

Rough Matters

by Ken Ingram, CGCS

Stanley Zontek's article "Smoothing Out The Rough" in the March/April issue of the USGA Green Section Reporter is a must read for Superintendents and really made me reflect on the changes we have seen in our management of roughs the last few years. Stanley's well written article suggests changing the name of the rough because "after all, they certainly aren't rough anymore." Perhaps he's right, because of our increased responsibilities with roughs and every other facet of the course we aren't just "greenkeepers" today.

Clearly many courses today are trying to improve turf quality in rough. Stanley's article lists several reasons for this, the most important being economics. Golfers today demand quality and are willing to pay for good lies in the fairway and the rough. Just keeping the rough mowed is no longer sufficient. For many Superintendents fertilizing rough is something we tried once with some old, leftover fertilizer and swore we

would never do it again, but alas, many courses routinely fertilize rough today.

Maintenance practices change with the attitudes and perceptions of our golfers. Improving roughs sends us back to basic turf management. Accurate measurements are needed and it is shocking, often four times the area of fairways and close to one hundred acres for some clubs. This is a tremendous problem. If soil testing shows lime and nutrient deficiencies, corrective treatments for such a large area could be cost prohibitive. Weed control really shouldn't be considered if the fertility requirements aren't met. Grub control will probably be required regardless.

Without question the limiting factor in rough maintenance is irrigation. If drought stress weakens the stand every summer all other programs are futile. There were no double row irrigation systems in the Mid-Atlantic until the 1980's. Now double row is standard and many courses have triple row

or some form of perimeter irrigation. But every course has some limitation to water supply. In 1999 that limitation was the government. It was illegal to irrigate rough in Maryland.

The old reel type gang-mowers were standard equipment on every course until the 1980's. The big deck rotaries have replaced many of them and do a fine job. It's no surprise, the patent dates on those old Blitzers were stamped on the side-plates and dated back to the 1920's. Most courses today do not mow fence-line to fence-line with gang units. Trees start to form "woods" and frequently there are some areas not mowed and reserved for native plantings, or wildflowers. Depending on the layout, these areas can significantly reduce mowed rough. Many Superintendents remember the "contour mowing" craze of the 1970's when mowed fairway area greatly decreased. At my club there were sixty acres of fairway at one time, today there are twenty four acres.

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Another change has been an increase in intermediate rough surrounding the fairway. It makes perfect sense in theory, missing the fairway by inches should not be penal, but mowing this strip provides a real challenge to Superintendents. Finding the right width, height of cut, frequency, equipment, and turf type is not easy. Our friend Stan needs to find a name for this too. Intermediate Rough, First Cut, Primary Rough, what is best? My staff calls it the "Once Arounds!"

Grass selections have changed as well. Heaven help the courses with roughs seeded to K-31 Tall Fescue. I had a college professor that called K-31 "60 mile per hour grass." It only looked good, Dr. Troll said, if you were driving past it at 60mph! The

improved Turf Type Tall Fescues are much better. Bluegrasses seem to be the answer for new courses but introducing them into existing turf can be difficult. Ryegrass was great before Grey Leaf Spot. Don't you just love the Mid-Atlantic, there is no perfect grass.

The diversity of courses and conditions help make golf a great game. Just look at last year's Open Championships. No rough at Pinehurst and punishing rough at Carnoustie, and how about that new 1 3/8" second cut at Augusta. Rough comprises so much of the course and there is so much play out of the rough we should have some management plan for it, even if the plan is for low maintenance.

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ask the Superintendent who's whole crew was an hour late on Saturday morning. To realize the value of ONE MINUTE, ask the operator that just made five passes on a green with a hydraulic leak on his mower.

To realize the value of ONE SECOND, as a person who just avoided an accident. To realize the value of ONE MILLISECOND, ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics.

Treasure every moment that you have, and treasure it more because you shared it with someone special, special enough to spend your time. Remember that time waits for no one. Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why it's call the "PRESENT."



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