

Course Grooming

BY KEVIN DOWNING, CGCS

Willoughby, G.C.

Years ago when I started as an assistant superintendent at Doral C.C. in Miami, one of my principal jobs was to work with the four course foremen on issues that golfers would notice.

These individuals were great people who worked closely with the crew but really didn't focus on the issues that golfers notice. Providing them with small lists to take care of the little things was part of my job as an assistant, but the philosophy has stuck with me during my years as a golf course superintendent.

Since I usually play golf at least once or twice a week, my scorecards are always filled with notes written in the margins. My rounds are usually played late in the afternoon or sometimes early on the weekends before play starts.

Most of the time I either play with one other individual or just as a solo so I can concentrate on the course conditions. The next day these notes have either been incorporated into the daily assignments or scheduled into future work programs.

This year we have implemented a new

system so that the "little issues" are handled by the same individuals. I selected two part-time people off my staff, Larry Drew and Ron Schurk, who have demonstrated tremendous initiative and awareness of our course needs.

Not every course can set aside two men for these jobs, but the concept of "attention to the details" will make each and every facility more pleasing to the members and golfers.

Clean Cut: Mowing Techniques

BY JOE DOUGHERTY

Presidential C.C.

As any golfer knows, when a putt rolls true, or when your balls sits up on the fairway or can be seen in the rough, it's generally the result of good mowing technique, courtesy of the golf course maintenance department.

Although courses differ in levels of perfection, the ultimate goal is to get the job done well enough to make play more pleasurable and appealing to the eye. The three factors that make that happen are operating ability, a good and thorough mechanic and the superintendent with the plan, vision and motivation.

"An operator is as good as his equipment," they say, but experience wins out. A person who cuts fairways on the same gang-unit for ten years can hear and see when their machine is faulty and report it to their mechanic. A new operator must be trained to think this way, be attentive



Rob Haas, superintendent of Miami Shores C. C. with a walk-mowing crew member.



Presidential C. C. mechanic Jim Burns lapping greensmower reels.

and have pride in the job being done. Learning to communicate with the mechanic is very important to get the job done efficiently.

The mechanic must be thorough in their upkeep of the equipment and the sharpness and consistency of the reels and blades. Oil fluid checks, lapping, bearing checks and gauge reading will promote consistent results.

When lapping reels, grit density should conform to the cut (120 Gr/greens, 80 Gr/fairways and 50 Gr/roughs). A good reel man who does nothing but grind

reels and bedknives is a great asset if your budget allows it.

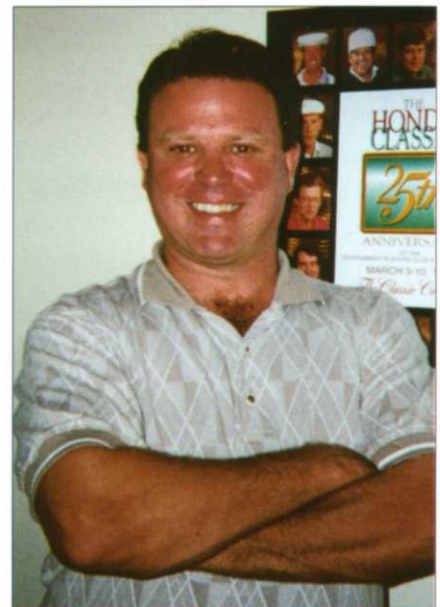
The superintendent's responsibility is to coordinate all of this and keep close watch on mowing heights and shape of cuts to promote visual delight. Mowing is more frequent during the rainy season, so define your cuts for the winter months in November.

Most courses use triplex mowers to cut their greens, but some still use walk mowers, which are better because they cause less stress to the turf and promote a faster ball roll.

Award-winning landscaper and former golf course builder for the Fazio Group, Rob Haas (my good friend and superintendent at Miami Shores C.C.), walk mows every day with four men doing five greens each with beautiful results. Our budget at the Presidential C.C. is somewhat lower, so we use two triplex mowers to cut the front and back nines. We have quick, true greens because our mechanic, Jim Burns, stays on a regular program of maintenance (checks fluids daily, lap weekly, bearings and tire pressure every 10 days, etc.)

On the other end of the spectrum is Mark Rice, superintendent at the Blue Monster at Doral C.C., home of the Doral Ryder Open. He maintains with walk mowers less than 1/8-inch height on his greens and double cuts every day for the tournament.

Keep the machines running clean and sharp, and motivate the operators to have pride in their work. Be creative, like my buddy Tony Ursoleo, superintendent at Bonaventure C.C. and Resort, who cuts a pro-walk from the tee to the fairway or a sweeping approach to the par three holes. Golfers always appreciate a clean-cut course.



Joe Dougherty, superintendent of the Presidential C. C.

Reel Maintenance

BY JOE ONDO, CGCS

Greensmower reels are checked twice a week and lapped once a week during the bermuda growing season. Reels are checked and lapped every other day for the first two weeks after seed has germinated and twice a week after seed is up and going good.

Our mechanic usually mows nine greens twice a week. We feel it gives him a chance to see how the mower is performing that week, and we can use him to fill in for someone who is sick or on vacation at certain times of the year.

Being a public golf course, we don't do much extra topdressing other than at aerification time, which we usually do three times — in the late spring, early summer and fall.

After topdressing, reels are usually

raised 1/16 inch and greens are skipped for a couple of days, until they are mowed again and lowered back, usually, to 5/32" after about a week. Instead of topdressing, greens are verticut lightly more often (every week to ten days) or greens are double cut two or three times a week.

We are not looking for fast speeds, just smooth and consistent ones for our customers.

All these practices are during transition, summer, and into the fall before overseeding. Any grinding for green and tee-mowers is usually done about a week after topdressing or a week before overseeding dates.

Greens (5/32") are mowed daily except after topdressing and the first week of overseeding. Tees (7/16") are mowed three times a week. Fairways (3/4") are

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mowed three times a week during spring until Primo is sprayed, then we go to twice a week during late spring, summer and fall, and back to three times until daylight savings ends.

At that time it is usually done once a week to clean up divots until springtime.

The rough and banks are usually mowed once a week at 1 1/4". Bunkers, fences and the clubhouse area is Flymo work weekly.

Lakes and canals are done about every three weeks unless Primo is used. Then it is on an as needed basis.

Heights of cut pretty much stay the same on a yearly basis except the greens, which are raised to 1/4" during seeding and gradually lowered until we reach 5/32".

We have two Toro Greensmasters and two Jacobsen Greensking IVs for tees, collars, approaches, some small par 3 fairways, the practice area and the clubhouse area. One Toro Hydraulic Seven Gang is used for fairways—we can change height of cut quickly and mow banks and

some rough if needed when we get behind.

There's one Toro Parkmaster Seven Gang with ground driven reels for roughs and banks. We feel that we don't have enough bunkers (22) and miscellaneous areas for a trim mower, so Flymos and string trimmers do all that work.

We have four full-time employees, one part-time (20 hours per week), one mechanic and one landscape person, plus myself, on our crew. Everyone is mowing or changing cups on Monday, Wednesday and Friday so Tuesday and Thursday are days we use to spike, verticut, spray, fertilize and do other maintenance work.

Every full-time person usually has to work one day on the weekend unless we need more for a shotgun start or special tournament.

After morning work, bunker work, Flymo work, mowing banks and roughs is done from #18 backwards, so we only bother one group of players at a time. This schedule gives the mechanic time in the morning to do maintenance on the

big equipment and the afternoon time for the smaller pieces.

Clippings are caught on greens and tees, collars and approaches and scattered in the rough. Fairways that leave clippings early are usually removed later, or the operator starts later in the morning. This is not a problem when we use Primo.

The green mowing pattern is changed daily, while tees, collars, approaches and par 3 overseeded areas are striped during the season. Fairways are not striped but changed from right-to-left to left-to-right every other time.

If all we had to do was fertilize and mow grass here at Winter Pines, it wouldn't be too bad with our crew. But throw in all the curve balls Mother Nature has in store for us at times, and it can get pretty hectic. As with any operation, we have made changes and fine-tuned our schedule during the 17 1/2 years I've been here, and we will continue to do so in the years to come.

'Detailing' the golf course

BY LARRY DREW
AND RON SCHURK

Willoughby, G.C.

Two men are assigned to course grooming. They are the "detailers." One tends the front nine, one the back nine, and they team up to care for the driving range.

Each man has a golf cart equipped with a sand bucket for divots, a weedeater, loppers, pruning shears, hedge clippers, a blower, a machete, a weedpuller, a rake and a ten-gallon spray tank.

They also pull a small trailer to collect debris, etc.



Fully equipped Detail cart with long time employee, Larry Drew. Photo by Kevin Downing.

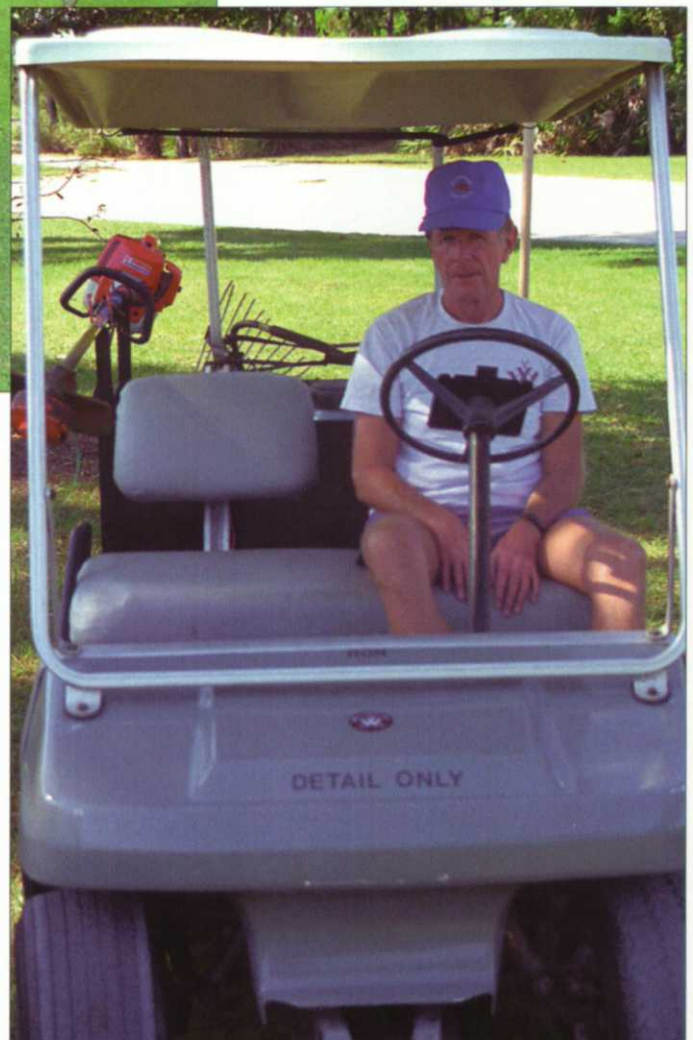


*Pine needle accumulation on the tees causes havoc to mowers and is unsightly. Detail personnel takes care of this problem before play gets there.
Photo by Kevin Downing*

Normally their pre-play routine starts by sweeping divots and tees from the range using a mechanical “Parker sweeper,” which is pulled behind one of the carts. Then fairway divots are filled and miscellaneous debris is picked up. It is also the time to trim fairway drains and irrigation heads as needed.

Once play begins, work shifts to areas that are less likely to interfere with golfers. These duties include filling the divots, trimming cartpaths, miscellaneous weeding, spraying beds and tree rings, and range work.

We are six weeks into the program, and it is starting to show results. Cartpaths are clear, tree rings and beds are sprayed and, although a great deal of work remains, at least a start has been made.



*Members recognize the need for special attention throughout the course. Each employee is assigned a select nine holes. Part time employee, Ron Schurk, works four days a week on the front nine.
Photo by Kevin Downing.*



*If a drain needs trimming, the detail employees have their equipment with them.
Photo by Kevin Downing.*



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BY MICHAEL J. SWINSON,
CGCS

Cypress Run is a private, equity-owned golf club. We accommodate approximately 30,000 rounds of golf per year. Having such a limited number of golfers is helpful to our maintenance program. Our members understand that our practices are necessary and for their benefit.

Since we are a private club, we have the luxury of closing when necessary. From June through October the course is closed all day every Monday. November through May the course is closed until 10:00 a.m. every Monday.

We maintain approximately 110 acres of bermudagrass. All of our turf is 15 years old. Our 419 fairways cover approximately 30 acres. They are mowed all year a maximum of three times a week, usually Monday, Wednesday and Friday with two Toro 5100D lightweight fairway mowers.

One mower is used for each nine. The height of cut in the summer months (June through October) ranges from .437 to .5, depending on weather conditions. From November through May, when we have overseeded with perennial ryegrass, our height of cut is between .5 and .562.

We change our direction of cut each time we mow using the clock method. This helps us reduce grain and provide a smoother playing surface. For special tournaments we double cut as needed.

To produce continuous striping we will mow in the same direction for several days in order to "burn in" our stripes just prior to an event. This gives us the TV look, especially in the winter.

Most of our mowing is accomplished in the mornings by noon. In the afternoon, any clippings left on the fairways are either re-mowed or blown off with a

tractor-mounted 3-point hitch blower.

Our six acres of 419 tee tops and green collars are mowed all year a minimum of three times a week, usually on Monday, Wednesday and Friday depending on the weather. The height of cut corresponds with the fairways. The direction of cut is changed each time to help reduce grain and provide a smooth playing surface. The tee tops, green collars and approaches are all mowed with two Toro 3000 Greensmaster mowers using no baskets.

Operators are instructed to mow each set of tees on the hole in the same direction. To accomplish this, the operator picks a fixed point such as a tree, post or the center of the fairway with which to line up his mower.

Starting from the back tee he proceeds to make a down "pass" on that tee and each consecutive tee in a straight line to his reference point. The operator then mows the next pass as an up pass and so on until the tees are completely mowed.

No matter how the tee is shaped, the stripes will all match on each tee when viewed standing on them looking out to the fairway. This is usually done on Fridays and for special tournaments — it's also known as "tournament cut."

The green collars are mowed in two directions. The first pass is made clockwise, and the second pass is made counterclockwise. The collar is then mowed out to the approach for approximately four passes parallel with the green.

No baskets are used. The height of cut is maintained in conjunction with the fairways, usually between .437 and .562, depending on the weather and overseeding.

Our 419 rough covers approximately 70 acres. This includes all green slopes,

fairway rough and lake banks. The height of cut is between .75 and 1.125, depending on the weather and time of year.

For our large areas of turf we use two Toro ground-driven seven-blade pull-behind rough units. We have chosen this type of unit due to its dependability, lack of major hydraulics and its weight.

The operators mow their own nine first and then switch over to mow the other nine. They double cut in areas where they can maneuver. Two mowers are necessary in our situation to provide a level playing surface so that the ball sits on the grass instead of in it. This helps keep our rough tight most of the year.

For all other bermuda turf areas where the pull-behinds cannot mow, such as areas between the sand bunkers and the green or sand bunker fingers, we use a four-wheel drive Toro 3500 diesel mower.

Although this mower is large and has major hydraulics, it provides an exceptional cut when operated properly. The operator must be cautious using this mower on slopes and around tree rings to

prevent a tire burn on the turf. We have found that with this piece of equipment it is best to have only one dedicated operator.

Our greens are Tifdwarf bermuda that are maintained between .156 to .125, depending on the time of year, weather conditions and overseeding with 100% Poa Trivialis.

The greens are hand-mowed approximately 300 days of the year. They are not mowed on Mondays, giving them a day of rest and also enabling us to fertilize, verticut, topdress, etc. We own eight Toro Greenmaster 1000s with four of them being used daily and the other four as backup and for special tournaments.

The change to walkmowers was made in 1992 in order to eliminate the triplex cleanup tire ring and to prevent hydraulic leaks. All mowing is done in the early morning unless we are in the beginning of our overseeding, when we start mowing about 10:00 a.m. dry with no baskets, so as not to pick up seed.

Perimeters are mowed four out of the

six days, depending on stress conditions. The direction of cut is changed daily using the clock method. Our Saturday cut is 6-12, also known as the "tournament cut."

For special tournaments we will double cut and/or roll to accomplish the desired speed. We always mow with baskets except the day after granular fertilization. Operators are also instructed to empty their buckets frequently, especially before making their perimeter pass.

Throughout the year we use PGRs, especially on fairways in the rainy summer months. They are also used on bunker edges and tee tops. We recently used them on our greens at low rates to help with the mutations and contamination.

We were happy with the results and have now made PGRs a part of our overall maintenance program in order to help reduce mowing.



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