



“Now, I’m not saying that the movie ‘Caddyshack’ was based on my experience, but I can tell you I could definitely relate very closely to the theme of that movie.”

MARK WOODWARD, *Contributing Editor*

Trickiest green ever: Just prior to grand opening

After more than 40 years in the business and working with hundreds of greens, the trickiest challenge related to getting a green ready for play, dates back to 1974 when I first got in the business. I was a young assistant superintendent at Dobson Ranch Golf Course, just five months out of college. The month was October. We were preparing the golf course for the grand opening ceremony, which Lee Trevino and a bunch of dignitaries were scheduled to attend.

The golf course was in a new community and was the first thing built as part of a huge residential development. The plan was to build the golf course first and then get premium prices for the home lots surrounding the course. At the time of the opening, there was not one home surrounding the facility. Several years later there were hundreds. This caused the problem with the green in question. The land that the golf course was built on was old farmland and had a high population of a pest we have all seen on the big screen.

Literally two weeks before the grand opening... you guessed it. The inevitable happened. A gopher popped up in three different locations, right in the middle of

the third green. We came in one morning and during course set up, immediately noticed three large piles of sand on the green. And this was six years before the movie “Caddyshack” came out. Instantly we knew we had a serious problem.

We began developing plans to get rid of this unwanted pest and that is when things got interesting. Our thought was that we didn’t want to run water down into the holes because we were dealing with a relatively new green and were afraid the water would cause more damage. Remember, there were three mounds of sand meaning that the gopher had a fairly extensive system of burrows running across the green. I can only imagine how this gopher must have been

thinking: how cool this is! This was the best and easiest digging he’d ever experienced. USGA sand is very diggable compared to the normal caliche soil he was used to.

Anyway, we tried virtually everything we could think of at the time to eliminate this problem. We used gopher bait, poison and gas. We even backed in an old Cushman with burnt valves that smoked worse than a burning tarpaper shack, hooked a hose to the exhaust pipe and floored the accelerator. After each one of these attempts we would come in the next morning and the gopher seemed to be thriving. He burrowed more tunnels and popped up in several more locations around the green.

Since we were having

no success with all of these supposedly tried and true methods, we finally decided to stick the hose down one of the holes and flush this critter out. When we did this, just like in the movie, water started bubbling up from all the holes created by our friend.

Finally, as we were all focusing on other holes on the green, the gopher popped up in a new hole behind us. One of the more agile maintenance workers ran over and solved our problem with one mighty stroke of a round point shovel. I don’t mean to sound morbid here but that was an extremely good day at the ranch. We were only a week from the grand opening.

At this point our agroeconomic skills kicked in. We stripped the sod along the tunnels created by the gopher, added some sand that had been washed away, re-laid the sod, watered and rolled the green. Obviously, on the day of the grand opening you could see the sod lines but the green was smooth and very playable. No one said a word.

Now, I’m not saying that the movie “Caddyshack” was based on my experience, but I can tell you I could definitely relate very closely to the theme of that movie.

A year or so later we found a 1,000-year-old Hohokam Indian skeleton behind this same green, but that’s a story for another day.

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