, you could make the argument the USGA has deferred a portion of the liability of credential verification to itself — by Mr. Snow's implication in his article that all the listed labs are either competent or will be competent by virtue of USGA training. It is not clear to me how the USGA intends to rectify the "simple mistakes," but the process would seem to include the assumption of a considerable amount of liability on the part of the USGA.

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