Superintendents innovate to save time and money on course

By Joel Joyner

DULUTH, Ga. — Faced with smaller budgets and staffs and managing increased workloads with fewer resources, golf course superintendents are turning to innovative ideas to survive economic fallout. Superintendents Mark Hoban and Sam Orozco know that saving time and money in a golf course maintenance program helps to create a more efficient operation and could potentially save jobs.

HOBAN MODIFIES GOLF CARS

At the Standard Club in Duluth, Ga., Hoban has modified used electric golf cars into utility vehicles.

“We have electric golf cars that we’ve converted to utility vehicles,” he said. “We build a deck on the back of them so that all our greenskeepers can be easily loaded on and off. We can get a fleet of six used electric cars and convert them for the price of one new utility vehicle.

The cars are only stopping at four or five greens at a time so there isn’t any wear and tear before they are headed back to the shop and recharged for the next day, according to Hoban. “It’s a big savings with small benefits included,” he said.

“There’s a windshift so that the operator doesn’t get a cold wind in the face during the winter and a place for coffee. We really load the cars up. There’s a place for a whipping pole and backpack blower,” he continued. “There’s a map for which greens an operator is supposed to do. Each car is assigned so that the same mower goes to the same holes every day. So there’s a problem with the equipment, we know which operator was on-hand running it on a given day.”

Hoban has reduced his fleet to 21 vehicles, including the six electric cars with mowers on them, as well as decreased maintenance requirements to keep the gas powered vehicles operating. “The constant stops and starts with the gas powered vehicles left us with several repair problems in the long run,” he explained.

Hoban learned of the idea when one of his assistants saw it done at the Athens Country Club. “We discussed it for a few years, then I sent my mechanic, Herb Zelm, to the club to check it out,” said Hoban. “We ended up using a modified version to meet our own needs.”

EFFICIENT OPERATION

The electric cars are able to handle the load and help to make a more efficient operation. “The cars are already loaded with the mowers each morning and the crew is out on the course within minutes. It’s easier than finding a utility vehicle, getting a trailer to hook up to it, and arguing about who has what,” said Hoban.

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OROCZO FINISHES FACILITY

Superintendent Sam Orozco, at the Palo Duro Creek Golf Club in Nogales, Ariz., took on the role of general contractor after finances started drying up during the approach renovation with sand rootzone, extensive drainage, and independent irrigation may become the standard.

APPROACHES AND PLAYABILITY

Many architects, builders and superintendents are beginning to rank approach areas above tees. Why? Because the approach area is highly contoured.

Two images of St. Augustinegrass, green under the same conditions with gray leaf spot, show improvements (left) where the turf was amended with silica.

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Ross approaches
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involved in the playability of the hole, so how the ball reacts off this surface is critical. As the USGA green became the standard method of construction, along came firmer green surfaces. With firmer green surfaces, golfers have been forced to play the ball into the approach area and bounce/roll the ball onto the green surface.

In recent years, many golf course superintendents have adopted green-style management programs on approaches, such as: walk mowing, aerifying and topdressing.

This shift of green style programs to approaches has produced excellent turfgrass conditions. However, this maintenance cannot guarantee excellent playability. The biggest factors contributing to this are the growing medium, drainage, and irrigation. Generally, approach areas are constructed with typical topsoil medium, minimal if any drainage, and irrigation coverage from some other area (like fairways).

NEW CONSTRUCTION METHODS

The solution to this problem would be to consider approaches as the next modified area. Construction using USGA rootzone, independent irrigation set-up, and herringbone type drainage could offer extensive benefits. The foremost benefit of this construction would be the ability to control the moisture. This would solve the main complaint over a present softer/wetter area where ball reaction is minimal and unpredictable. From a playability standpoint, approaches that have a high sand mix can offer the benefit of a firmer surface, unlike soil based approaches. Firm approach surfaces can offer the golfer the option of a bump-and-run shot with more predictability. Sand mix can also be graded much easier, thereby producing a very even and smooth contour. This smooth surface would then be able to offer a superior, tight cut.

While there are many different ways to achieve this, one construction method could be to construct an approach cavity six inches lower than final grade. Within the cavity, drainage could be installed dictated by the final grade contours using four-inch drainpipe and enveloped with peastone. A six-inch depth of rootzone and independent irrigation would complete the approach construction. Not only would this offer great playability, but would also offer the potential for growing very fine turfgrass. Since approaches make up an average of two acres on an 18-hole course, this method would not significantly add to construction costs.