Turf stress a factor with 9-hole courses

When to expand — For courses of 2,500 to 3,000 yards and a Standard Scratch Score as low as 60, the option to go to an 18-hole format should be resisted, if there is only the room to double the existing yardage. It may make more sense to design a quality, 9-hole layout with a better balance of par 3, 4 and 5 holes.

Some superb 9-hole layouts have a special character of their own which would be impossible to repeat through a full 18.

Turf stress concerns — A round of golf on a 9-hole course still adds up to 18, and this results in double the turf traffic.

If room was initially a constraint, it is unlikely that much thought was given to designing large greens, adequate tees and wide, diverse traffic routes.

Nine-hole courses with separate tees and varied landing and approach areas will have less wear damage. A tighter layout also provides less opportunities to divert winter play.

The question of access around the course has implications for equipment as well as golfers.

If the layout takes up most of the available room, then maintenance vehicles may encroach more onto the playing areas of the 9-hole course. Less room through the site may necessitate having to mow everything, an added maintenance burden many 18-hole courses avoid by promoting haphazard roughs and conservation areas.

Morning glut — It won’t take long for a 9-hole course to become choked with golfers first thing in the morning, and there will be minimum amounts of time for greens mowing and other important morning maintenance.

Maintenance for 9 holes is not half that of the 18-hole course due to down time — traveling around the course, maneuvering around small greens and small tees takes up a major portion of management hours.

Machinery costs — Essentially the same machinery range is required to tend a 9-hole golf course. A triplex mower is needed for the greens, regardless of number. At first glance, it may be thought that a walk-behind greens mower is more feasible on a 9-hole course. However, the lack of time may mandate using a riding triplex.

Half the topdressing, fertilizer and fungicide can make for a tidy savings, although the difference can be eaten up by increased repair costs.

Fertilizer and pesticide bills may not show lower costs, due to the demands of play, which require a greater input to stimulate growth.

Equivalent costs with reduced income will not make the club’s accountant a happy man and the budget will be strained by major outlays, such as irrigation projects, or larger equipment purchases.

—Source: “Northern Ohio Turf”