

Ex-super architects' lament: 'Please maintain integrity of my design'

By MARK LESLIE

Sometimes mixing the two jobs of superintendent and architect can be a bad idea, especially in regard to design integrity.

Architects who were once superintendents have an idea what supers should not do.

"It is rare that our bunkers are the same six or 12 months down the road [after a course opens]," said Keith Foster, an ex-superintendent who now operates a design business out of offices in St. Louis, Mo., and Phoenix, Ariz.

He recalled how he had destroyed those two holes in his superintendent days. "There was a long par-4. I'm a good player, and I felt the hole needed a bunker directly in front of the

green. I made that my mission because I didn't think the hole was tough enough. I ruined the hole. Years later, when I knew what I was doing, I went back to the club and convinced them to fill the bunker back in."

Tree programs are another example of something that sounds good, but can be a detriment. Since many clubs and members appreciate trees, Foster said, they give their superintendents money for tree programs. "Many times, the trees are okay. But what

happens when the trees aren't properly placed?" he asked. "I think they should be more cautious about maintaining the integrity of the golf course."

Care of greens is a major problem, superintendents-turned-architects said. To avoid complaints by membership and players about scalping along the edges of greens, crews tend to overcompensate in mowing and cut the green smaller, according to Jan Beljan of Tom Fazio Golf Course Designers, Inc. "An

eighth inch daily, day after day, and at year's end the green is six inches smaller," she said. For this reason, many owners are now deciding to have wire placed around the perimeter of the green during construction, "so you will always know how far out the green should extend."

Michael Hurdzan of Columbus, Ohio, alluded to this "subconscious effort that causes greens to shrink. Now that these greens are smaller, clubs have placed new irrigation on the edge

of the greens and we can't take them back out beyond the heads to where they should be."

Hurdzan added that where people have improperly built the edge of a green — where it interfaces with surrounding soils — the most common symptom is dryness on the next two to three feet. "When the superintendent can't get grass to grow on a short cut, he will often raise the cut to compensate for the bad interface. So you have

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Tips from toiling in both positions

Having toiled both on the equipment and at the draftsman's table, what tips do the superintendents-turned-designers have to pass on?

- Trees: "Keep trees back from the surfaces of greens," said Snyder. "And if you're in an area where you have winter frost, do not plant on the east side of greens and tees, so that the sun hits it."

- Bunkers: "Watch that the slope is not too steep," Snyder said. "Make them big enough so that you can handle them with a machine. Also, allow the golfer a way to walk out of the trap."

"I like to have my traps and mounds fit in as a unit with the green. The shape of the green should match the outline of the sand trap and mounding. Then you have enough space between the edge of the green and sand trap so you can turn a triplex around."

- Greens: "There should be at least several areas on a green where you can put a pin," Snyder said. "I'm not against steep slopes on a green except when you're having difficulty in a change of slope."

On using USGA-spec greens in the desert, Snyder said: "I'm against spending all that money for something you don't need here... We've found that the more sand we use the better off we are."

- Grasses: "If anything," Hurdzan said, "avoid planting the wrong grass in the wrong microclimate. Don't plant Bermudagrass where it won't grow, or bentgrass where it won't grow."

- Drainage: Primary concerns for superintendents and architects are irrigation and drainage.

"Normally, we drain water off greens in at least two directions," Snyder said, "But dump as little off the front as possible because that's where the fairway mower comes up and where most golfers walk onto the green."

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