

Getting course ready for a tournament

By TERRY BUCHEN

The purpose of these Tour conditioning guidelines is to help the golf course superintendent and sponsors provide a course that tests the players' skill, is fair to all contestants, and one that has consistent playing conditions in all areas of the course.

The following guidelines cannot

apply to all courses because of grass types, design and the time of year certain events are played.

Yet, since players of all caliber enjoy and benefit from playing under tournament conditions, adhere to these guidelines as much as possible during the rest of the year as well as during the event. Some changes will of course be necessary because of weather and membership demands, but usually when this is done the membership enjoys the improved playability of the course. Maintaining near-tournament conditions also makes preparation for the following year's event much easier.

Second of three parts

FAIRWAYS

Most well designed golf courses have fairways that offer options to the player in approaching certain pin positions on the putting surface. With this in mind the Tour does not require standard fairway widths. During the advance visit by the Tour agronomist, any changes necessary in fairway contouring will be made. Narrowing fairways to a point where fairway bunkers become bunkers set into the rough, or where a prime fairway approach is lost, must be avoided.

Overwatering of fairways must be avoided at all cost. Providing a firm, uniform fairway surface over 18 holes is difficult, but if the superintendent selectively irrigates only those fairway areas needing water for turf survival, a more consistent fair playing golf course will be the result. Superintendents and irrigation technicians should practice programming their irrigation systems to achieve these conditions well before tournament week.

During tournament week all irrigation schedules must be discussed with the Rules officials on a daily basis. Mowing heights for bermuda and zoysia fairways should be as

close to 3/8 inch as possible. For cool season grasses 3/8 to 1/2 of an inch are required.

The trends toward lightweight mowing has produced improved surfaces wherever it is part of the maintenance program. One possible drawback is the possibility of increased thatch development. Fluffy fairways should be avoided for the health of the turf and for playability considerations. If thatch is a problem, vertical mowing and aeration should occur in time for complete healing of the fairways before the tournament.

The smaller lightweight fairway units allow more frequent cross mowing of fairways throughout the golfing season. This practice reduces surface grain and allows existing depressions to be mowed more cleanly. Fairway depressions including sunken irrigation or drain lines should be repaired as part of the regular maintenance program. Many superintendents maintain the white lines put down by the rules committee after the tournament until the areas can be repaired. It is discouraging to have to mark the same areas year after year on a tournament golf course.

Daily mowing should begin Monday of Advance Week, including the week end before the tournament.

BUNKERS

After each PGA Tour event, players respond to a questionnaire regarding conditions. The most frequent complaint is bunker condition.

To improve bunker conditions:

- Have all new sand in place at least 90 days before the tournament.
- Ensure that there is a uniform settled depth of 4 to 5 inches throughout the bunker floor. If steep faces are part of the design, these areas should have no more than 2 inches to prevent buried lies.
- When sand is redistributed to maintain constant depths, or is necessary after heavy rains, make sure that these areas are compacted. Tamping and/or hand watering is usually necessary.
- If mechanical bunker rakes are used on a regular basis, avoid using the "down pressure" feature at least one month prior to the tournament.
- Before buying new sand, send samples from suppliers for testing.
- Rakes such as Accuform, Standard Tour Smooth, Lesco, Rake Rite and Innovative Products provide smooth bunker surfaces. Please use one of these or a similar rake which has been approved by the Tour.
- Generally, grass bunker slopes should be closely mowed to prevent hanging lies.

An ideal sand may not be available in all areas of the country, but every effort should be made to find the best possible material. Color should be a secondary consideration to playability, not only for the Tour players, but also for the general membership.

The trend in Tour conditioning is away from standardization of playing conditions and toward a program of treating each course on an individual basis. This will protect the design intent and allow the course set-up to take advantage of each course's strong points.

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