

## OVER WATERING AMERICAN GOLF COURSE

How often it is heard, from players returning from a golf sabbatical, how clubs such as Shinnecock Hills, Winged Foot, Baltusrol, and Pine Valley played so well with fast, firm greens and tightly cut fairways.

It has been my pleasure to have chatted with the men in charge of maintaining these courses, all of whom echo the same water-management theme: "Keep the golf course as dry as possible."

Through many turf organizations, associations, and university research people, findings show that grass will grow in the spring when it is ready. If man tries to push the grass in the spring this will usually result in poor golfing conditions in late July and August. During the late spring and early summer it is sound to allow a golf course, with majorities of bentgrass and bluegrass varieties, to go on the dry side. This enables the roots to go deep, thus making a plant independent. An applicable adage is that it is easy to put water on, but is almost impossible to take it away. I know in the case of the Garden City Golf Club, the course, in 1965, used 55-plus million gallons of water. Last year's water use was 12-plus million gallons.

As a Golf Superintendent and one who has had a peripatetic golf-history heart, I have observed how membership requests can sometimes detrimentally influence the nature of a golf course, and its Golf Superintendent. Many of these wants/desires are: The greens don't hold a shot—give them a good soaking; We want everything green and lush to impress guests; We have our own well and water is free and unlimited—let's use it; Our course doesn't compare to the one seen during the televised tournament; Our foursome was out this morning and we noticed an area on the seventh fairway which was "burned out;" Why isn't the course being watered more—it's dying; and, Why do they (greens crew) have to renovate during the prime time of late August and early September?

In answering these comments, I begin by noting that giving the greens "a good soaking" can sometimes lead to weed encroachment, disease, and deep, difficult-to-repair ball marks. Also when talking about the holding qualities of a green, one must consider the condition of the fairways. Simply put, you can not "pinch" the ball from a soft, lush fairway, and to pinch the ball means to give it the needed spin to hold the green.

Water may be free for some golf courses, but the cost of electricity to pump that water is not. The self proclaimed agronomist who sees, on TV, a golf course at its peak, does not view that same golf course two weeks later after the trials of big-time tournament play. Additional costs from the overuse of water come in the form of extra fertilizer, chemicals to control disease, and, naturally, mowing more often. Of course when overuser of water has finally drowned all turf out, then out comes the aerifiers, thachers, slicers, spikes and assorted other machinery to try to bring the golf course back. By adding this additional work on a greens crew which may already be overextended, much of the normal, everyday work is left to wane, thus, making a course look even worse.

The water-management program for any golf course must take stock of the different types of soil varieties which are present on the course. These vary from sandy soil, which requires heavier amounts of water; clay soil which needs little water, but which needs to be constantly kept moist; heavy, rich loam soil, which needs water but never too much at one time; and a mix of sand and rich loam that is found in many parts of this

Met area, especially on the older links, and which requires only moderate watering. On most of this area's golf courses practically all types of soil varieties can be found. This means that no set program can be made for everything getting exactly the same amount of water.

Probably the major concern that must be had at most Met-area courses is not to go into August with overly wet soil. As we all know, August days are generally hot and humid, and just bloody uncomfortable for man and, yes, grass. So as to give our courses the best chance for survival, we should gear out watering efforts for these dreaded Augusts.

Should your golf course be cutting back on the amount of water being used? Let me answer this in the following fashion.

The alarming problems of conserving water just tapped us on the shoulder last year. We saw Monterey Peninsula and Marin County of California brought to its knees for lack of water. In the Midwest, many golf courses were cut off from water use. On Long Island, a municipality whose own water supply was polluted took over a golf club's well for city use.

With the improper management and wasteful consumption by everyone, it clearly documents the severe shortage in all areas of our nation. We all must share the burdens of water conservation for if not, we only have ourselves to blame if the water runs out.

Melvin B. Lucas, Jr., CGCS  
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