

Suncoast Sails

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Manual Versus Automatic Irrigation

In this day of modern technology and advanced equipment, there are still superintendents burdened with the problem of manual irrigation systems. After discussing this topic with several superintendents who have manual systems, some contrasting viewpoints were found with most being disadvantages while some advantages were found.

Let's cover some of the disadvantages first. Employee turnover was at the top of everyone's list. Due to the hours and type of work involved, employees become disinterested quickly and move on. (There are exceptions, of course, as Hugh Bebout at Sarabay Country Club has had the same night waterman for 18 years.) Finding good responsible employees is also a concern. Some courses employ one man who waters six days a week while others use two or three and divide the week up between them. Average salary ranges from \$4.00 per hour to \$6.00 per hour.

The inability to syringe presents unique maintenance problems, especially during overseeding. Most manual systems are not charged when not in use and need either heads running or lake valves open to relieve pressure. This makes it difficult to syringe without inconveniencing the golfer and disrupting play.

Availability of parts and accessories is becoming scarce as most older manual systems become obsolete. With the



Par 3 190.

demand decreasing, most suppliers are not stocking the necessary parts and equipment.

The demand for better playing conditions presents problems unique to courses implementing manual irrigation. Since most manual systems have single row head placement the coverage is very limited. Good timing and proper scheduling are a must for fertilizing, aerifications, weed control, etc., in order to get the desired results. Some clubs try to time maintenance practices with periods of regular rainfall to insure success of the programs



Par 5 dog leg left gulf in background.

they have set up for the growing season. With the weather becoming more and more unpredictable here in Florida, this practice is sometimes a big gamble.

Maintenance and cost of repairs of a manual system are two of the few real advantages to manual irrigation. Since the system is attended when in use, this cuts down on the worry of heads sticking on or not coming on at all. Most quick couplers are much shallower than automatic pop-ups. This makes for ease of replacement and maintenance. The cost of replacing a quick coupler is about \$25. compared to \$70. and up for most automatic heads. Line breaks are also less frequent because the systems are only charged when heads are out and there is an outlet for pressure.

Some of the superintendents polled felt with water becoming a precious commodity, they might have an advantage

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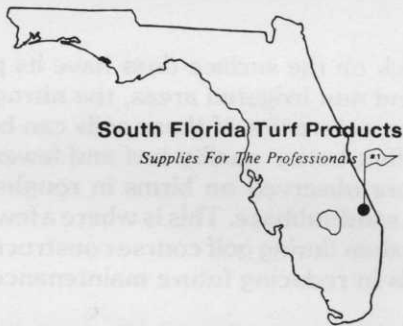
when water usage is cut back or put on a limited basis. The reasons given were that they could run one head at a time on a green or tee where with most automatic systems, two or three heads come on at a time.



Par 3 185 trap surrounds green.

As you can see, the disadvantages outweigh the advantages quite heavily. All the superintendents polled had the same conclusion. The sooner they can convert to an automatic system the better!! All the courses except for one had plans in the near future of converting over to a total automatic system.

Next time you are out adjusting your time clocks, give some thought to your less fortunate colleagues who don't share the same luxury!■



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