



By Mike Harrington

# SPIN CITY

**Disc golf doesn't have to be the nightmare most turf managers suspect. In fact, it could be a valuable revenue stream.**

## I have had

conversations with no less than a dozen people in the golf industry and every single one of them started with a response similar to "You want to do what on our golf course!?"

Having been in the golf course maintenance industry for nearly a decade I can appreciate why that is the initial reaction. However, I am here to tell you that adding disc golf onto an existing golf course does not have the negative impact everyone might initially think.

In fact, I am willing to say it has the potential to be another significant revenue stream for golf courses suffering from decreasing rounds played. It will only require a small investment in the disc golf equipment and even smaller investment in additional labor to maintain the course.

Consider the fact that you

already mow the grass, trim the trees, aerate your fairways, rake your bunkers, and keep the property very well groomed. Disc golfers are accustomed to a much lower maintenance regime and the high maintenance conditions on a golf course would be a welcome sight for many disc golfers. These are the conditions that would actually entice many disc golfers to spend money for the beautiful surroundings and the unique experience.

With proper design of the disc golf course and installation of the baskets and tees, the turf on the golf course will not suffer anymore from the traffic of the disc golfers than it does from the wear and tear a few thousand golf cart rentals do in a season. Proper design also includes ensuring that errant discs do not end up landing on fine turf areas. Putting the basket areas in the rough and along the edges of the golf holes will be necessary. Locating the tees away from fine turf areas will also ensure that the disc golfers do not put extra traffic on the highest maintenance turf on the golf course. Taking the time to design the disc golf course properly is an integral step in this process and the location of the tees and baskets is the first step.

Tees can be as simple as markers placed in the ground to indicate that day's location. Disc golfers do not need fine turf (golf tees). In fact, most disc golf courses receive even less maintenance than you would perform on your typical golf course rough. All we need is a level area in the rough. We could even use existing cart paths for tees if those made sense for the layout. The best solution for consistency and for the turf would be to use rubber mats and they are also easily movable. These are typically 8 feet long and 4 feet wide allowing people to gain momentum and throw from the rubber mat. That will prevent potential turf damage from spinning feet. The mats could be moved a few feet in any direction to keep from damaging the turf due to overheating or compaction.

Baskets could be setup as portable targets requiring no additional hardware as a bare minimum. Metal sleeves can also be mounted into the ground with concrete to keep them level and secure. Place a valve box in the concrete so that when the baskets are not in use, the valve box cover can go on just like any another irrigation valve box or drainage box.

Ideally, setting up a disc golf course on a completely temporary basis with portable bas-







Mike Harrington spent 10 years in the golf course maintenance industry with three and a half years as superintendent at Scenic View Country Club in Slinger, Wis. Since 2005 he has been vice president of Beautiful Blooms Landscape & Design in Wauwatosa, Wis., focusing on lawn and landscape design, installation, and maintenance. He recently started a new company called The Disc Golf Experience aimed at promoting the sport of disc golf through sustainable disc golf course design and running fun and unique disc golf events.



kets and portable mats – or just tee markers – makes the most sense initially. That will allow you and the golf course owner a chance to see the impact of the game and how much additional work there is to maintain the golf course. It will also allow them a chance to see just how much money can be brought in with the addition of disc golf. Start with one night of league per week in the spring when golfers have not come out of their winter hibernation. Perhaps a weekend tournament in the fall would work better when the golfers have had their fill of the game for the season and the decreasing temperatures keep them away from the golf course.

Consider that the golf course could bring in a lot of revenue if it was left open for disc golf through the winter. The best part about the third option is there would be absolutely nothing needed to maintain the disc golf course in winter. Disc golfers are a hearty bunch of people and are just happy to be able to play at all in winter. These are the three main ways that disc golf could be consolidated onto a golf course. The additional maintenance will be minimal but the potential revenue could be an outstanding addition to the bottom line of your golf course.

Not every golf course will be suitable for the addition of disc golf. There will be courses that simply do not have any time on the tee-sheet that is slow enough to accommodate disc golfers on top of their normal golf clientele. Some courses will not have enough challenge or interest for the disc golfer because there is no forced throws over water, minimal trees on the course, or very little elevation change.

Disc golf does require obstacles for the course to be enjoyable or challenging enough to get disc golfers to be willing to pay a fee to use the property. I am confident there are a lot of golf courses that this could be an outstanding addition to the property with only a minimal

investment of time and money to make it happen.

If you would like to discuss your golf course and the potential for disc golf please feel free to contact me. I am here to be a resource for golf course superintendents because I know you are integral in the decision making process for this venture to work. I understand and appreciate your concerns because I have managed turf for over 20 years. However, I believe the potential is far greater than the drawbacks. I want you to understand the game and the impact on your golf course in case your golf course owner decides this is something they would like to pursue.

If you educate yourself on this idea and feel strongly enough to recommend it to your owner or general manager, perhaps you will be valued even more than you already are for thinking outside the box. **GCI**



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