

golfbusiness

Remodeling: blueprint for better play (Part 1)

by Ronald W. Fream



The ninth green at Santa Ana (Calif.) Country Club is shown above during reconstruction. Speed is of the essence to complete remodeling with as little disturbance to golfers as possible. Completed green is shown at right.



At some point in the history of almost every golf course, the necessity of remodeling becomes apparent. The motivation may be economic, aesthetic, or — as is now so imminent — the weather.

Remodeling can be classified as modernization, renovation, the

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correction of existing problems, improvement of playing conditions, or any variety of these. Improvements most certainly should include aesthetic ones such as improvement in the visual appearance of greens, bunkers, and tees. Ornamental tree planting, the addition of flower beds, the replacement of a drab river sand in the bunkers with bright crystal silica sand, and similar "eyewash" activities are also a part of an overall remodeling program.

Most common and most inevitable are those remodeling works which are the result of golf course old age or recent, but incorrect, construction. Deterioration of seedbeds and associated deterioration of turfgrass growing conditions and turfgrass appearance are the usual symptoms. Greens which burn out under minor environmental stress, those which become a quagmire after the briefest shower, or those which resemble

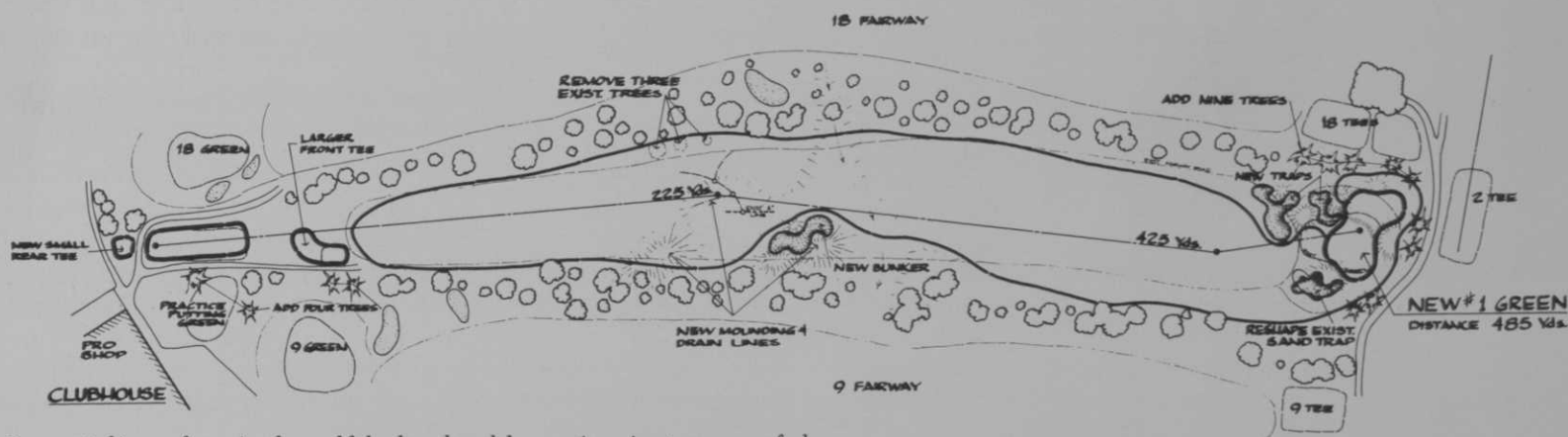
paved parking lots after even modest play are common candidates for renovation.

There are numerous golf courses that were constructed 10, 20, or 50 years ago which did not have the benefit of modern golf course construction knowledge or methods. There are also golf courses that may have been built within the past 10 years or less which were constructed improperly or inadequately due either to insufficient funding, lack of appropriate knowledge, or carelessness.

The problems of improper construction — and concurrently, in some cases, inadequate golf architectural design — are those seen almost universally: small, heavily worn tees; greens unable to withstand climatic stress and too small to accommodate increasing rates of play; fairways having more exposed soil than turf; water-filled bunkers after even the



Objectives of remodeling should be drama, aesthetics, challenge, and improvement in turfgrass maintenance conditions. The natural look is in vogue now.



Remodeling of a single golf hole should receive just as careful consideration and thought as the redesign of an entire golf course. This is especially true since what is done on one hole may have an impact on the overall rhythm of play throughout the 18 holes. Shown is proposed plan for first hole at Almaden CC in California.

briefest shower; and drainage problems in general on tees, fairways, and at the greensites. A "compaction problem" is the common name for most of the visible symptoms.

Irrigation systems also show the effects of recent modernization and improvement of products when compared to the old hose bib, hose-and-sprinkler, or manual quick-coupler systems. If any form of golf course remodeling or renovation is contemplated, regardless of the scope of the project, a simultaneous consideration of irrigation system improvements must be undertaken. To rebuild one green, a fairway, or a single tee and not consider the long-term impact of such works on the irrigation system can lead to "cart before the horse" situations and needless future extra expense.

Remodeling and renovation must be considered as two sides of the same coin. Renovation alone, to improve the seedbed conditions or only the turf-grass surface of an area, is frequently seen. However, as so many existing golf courses are basically images of others, remodeling with the emphasis on design aesthetics and seedbed improvement is the preferred method. To improve both the aesthetics and the seedbed, when each can be mutually and simultaneously obtainable, is a most productive achievement.

It pays to do it right

Remodeling, no matter where or when it is done, is expensive. The costs to rebuild some portion of a golf course would be higher than to construct new facilities of similar size and construction method. The problems of work-

ing on an existing golf course and maintaining reasonable play while construction works are going on obviously add costs to the work. It would be desirable to remove play from the portion of the course undergoing remodeling, but this is not always politically or financially feasible — and temporary greens and tees must be provided as the alternative.

When temporary greens are required, it is far more successful to spend a little more time and money to provide "real" temporary greens. Only mowing a smooth spot on a fairway the day before you close the green to be remodeled is adequate. However, if an actual small green is developed by bringing in sod from the putting green turf nursery and placing it upon a sand layer, or by slowly creating a temporary from a selected portion of fairway with successive applications of top dressing and overseeding, a much more desirable temporary surface is obtained. Even placing a few containerized trees behind the temporary to provide depth perception or creating a small greenside bunker will go a long way to minimize or eliminate golfer complaints about the remodeling program.

Before any remodeling works are undertaken, it is in the long-term interest of the owner of the golf course to first consider having a qualified professional golf course architect prepare a long-term master remodeling plan. A master plan or golf course improvement plan would provide a coherent and unified map that will eventually lead to a finished product that "fits." All too often, remodeling

works are undertaken with a very specific goal in mind: one hole, one tee, one bunker perhaps, without adequate overview to insure that at some future time, all of the various alterations or improvements anywhere within the course will be compatible.

Perhaps the best examples of sporadic remodeling originate with the green committees of private clubs. The new committee chairman wishes to memorialize his term in office, almost regardless of what that year's remodeling projects will do to the future appearance, playability, or maintenance of the course. Certainly nearly every person who can hold a golf club also fantasizes his equal or superior ability at being a golf course architect. The results of such efforts at golf clubs all over America are common and at times pathetic. Furthermore, considerable dissension can arise within a membership or between membership and superintendent when ill-conceived projects of golf course "improvement" are initiated by these instant experts.

A comprehensive master plan, developed by a professional golf course architect in close collaboration with the green committee, course owner, golf manager, golf superintendent, golf pro, and/or other pertinent interested individuals can result in a foundation upon which any modernization of the golf course can be undertaken with reasonable assurance that when the works are completed — be that one year, 5 years, or longer — the finished product will fit the specific needs and requirements of the individual course and client.

A golf course remodeling master

plan, fully implemented in concise detail, is not an expensive luxury only the most successful golf clubs can afford. Perhaps it is better to state that when any remodeling or alterations to a golf course are contemplated, a master plan is a first order necessity. Savings in time, efficiency of implementation, coordinated results, and — not the least — improved design aesthetics are all part of the investment in a master plan.

As a guideline, the golf architect's fee for preparing the entire master plan and written report, including irrigation system and pumping plant evaluations, for an 18 hole course shows reasonable cost between \$3,500 and \$6,000. That sum represents from

easy way to dramatically improve the beauty of a course. Cart paths are becoming an ever-increasing necessity. The proper routing of the cart paths may make the difference between those paths which are used and those which are ignored.

Perhaps the most dramatic and sought-after goal of remodeling is the improvement in visual aesthetics and playing challenge which can result from creative, imaginative design and proper construction procedures. Many golf courses appear to have been designed by the same rubber stamp. Monotony and boredom are rampant and all too common on the majority of typical older courses and not a few of the newer ones as well.

courses have been eclipsed by the graphite shaft and extra distance balls. Par should never come cheap. The golf course must offer a fair and reasonable challenge to all golfers. During remodeling, this challenge must be maintained or enhanced. On many of our typical racetrack-type courses, no strategic challenge at all now exists.

Certainly one of the foremost objectives of any remodeling program is to improve the turfgrass growing conditions. Improved seedbeds, drainage improvements, and the modernization of the irrigation system can all be done with careful consideration of the golf course superintendent's requirements. With the ever-increasing costs of golf course maintenance, improvements in playing conditions while minimizing maintenance cost increases — or actually reducing or stabilizing such costs — is a very real objective of remodeling.

Remodeling can revitalize and renew a tired, wornout golf course as no other method can. Remodeling may be as certain as taxes, but when it is undertaken with professional and thorough planning, creative design, and implementation using modern agronomically correct techniques, the finished works can provide many years of satisfied, beautiful and enjoyable golf play. □

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3 percent to 4½ percent of a single year's maintenance budget. As the master plan can have a functional life of 5 years or more for full implementation, the cost is really rather modest.

Remodeling can improve dramatically the carrying capacity or potential volume of golfer use on many courses, especially municipal facilities. New and larger tees with improved seedbeds, greens of enlarged size and shape with agronomically correct seedbed mixtures, and improved turfgrasses can offer more enjoyment to the golfers and fewer maintenance problems for the golf course superintendent. The automation of an irrigation system can increase application efficiency and conserve water, reduce labor, and allow improved watering during night hours. The addition of drainage facilities throughout a course can extend the playing season in some cases. The addition of ornamental tree and shrub plantings can greatly improve the seasonal appearance and beauty of the course. Adding colorful trees is an

The visual beauty of a golf course can be greatly improved through the remodeling design process. The resultant improved shapes, surfaces, and sizes of greens and the contouring of mounding and bunkers around the greensites can create some very beautiful playing settings where small, flat, round greens once existed. Teeing areas need not resemble postage stamps. With proper design increased teeing surface, additional tee shot variety, and improved appearance can result. Fairways need not be tabletop-flat and boring. While improving or correcting drainage problems, mounding and bunkering can be added to emphasize strategic golf shot placement and enhance the visual beauty of a golf hole. Such visual improvements can be placed so as not to significantly hinder play.

Any manner of the above visual or aesthetic improvements must also be coordinated with improvements in the strategic challenge and playing feasibility of the course. As the tools of the game have improved, the typical older