

Director's Column

"If I Only Had a Half Million Dollar Budget"

by Bruce Williams, CGCS

Bob O'Link Golf Club, Highland Park, IL

This article is not intended to defend those clubs with higher budgets but rather to show how that money is utilized to provide the best golf courses possible. Without a doubt there is a direct correlation between the amount of money spent on the golf course and the quality of the playing conditions.

No matter what size your budget is the money must be managed effectively. Contrary to popular opinion the "open checkbook" country clubs do not exist. It is so important that as Superintendents we have budgets that will meet the desired objectives of our memberships.

In the case of clubs desiring the best conditions the budgets in the Chicago area are in the \$400,000 - \$500,000 range. These clubs normally employ 13-16 employees in the growing season and 5-6 employees during the Winter. Labor normally comprises 60% of the total budget. What follows is a brief explanation of the activities at Bob O'Link Golf Club.

Our Assistant Superintendent, **Rick Bowden**, is in a supervisory position which I like to refer to as a Production Mgr. He makes sure the jobs get done. Our mechanic is kept busy with equipment maintenance 40 hours a week. Our gardener spends the entire workweek on the bedding plants, clubhouse, landscape, and parking areas. The irrigation technician is responsible for the pumping plant, irrigation applications, system upkeep and repairs. We use our apprentices or interns for chemical and fertilizer applications.

On a daily basis four men mow greens, two men change cups and tees, and two men rake bunkers. Fairways, approaches, tees, and collars are mowed three days per week with clippings collected on all areas. The remaining bluegrass areas including the rough and green banks are mowed once a week. Hazards are marked once a week also.

Even with the use of Embark tree bases are rotary mowed 4 times per year. Bunkers are edged 3 times per year and lake banks are trimmed twice a month. Flagsticks and cups are replaced once a month and then we paint the spare sets.

Fungicides are applied with the preventative approach to greens, tees, and fairways. Greens and tees receive up to 10 applications annually and fairways average 7 applications per year. Fairways are treated for *Ataenius* as well as two insecticide applications for cutworms. We are currently establishing methods for earthworm suppression on the fairways. Greens and tees are treated with insecticides for cutworm control as needed. Topdressing on greens is monthly and we use sand topdressing on our tees four times per year. Wetting agents are applied to all playing surfaces 3 times per year.

In the Spring we spend 2 weeks aerifying 35 acres of fairways with Greensaires followed by an overseeding of Penneagle creeping bentgrass. In the Fall we run blowers and mulchers 8 hours a day until the end of the season. We prepare the golf course in the same manner for 20 players as we do for 150. This includes the slow days in the Spring and Fall as well as Mondays throughout the playing season.

The bottom line is that given the same budgets and tools to work with most all of us could provide the same quality playing conditions on any given golf course. If only the golfers would understand that you get what you pay for.

The Specialized Management of "Fast Putting Greens"

by Michael W. Rothenberg, CGCS

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

There has been a great deal of discussion in our industry the past few years about the growing trend toward faster and faster putting surfaces on golf courses. We've heard university researchers describe the technical methods a superintendent must employ to produce fast greens in the first place. We have heard debates over the merits of fast greens, especially from the viewpoint of the average or high-handicap player. One area, however, that has received way too little attention has to do with the fact that golf course superintendents who embark on a fast greens maintenance regimen invariably suffer a certain degree of decline in the quality of the turfgrasses on those greens.

This decline can manifest itself in a number of ways. It is most frequently observed as simply a thinning of the grasses, a general overall decrease in the turf density, if you will. During severe summer stress periods, a yellowing or chlorotic appearance may develop on these fast greens, for no apparent reason other than the added stress of the fast greens regimen. There is also a definite decrease in the tolerance of these grasses to wear and tear. Things like ballmarks, spike marks, and the plugs from old cups are much slower to heal than they are on a slower green. Of course, the rock bottom of this vicious decline cycle occurs when we observe the encroachment of moss and algae into the thin areas that have formed on these greens.

I first began the switch to fast greens around 1980. After about a year or so (there does appear to be a grace period between the time you initiate a fast greens program and the time turf decline begins), I started to experience exactly the type of decline symptoms that I just described, and about the same time I also began to search for an answer to the question: "Can fast greens co-exist with a quality stand of turfgrass?"

Before I go any further, I want to draw a distinction between two types of "fast greens programs", only one of which I am alluding to in this discussion. The first type is where the superintendent normally maintains his greens at moderate speeds, and only throttles them up to 10 feet or so during major tournaments and club events. This method appears to be quite safe and will generally not lead to the type of decline I'm referring to. The second type, which is the type I am referring to, is where greens are maintained at fast speeds (if I had to assign a stimpmeter reading, I would say 9½ feet or greater), but the important distinction is that they are maintained that way day in and day out, all season long. This is something we are seeing more and more of in the northeast, and as I stated earlier, it is usually accompanied by a decline in the turf quality.

When I first set out to find the solutions to the problem, I was initially disappointed by the fact that there was little or no formal research being geared toward the specific turf problems associated with fast greens. However, in looking for that research, I had a number of informal conversations with turf researchers, with USGA agronomists, and with a number of superintendents who had been on fast greens programs longer than I had, and who were already confronting these problems. Out of these conversations came a number of excellent suggestions and "home remedies", many of which dramatically improved my greens.

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