

EDUCATION REVIEW

Charles Anfield, CGCS, *Heritage Bluffs Golf Course*



Midwest Turf Clinic

The MAGCS Members once again met at the always spectacular, Medinah Country Club for their premiere education event of the year. Of course I'm talking about the 59th presentation of the Midwest Turf Clinic and Annual Meeting. Once again, the "cracker" Staff of the Education Committee Chaired by Dave Groelle, CGCS from Royal Melbourne Country Club did not disappoint. The theme for this year's Clinic was "It's Tournament Time."

Outgoing President Dan Sterr from Stonebridge Country Club started the Annual Meeting and included a recap of all of the Education from the monthly Meetings of this year.

Brian Placzkowski, Assistant Superintendent from Royal Melbourne Country Club was the Morning Moderator.

Our Host for the Day Curtis Tyrrell, CGCS from Medinah Country Club was the first speaker. Curtis's topic was "Ryder Cup Preparations." His Ryder Cup preparations began the day he was hired as Director of Golf Course Operations in 2008. The Club had compiled data that indicated that 8 of 12 rounds being played were being played by guests. Guest expectations for golf at Medinah are "sky high." The Membership wanted to improve day to day playing conditions on all of the courses. The Membership wanted to try to meet expectations by improving the infrastructure, to create better consistency in turf maintenance practices and playing conditions. This was to be accomplished by rebuilding and renovating existing features as required and re-grass turf species. The initial focus is on course #3 and over time will expand to the other two courses.

Golf Course Architect, Rees Jones (A.K.A. "The Open Doctor") was brought back in by the Membership (not mandated by the PGA) to make some changes to course #3 to prepare for the 2012 Ryder Cup. Curtis showed some slides of soil profiles on some of the greens on course number 3 prior to the renovation. The photos revealed a clay subgrade capped with a soil loam, topped off with a few inches of ac-



Curtis Tyrrell, CGCS

cumulated topdressing sand from over the years. These greens were problematic during periods of hot and wet soil conditions. The overall goal was to provide firm, fast conditions, every day. The decision was made to rebuild all of the greens to USGA specifications. Minor topographic contour changes were made. The greens were also "plumbed" to accommodate portable Precision Air units which can either blow or remove air from the greens profile. Vaults were installed to be able to visually check for positive water flow. Seed was planted in August of 2009.

In addition all of the bunkers were renovated to stabilize the subgrades, improve drainage, install liners and add new sand. Some new tees were added and constructed as recommended by Rees Jones.

The fairways were renovated to create a more uniform stand of bentgrass. First they were sprayed out with Round Up, and then an application of Basamid was made and watered in. The fairways were seeded in two directions. Root pruning was conducted on all fairway perimeters to minimize tree root intake of the herbicide. Curtis compared the scope and mess of the process with his experiences in the desert over-seeding ryegrass into dormant Bermuda.

Tree removal has been ongoing and the thinning of some of the heavily dense stands of trees and removal of dead and dying foliage has taken place. Curtis showed some slides of this "wicked" tree cutting machine on tracks that looked like something out of "Mad Max". The pictures brought oohs and aahs from the grass loving Members in attendance.

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I asked Curtis what the maximum size tree it could handle. "There's nothing here that it can't handle," he answered.

On the day of this presentation, Curtis was meeting with the Green Committee and Board of Directors later to decide the fate of a fair amount of mature oak trees marked for removal. The meeting went well into the night but the resolution passed. This was to be sure, a difficult but big step in the agronomic health for the new turf and playability of the golf course.

The biggest change to the golf course was the redesign of hole #15. Previously, the hole had drainage issues and was considered a non-descript par 4. The Members let Rees design a drive-able par 4 to create more dramatic risk/reward situations in a match play scenario. The new yardage will play between 280 and 315 yards. New drainage was installed and a new pond fronts the green as an added challenge.

Curtis showed some stunning overhead views. This hole is sure to be a major viewing area for the Ryder Cup and will be an exciting hole for the Members to "double down" and "put it on the line" for their own matches.

In addition, The Club re-built the Golf Maintenance Facility.

Curtis took some time to emphasize the TEAM concept that needs to be adaptable to fit the scope of preparing a golf course for the Ryder Cup. It starts with the Staff, Members, Consultants, PGA and a network of colleagues. There will be over 43 acres used on property just for infrastructure support including hospitality and the media.

On June 5, the preparations on site for the event begin.

Much of the major "in house" work will begin after the Ryder Cup ends. Work will need to be done to restore the damage from the galleries and equipment used during the event. If that's not enough, future renovation work was recently approved for course #1 in 2012. The Club will bring in Tom Doak and Renaissance Golf for a re-design. Curtis and his Staff will be busy next year.

Curtis also mentioned the Class A/SM GCSAA gold membership card will get you access each day to the tournament for you and your spouse. Furthermore, Curtis will be working with the Midwest to ask for volunteer help. Look for communications forthcoming.

Tim Moraghan, Principal: Aspire Golf Consulting took the podium for his presentation, "Everyday Championship Agronomy." Aspire taps into an extensive and knowledgeable network comprised of leading golf industry professionals with decades of experience and who understand the importance of long-term relationships. Based on client needs, Moraghan and his associates create short and long term golf conditioning programs, facilitate the master planning process, develop event solicitation and preparation strategies and fit Superintendents with the best courses through Aspire Golf's placement division. In addition to his work as a Golf Course

Superintendent with experience in maintenance and grow-ins, Tim spent 20 years with the USGA as Director of Championship Agronomy.

Tim began with a few pieces of advice. "No one appreciates Superintendents and I don't know why. Also, brown is not the new green, green (as in money) is the new green. Don't be afraid to play golf. The lower your handicap is the higher your turf growing I.Q. Take a Rules of Golf Seminar; it will increase your credibility."

- I. Planning and Organization
 - a. Plan events around the weather for that time of year.
 - b. Know the competition format
 - c. What will set up philosophy be?
 - d. Form an event management team
 - e. Work with Committees
 - II. Access Needs
 - a. What equipment will you need?
 - b. Start gathering volunteers to help.
 - c. Begin contacts with outside Vendors.
 - d. Consider Parking needs
 - III. Prepare Timeline
 - a. Maintenance calendar should be based on soil temperatures.
 - b. What cultural practices will need to be done and when?
 - c. Overlay golf calendar with maintenance practices.
 - d. Adjust dates if conflicts.
 - e. Start season.
 - IV. Follow Up
 - a. Coordinate with Chairman and Committees.
 - b. Coordinate with Staff and Professionals.
 - V. Execution
 - a. Course set up issues
 - b. Rules of golf
- Tim ended his presentation and left us with a few bits of wisdom for consideration.
1. Purchase a prism to measure "true" height of cut on greens.
 2. In stress conditions, sometimes its best do nothing. When in doubt, don't do anything.
 3. Make sure tee markers are 7 paces apart.
 4. Bunkers
 - a. Check for proper sand depth
 - b. Make sure bunker has defined margins
 - c. Work on drainage



Tim Moraghan

- d. Clean rocks, stones and roots out of sand
- 5. Equipment Needs: Make sure you have what you need to complete tasks.
- 6. Tap into networks: GCSAA, Turf Students, Interns, Vendors, and Superintendents.
- 7. Fairway brushing can help ball sit up on turf.
- 8. When soil temperature are over 80 degrees at night, back off aggressive practices.
- 9. Slow greens are actually harder to play on than fast greens.
- 10. Green speed can influence set up.
- 11. Maintain fairway divot repair.
- 12. Use a piece of PVC to roll cup after installation.

Paul Vermeulen, Director of Competitions Agronomy for the PGA Tour made his presentation: "Putting Green Firmness For Competitive Golf." Paul joined the PGA Tour Staff in 2006 after working for the USGA as a Regional Agronomist for 20 years. "Competitive golf is much different than everyday golf. Surveys indicate players appreciate firmness and firmness can influence course strategy and scoring. Focus on firmness, not fast and eliminate fast from your vocabulary." In Paul's current job, he works for the players He has been compiling firmness data for the last two years at PGA Tour site courses.

So what is firm and what is soft?

When conditions are soft the players refer to the playability of the greens as "playing darts." They can hit shots right at the flag stick. When conditions are firm, they must hit in specific locations on the greens so the ball releases to the hole. Players are more challenged with firm conditions. If you watched the Presidents Cup at Royal Melbourne in Australia, those greens would be considered firm. "Faster greens allow the course to play easier. Slower greens are actually more difficult to play."

So how does one measure the firmness of greens? For the PGA Tour Paul uses a USGA Trufirm Meter. It operates on a Clegg hammer principal. It calculates the depression depth of a simulated ball impact. The formula is as follows: $h=1/2 (V1-V2) t$ h: height, V:velocity, t:time.

Paul collects the data for nine sites on each green. The data is downloaded into a data base with mapping features. The goal is to quantify firmness and to modify maintenance practices that will achieve more overall consistency.

Most people's perception is that Bermuda grass is firmer than bentgrass. This does not measure up. For some reason the Bermuda thatch is different than bent thatch and the bent greens typically measure to be firmer. "We don't have any specific targets, nor can firmness be manufactured on a daily basis." Information is used to avoid conditions that are inappropriate for the particular event.

Rainfall and irrigation are major factors influencing firmness. Firmness can be managed to some degree until nature decides otherwise. Start with the calendar and plan events around typical rain cycles. Some times of the year there is less chance for rain. Improving drainage can be helpful for achieving more firmness. Firmness comes with a price. It takes a lot of manpower for morning and afternoon rolling and judicious use of hand watering. It also takes a maintenance window outside of play.

A moisture meter can be of help to document soil moisture which affects overall firmness. Field data can be downloaded for mapping and analyzing purposes. A moisture meter will help quantify dry and wet areas on the greens. This can help to adjust irrigation scheduling for specific sites on the greens. Less volume with a higher frequency is more desirable for better firmness. A daily firmness target is irrational and not manufacturable. Consistent firmness takes record keeping, good help and luck. Paul wanted to emphasize "not just rolling to firmness."

Chuck Barber from St. Charles Country Club was the Moderator for a "PTI", point counter point discussion featuring Paul Vermeulen and Tim Moraghan on selected topics.

A summary of some of the comments:

- Organized teams have a better chance of producing the best playing conditions.
- The quality of the golf course makes the tournament event have a better chance for success.
- Green speeds are too fast today. PGA Tour average speeds are 11.
- Architects and course owners are building excessive and hard to maintain bunkers strictly as "eye candy."
- Future course designs will feature fewer bunkers and less numbers of ponds that will be easier to maintain.
- Advice for Superintendents over 50:
 1. Stay competitive, stay current
 2. Improve your communication skills
 3. Avoid Club politics – stay neutral
 4. Embrace social media
 5. Follow interests and don't be afraid to make changes
 6. It's not your course. Don't be possessive. **-OC**



Paul Vermeulen