

Conference Report

# Builder, blender urge: Do job right or pay more second time

BY MARK LESLIE

Spend a little money to do the job right, or the work will have to be redone later at greater expense, drainage and soil-blending experts explained at the annual Golf Course Builders of America conference.

Troy McNeill, president of Transamerican Soil Blenders of Lubbock, Texas, and Joe Warrenfells, regional engineer for Advanced Drainage Systems, Inc. of Charlotte, N.C., both said they have faced rebuilding greens or re-installing drainage systems that would have been unnecessary if the job had been done right in the first place.

"Cheaply built greens are the most expensive thing you can build," McNeill said. "Why stress quality control? Build them right the first time or we'll be back in 10 years to do them

again."

Greens are "the heartbeat of the course," McNeill said. "Our feeling is, you're spending \$2 million, \$10 million, \$100 million ... on the golf course, and they argue about ... the \$10,000 to \$15,000 it costs to do the blending. Do it right the first time so that you don't have to come back in and do it again."

Warrenfells echoed that sentiment. "Whether you're building or rebuilding, you have to put in proper drainage or you're going to have to do it again," he said.

Warrenfells cited water-collection technology that, if installed correctly, can keep a golf course dry for its lifetime.

Polyethylene pipes — durable, pH-resistant, easy-to-handle, lightweight, flexible, easily cut and customized — lead the list. He also

discussed geocomposite fill drains, geotextiles, surface and subsurface collection systems, and AdvanEDGE — a thin, elongated pipe that is perforated on both sides and can be installed behind a trencher.

"To build a golf course you need land, common sense and drainage. If you lack common sense, put in more drainage," he quipped.

McNeill listed three practices that cause major problems in greens construction:

- Placing sod grown on a silt and clay material on top of a USGA-specification mixture. The USGA-built subsurface may be done correctly, but by putting the sod grown on that material the builder has created a barrier between sod and sand.

- Using a rototiller to mix the materials. By rototilling "you've got your anaerobic material and black layer already formed," he said. "It's a very cheap way to mix it. But one of the most expensive things you can do in the construction of a golf course is to rototill it in. If a guy can't afford to do this, he probably shouldn't be building a golf course in the first place."

- Installing pure sand greens. "It's not fair to the superintendent. He's got enough problems out there without worrying about something that has no water-holding capacity or nutrient capacity," he said.

"Please, Mr. architect," McNeill pleaded, "specify a quality-controlled (soil) blender for USGA greens specs."

## McNeil suggests fertilizing blend

Golf course builders should take USGA specifications for greens construction one step further and add fertilizers to the blended soil, according to Troy McNeill, president of Transamerican Soil Blenders in Lubbock, Texas.

Saying that his firm totally endorses USGA Green Section specs, McNeill said: "Let's not only look at the physical characteristics (of a green). Let's look at the chemical characteristics as well."

McNeill said: "The ideal time to put in a starter fertilizer is at the state of mixing, when we can mix it in at an accuracy of .5 percent. You can't walk on the surface and put it out that accurately."

At the GCSAA conference he said nitrogen and other elements that leach out more quickly should not be mixed this way. But USGA Green Section then National Director Bill Bengeyfield conferred with McNeill later and both supported mixing in the entire fertilizer mix so long as the blend is not stockpiled for several months. (If that were done, the nitrogen would activate organic breakdown.)

Dr. Tom Samples from Tennessee and Dick Psolla of Brookside Laboratories in Huntsville, Ohio, have encouraged this procedure, predicting 30 percent quicker establishment and maturity of the greens, according to McNeill.

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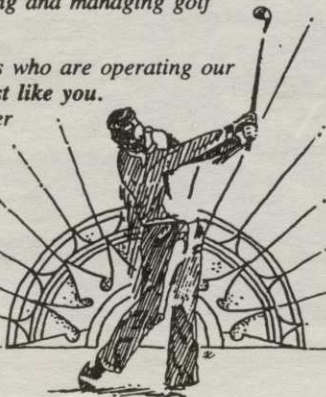
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