

GOLF COURSE PRESENTATION

By Stewart Brown

The significance of golf course presentation should be known to all Course Managers and greenkeepers and be an integral part of their thinking and attitude towards their profession. It is true that you cannot always judge a book by its cover, but we live in a media-dominated world and people not only expect quality, they expect it to look good too!

Many factors make up a 'quality' golf course – course type, history, players, greenkeeping staff management etc – and presentation is but one weapon in the armoury of management tools at the disposal of the greenkeeper.

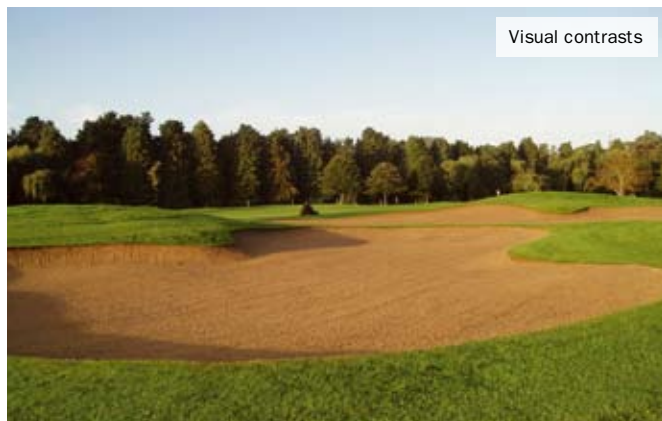
There is no substitute for sound agronomic practices in maintaining golf courses in top condition for play but there are many benefits that accrue from high standards of presentation. However, the most important factor to remember is the course aesthetics or visual appearance should never dominate the requirements of the game or health of the course. Golf course presentation is about achieving a balance between agronomy, playing requirements and course aesthetics.

A RATIONALE FOR GOLF COURSE PRESENTATION

Why then should we be concerned with golf course presentation, knowing it is not a panacea for creating good golfing conditions? Foremost is that it indicates the high levels of greenkeeper professionalism all should be aspiring to. It is the most visibly apparent aspect to the greenkeeper's efforts and shows players and golf course managers/secretaries the standard of 'craftsmanship' being achieved. Greenkeepers who take pride in their work like to demonstrate their high skill levels and knowledge to players and golfing officials. The striped green or neatly raked bunker is indicative of greenkeepers approaching even routine tasks with great care and attention to detail.

Such professionalism reflects well on greenkeeping staff, in most cases players and employers are appreciative of their efforts. Golfers are often 'professionals' from commerce or business and showing them a course presented to the highest standards only elevates the standing of those responsible for the course and its upkeep. When a golf course is presented well, golfers and greenkeepers alike can take great pride in their course and this instils a sense of ownership, which helps to ensure that all involved will want to support and continue their role or membership.

It is generally a fact that people like being associated with quality and success. A course in top condition, presented to a high standard will motivate people to look after their course, maintain such standards



Visual contrasts

or even aspire to higher levels of performance. A young greenkeeper indoctrinated with sound greenkeeping and an appreciation of course presentation, working under experienced and dedicated senior staff will carry this forward when they are managing their own course one day. So future golfers will benefit from this ethos of professionalism and commitment.

Presentation is also good business sense. Golfers want to play at the best courses. They seek a test of their golfing prowess and ability but also an enjoyable experience. A golf course which is aesthetically pleasing to the eye as well as testing of their golfing ability, leads to a rewarding golf experience which players will want to repeat. In contemporary golf course management competition is acute and the well-presented course, even if all other factors are equal, will often have the edge on its competitors.

Finally, for those venues hosting competitions and major tournaments, golf course presentation is a critical factor in determining a positive media perception. It is fact that people will judge the quality of a golf course by its aesthetic appearance even when it is generally well known that such appearances can be deceiving. Just because it is 'green' and highly manicured does not mean it has the best conditions for play! Presentation is particularly important where there is a media presence, where the 'world' will be looking at your golf course and making judgements on what they see on the screen. Television, particularly, is a very powerful medium and can pick on increasingly minute details in course appearance and presentation. Anything untoward or detracting from visual quality will be commented on, often in a negative way that will reflect upon the golf course staff and particularly the greenkeepers.

Equally, it can work in your favour – as others have said in other spheres, television can make or break you. If the course is presented to a high standard and looks good what harm will that do to your career or the reputation of the golf club? The caveat to this, of course, is that playing conditions are good also. It has to play well and look good. If the media, players or club officials consider the course to look poor you will soon know about it!

You must also understand that the game of golf is highly psychological. A player will be affected by the standard of presentation and course aesthetics. There is some truth in the adage that if it looks good it must be good at least in the mindset of many players. Remember golfers are your customers and to give them what they want is what business is all about. This, however, should never be at the expense of providing quality playing surfaces and golfing conditions. The art, as already stated, is to achieve both criteria.

HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE HIGH STANDARDS OF PRESENTATION?

Training is paramount. Unless staff are trained and competent in all aspects of course maintenance they will not be able to achieve craftsmanship levels necessary to present a course for play. This is true for aesthetic, agronomic and golfing requirements. After initial training and time to practice, an operative can achieve a level of competency but it is only with further years of experience that the highest levels of proficiency can be achieved.

Planning is crucial to success. Define objectives for the course and implement practices which will achieve them. These need to be attainable



Count on it.

CONTINUE TO LEARN



The Green - focus of the game

philosophy. Many a golf course has lost its initial design and character through errant greenkeeping practice or mismanagement. We need to maintain integral design features while presenting them to the highest standards of maintenance for play. The environment and 'natural' landscape need to be remembered and not unnecessarily compromised, abused or damaged.

Two phrases come to mind here – 'you cannot improve on nature' and 'nature will always have the last laugh'. Most people in golf course management now know working with nature is a better policy and that this can both enhance the natural appearance of the golf course, aiding aesthetic presentation, and be more efficient in resource utilisation.

Golf courses are valuable habitats for many species of native flora and fauna and these can greatly enhance the golfing experience. Standards of play and particular surface requirements may vary according to golfing standard, player ability and objectives for the club set by management but nonetheless the visual appearance and level of presentation can still be high.

Standards and methods of construction inevitably impact on maintenance requirements but again in terms of presentation achieving a high standard should still be a key objective of greenkeeping staff.

A final consideration is to remember and get the basics right. Simple aspects such as clean furniture, litter removal and course signage are easy to get right and these greatly augment the golf course appearance.

Make an impact – consider the view from the first tee and the approach to the last green and clubhouse. Similarly, look in your maintenance facility, what image does this present to the visitor, player or club official? High standards of presentation should extend to all parts of the course. Landscaping around maintenance facilities and clubhouses must be maintained as well and not overlooked by staff purely focusing on the playing components. It is not easy, but sufficient resource, effort and budget should be made available for all ancillary areas as well as the greens.

TO CONCLUDE

Major areas to consider will include mowing practices (patterns and delineation), bunkers (weed free and edged), water features (clean and aerated), course furniture (clean and painted), landscape plantings (weed-free, mulched and litter-free). This is not an exhaustive list but merely indicative of the types of works required to ensure high standards of course presentation.

Finally, remember courses can still be presented to a high standard without chasing the 'great god green', many of our courses (especially links) will 'brown' in the summer but this is natural and understood by most who understand our golfing heritage. Presentation should not be about throwing on the fertiliser and water simply to green-up the course. This suits neither our golfing tradition nor the environment.

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but should be set to a high standard and clearly communicated to all levels of staff in the greenkeeping team. This is also where the course management policy document comes in as it needs to be communicated to players as well. Course presentation is an important part of the course upkeep and maintenance.

It should be seen that course presentation is an integral part of the maintenance regime and philosophy, not simply a bolt-on extra needed for tournaments. Staff should always strive to achieve excellence and be led by management in this quest.

Machinery is a key component in the achievement of presentation standards. Most operations are mechanised and some, such as mowing, are the most significant in presenting golf courses for play, delineating the areas for play, providing the necessary course definition and the most visually apparent evidence of the greenkeepers work. Mowing alone probably is the single largest factor in quality course aesthetics and appearance. Machinery must be fit for purpose, efficient, maintained and operated with due skill and recognition of the task requirements.

Finance is always an issue. Of course, a budget is needed to procure the necessary mechanical, material and human resources, but all these need managing in a way cognizant of the management objectives for course maintenance and presentation. Having all the resources in the world does not mean success is inevitable. Manage the resources available for greatest effect and efficiency. A little can go a long way if properly directed and controlled.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

The most important factor to consider is the course itself and its particular features. All courses are different and each must be considered separately; we are not aiming for all courses to look the same, nor is this desirable. Course presentation should bring out individuality and carry this through for different holes around the course.

Work with what the designer and landscape have provided and endeavour to highlight through course presentation the best attributes of the course. Be mindful, though, of course history, tradition and design