Design, maintenance a crucial marriage

By MICHAEL HURDZAN

In no other form of construction are design and maintenance so closely intertwined as with golf courses. Both are driven by the same objective: to provide the golfer with the most pleasant recreational experience possible. To reach this objective, designers and superintendents must be fully sympathetic to each other’s purposes and problems. Some of the issues involved and some of the compromises both must face regard drainage, earthmoving, greens and green surrounds, tees and bunker design.

First, maintenance is more important to the golfer than design. Given a choice between a well-designed but poorly maintained golf course, or a poorly designed but well-maintained one, the golfer will nearly always choose the best maintained.

Second, maintenance often has a greater influence than design on a course’s difficulty and speed of play. When greens are kept fast, fairways lush and narrow, roughs long and sand bunkers soft, you can bet the course will play difficult and slow.

Last, it is the visual impact or interesting patterns of color, texture and height that help make a course memorable and enjoyable. Usually this is achieved through mowing patterns, landscaping and selective maintenance, all under the superintendent’s control.

This means the superintendent should be given more credit for making a round of golf an enjoyable experience. (Such influences of superintendents are more than 100 years old, for in researching old magazines I continually find references to the great condition of a course, with only occasional mention of the design).

Because of the role of maintenance, a superintendent should be hired early in planning.

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DRAINAGE MOST CRUCIAL

The single most important element of a golf course is drainage. Everyone has heard the story of the superintendent who was asked what it takes to keep a golf course beautiful. His reply: “About 5 percent common sense and 95 percent drainage, and if you don’t have much common sense, then put in more drainage.”

Drainage is especially significant to effectively practice Integrated Pest Management.

Two elements of drainage must be studied and coordinated: surface drainage and sub-surface drainage. Unless a site has perfect internal drainage or no rainfall, the entire site must be analyzed for its drainage characteristics and patterns, and these should be planned for until all of the water leaves the site. This usually means a system of drainage swales, catch basins and swales that exhaust into pipes or tile, a tile system for all greens and bunkers, a series of ponds and drains, and sometimes a retention-detention basin.

The flatter the site and/or the tighter the soils, the more important and complicated drainage becomes. Drainage installation can be expensive, so many times the course architect must cut back on the scope of drainage so as to stay within the budget. Many believe drainage can be installed later, but earthmoving and amended soils for greens must be done now. It is a compromise of the “ideal” and the “adequate.” The designer and superintendent know the value of drainage and must try to convince the owner not to compromise, but often this is futile.

Dr. Michael Hurdzan is a course architect with a PhD in environmental turfgrass physiology.
A marriage made in golf

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BY TERRY BUCHEN

DALLAS, Texas — The Northwood Club is under the care of new superintendent Scott Ebers, which has a cadre program along with electric golf cars for their members and guests to use.

"Each of our golf cars has one soil divot bottle, instead of the normal two, because of other equipment-mounted on each car," Ebers said. "As golfers play the par-3 9th hole, or the 10th hole, they can exchange an empty soil divot bottle with a filled one simply by picking one up on the back of the tee benches on these two holes."

The bottle holders and bottles were purchased from the golf car distributor and then bolted to the benches, Ebers said.

"The soil bottle holders blend in nicely with the benches and of their black color," he said. "Because we do not overseed the golf course with Bermudagrass for winter time golf, we do not add any seed to the soil bottles. Each bottle holds straight sand, the same sand that was used in each of the teeing grounds construction, which is also used on fairway and rough divots as well.

"Each soil bottle is filled each morning and then checked midday and in the afternoon, as needed," Ebers added.

Mobile units: Northwood equips carts with divot bottles

Soil and seed bottles loaded and ready.

Northwood equips carts with divot bottles

Followed with electric cars for use.

To the benches, Ebers said.

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Equipment directly dictates future maintenance.

Greens should be designed to provide adequate face water from running into it, especially on sand faces, to reduce water erosion. This means that all edges of the bunkers should be at least a couple of inches above grade.

Second, the bunker should be drained either by tile or French drain. Also, the bunker bottom should be perfectly concave or bowl-shaped, smooth and compacted before sand is installed. Sand depth should be at least 6 inches — and 8 inches is preferred. The sand should be of angular shape and in the range of 0.25 millimeter to 1 millimeter, favoring the larger particles in windy areas. Color doesn't matter.

It is strongly recommended that grass bunker faces be treated with growth regulators, or planted to slow-growing grasses to reduce the need for edging and mowing.

Next month: The single most important specification that influences maintenance: selection of the turfgrasses.

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