A golf superintendent

Comparing budgets

As you examine the results of various course maintenance surveys, please remember that practically every golf club has a different objective when it comes to a standard of course maintenance. Thus, as Bob Williams noted in a discussion of efficiency and course maintenance, "let us be mindful that we have to adjust the shoe to fit the foot. Few statements can be made to apply to the majority of cases. No standard can be set to apply to all of our clubs."

Should we really compare budgets after all? William Bengeyfield, director of the Western Region of the USGA Green Section once noted that "it doesn't really matter if a superintendent's answer to this question is NO! It doesn't really matter if we respond in the firmest possible way. The fact is — budgets and golf courses will be compared by club officials — always! When it comes to economic matters, man must be logical. He must standardize, make a formula, figure the percentages. This is his nature."

Golf courses are entirely dissimilar. They cannot be standardized, do not fit any formula. Their value, beauty and enjoyment depend on their individuality. This is their nature.

An impasse? Not if we wish otherwise. Golf is only enjoyed to the fullest when the course provides the best possible playing conditions and pleasant surroundings. Emphasis of these points in relation to the money being spent is therefore the main point. In fact, the only point! It's not what one spends — it's what one receives for it that ultimately counts.

Variables which influence the cost of golf course maintenance and should be carefully examined before comparing budgets:

1. AGE — golf course design and construction has varied considerably through the years to reduce the hand labor and to accommodate the use of modern equipment.
2. ACREAGE — the size of greens, tees, fairways, bunkers and club grounds will vary from club to club. The club maintaining 100 acres of fairway will have costs exceeding the club which maintains only 21 acres.
3. WINTER PLAY — few clubs keep greens open for play in the winter. Depending upon the quantity of play this would increase the need for spring aerification and other requirements, each increasing the cost of maintenance.
4. ANNUAL PLAY — 35,000 golf rounds would create more maintenance requirements than the course with only 4,000 rounds of play.
5. GOLF CARS — heavy golf car usage or usage of cars during unfavorable conditions would result in the need for greater irrigation, aerification, fertilization and renovation with costs increasing proportionately.
6. GRASS VARIETIES — different species of grasses require different approaches to maintenance. Poa annua retardation programs are expensive to employ, but are generally programmed in the better clubs.
7. SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS — for reasons often difficult to explain some clubs may require unique maintenance programs which would influence the cost of maintenance. For example, control programs for the Hyperodes weevil or for the Ataenius beetle are not necessary to every club in Metropolitan New York.
8. SOIL TYPES — soil influences the cost of maintenance. Clay soils will not support equipment usage under moist conditions and will generally require aerification, spiking and topdressing more than sandier soils.
9. CART PATHS & SERVICE ROADS — roads facilitate movement of equipment and labor with less lost time or wear and tear.

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Tennis: the 20th hole

There was a time when a private golf club could be launched and thrive with installation of roughly 6,600 yards of greensward and 18 flags. But it was soon discovered that a 19th hole, including locker room and grill as well as tap, was almost mandatory. Today, it seems no less imperative that the facility include tennis courts.

The economic need for the modern club to serve as a family recreational center has combined with the upsurge in the popularity of tennis to make the tennis court an essential "20th hole." Many of the most conservative old-line clubs have felt the need to add tennis to insure the recruitment of new, younger members and the increased utilization of all other club facilities. And it now seems no less imperative that the facility include tennis courts.

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Typical of the pattern is the handsome Rolling Hills Golf and Racquet Club in Montgomery, Ala. This 1,000-acre development along Byron Nelson Blvd. opened in 1976 with one 18-hole course and six all-weather tennis courts. The latter are of the Chevron Laykold surfacing system and are lighted for nighttime play with Chevron's lighting system, which provides an even diffusion of light with no glare, hot spots or stroboscopic effect.

According to principal owner Hugh Smith, these courts were selected for their durability and minimal maintenance under heavy use and in all climatic conditions. "Following a cloud-burst," said Smith, "they dry in half an hour, and the only care they've required is an occasional sweeping off of leaves."

In less than 2 years, Rolling Hills has achieved a membership of 350 and expects to reach its optimum of 700 by 1980. So far, 200 homesites abutting the golf course have been developed, and a total of 800 are planned for completion over the next 10 years.

As projected expansion is realized, space has been reserved for a second 18-hole golf course and an additional 20 tennis courts. "Even that may not be the end of it," said Smith. "With a metropolitan population of 400,000, Montgomery is the fastest growing city in Alabama."

Rolling Hills is the ninth private country club in the area. "In starting a new club today," said Smith, "you have to compete for all of the family's recreational demands, and in planning your facilities, the inclusion of tennis is an absolute necessity."