USGA's Pace system can help your course cope with slow play

BY DEAN KNUTH

Just about the time course management and golf committees had despaired of overcoming the slow play obstacle to running an efficient golf course, the U.S. Golf Association's (USGA) Pace Rating System Manual has come along with a handful of remedies. And they work.

For 10 real-life examples, consider the manual's case studies of courses which have speeded up play dramatically through a combination of course management and education. The courses, which include membership and daily-fee facilities, are successfully replacing five hour rounds with rounds of 4-1/2 hours or less.

Obtain Your USGA Pace Rating and Time Pars

To a course, they began by determining an appropriate pace of play for a round. The USGA's contribution in this area is a custom measure called "pace rating," of the course, or the hours and minutes it should take to play a given hole. Each time par on a course is unique to the hole. It is calculated according to a formula, developed by the USGA, that takes into account the length and difficulty of the hole, and related factors, such as whether players normally walk or ride. The sum of 18 time pars equals the "pace rating," of the course, or the hours and minutes it should take to finish a round.

An advantage of the USGA formula is that it assumes play under "impeded" conditions, meaning...
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GOOD GRIEF... ANOTHER WETTING AGENT!

"I ALMOST TOOK THE PLUNGE WHEN SURF-SIDE WALKED IN THE DOOR"

The golf course is a Muirhead design. Millions of dollars were spent moving sand in flat South Jersey to create a spectacular and challenging golf course (The 17th tee is one of the highest points in Cape May County). Hot, dry, summer conditions on our sand greens, tees & fairways planted to Penn Cross / Penn Links needed a wetting agent for survival... and don't think wetting agents are all the same. We've tried most wetting agents and had our share of disappointments. The greens are about 98% sand and 2% organic matter making them extremely hydrophobic. We have used normal maintenance / aeration procedures over the past 4 years to improve the root zone but in 1991 we started applying Surf-Side at rates sufficient to eliminate watering problems. We start with a shock treatment Surf-Side in 160 gals water and we do water-in at these higher rates.

The Surf-Side gives us a quicker response on leaf absorption of nutrients. Surf-Side 37 can bring overall upgrades at three South Bend, Ind., municipal layouts — Ebel, Studebaker and Erskine golf courses.

- $400,000 for improvements to Eberhart-Petro Municipal Golf Course in Mishawaka, Ind.
- $250,000 for irrigation work at American Golf Corporation-operated Goshen Plantation (Ga.) Golf Club.
That's an average renovation price of $1.52 million, roughly the cost of a brand new, 18-hole "plain vanilla" course, according to architect Michael Hurzdan. Not exactly chump change. The glory in golf course architecture may be in designing a new course. But a great deal of satisfaction, and more than a few dollars, can be earned in course renovation. Just look at the famous architects plying their trade on existing courses — Pete Dye at Woodlands Country Club in Indianapolis; Jack Nicklaus at Castlewood CC in Branson, Miss.; Arnold Palmer at Buffalo Hill; Gary Player at Raleigh (N.C.) CC; Robert Trent Jones Jr. at Wailea; Mark McCumber at Sea Pines Ocean Course in Hilton Head, S.C.; Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw at Brook Hollow CC in Dallas; Rees Jones at Duke University GC in Durham, N.C.

Robert Lohmann may be the numerical leader with 20 different renovations in various stages of completion, according to GCN Development Letter figures.

"A lot of new clubs have been built here in the Midwest," said Lohmann of Crystal Lake, Ill. Additional clubs needed to renovate their facilities to keep up. Many park districts have renovated or expanded their courses because of the increased demand for public golf. And there are many public facilities that have just been beat up over the years. The land is paid for, the owners are pushing through 20,000 rounds per year and figure they can double that by rebuilding a few holes.

Other multiple-renovation project designers include Ed Connor (6); Larry Flatt and Rob Lohmann (5); 15 architects (3 apiece); Kickerling, Schreiner and Robert T. Jones Jr. (4 each); Randy Heckenkemper, Clyde Johnston, Charles Ankrom, Dick Nugent and John Harbottle II (4 apiece); and Rees Jones (2).

Still, renovations are where "young architects generally get to cut their teeth," as Liddy put it. "The better-known architects want to do new courses."

The problem for a young architect is getting to establish himself and not turn away business is being able to say "NO" to an overzealous greens committee member or course owner who fancies himself an architect. The amateur architect can destroy a perfectly good design if given his way.

"The relationship between the greens chairman and architect is the key to any successful renovation," said Barry Palm, president of the Donald Ross Society, which has charged itself with preserving the integrity of the master architect's 600-plus golf course designs.

"The chairman has to be an autocrat. You can't renovate a course by committee. But there has to be a solid reciprocal respect between the greens chair-man and architect. Ultimately the greens chairman must trust the judgment of the person he's retained to renovate his course."

Not allowing oneself to be bullied into a bad renovation decision is not only the architect's job but his duty, Liddy said.

"Any architect's goal should be to preserve the integrity of the original designer, no matter what the greens committee says," the Dye understudy said. "I've found that an architect is often called in to fix something a board member has done."

Lohmann agreed.

"People are beginning to realize that if they don't get an architect who knows what he is doing, they are going to get a bad project," he said. "An architect needs to be able to say to the doctors, lawyers, business people on a board that what they want to do is wrong. An architect better do what is right for the game or he won't be in the business for long."

As the country's golf course inventory continues to age, the number of renovations will only increase.

"You could probably make a living just renovating courses that interfere with play," Palm said. "Renovation work is becoming a cottage industry."