



"If you find yourself complaining that your putting green is too big, I suppose you can be thankful that it's not 2.3 acres."

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18 greens in 1

It's been said that putting green management is the most advanced form of agriculture that exists. That's probably true when you consider all the variables that we attempt to control and balance with golfer expectations for firm and fast, yet receptive and true putting surfaces.

Imagine then the undertaking of maintaining 85 greens at a world class golf resort. By "world class" I mean a bucket list caliber golf experience. No pressure, right? How about then adding a 2.3 acre putting course, roughly the equivalent to another 18 putting surfaces to the mix? That's what Ken Nice, director of agronomy at Bandon Dunes, Bandon, Ore., and his team do everyday.

Bandon Dunes Golf Resort is composed of four 18-hole courses, Bandon Dunes, Pacific Dunes, Bandon Trails and Old Macdonald, along with a 13-hole par 3 course, Bandon Preserve, all designed by some of the leading practitioners of modern minimalist architecture. It is also now the home of the Punchbowl putting course, which will officially open in May after a soft opening this past fall.

The Punchbowl is the

brainchild of Bandon founder and owner Mike Keiser, who enlisted architects Tom Doak as the designer and Jim Urbina as the shaper.

I recently had the opportunity to speak with Ken Nice about the maintenance regime they have implemented for the Punchbowl, as well as some of the design features.

The Punchbowl is grassed with a creeping red and Chewings fine fescue blend on native sand. Mowing heights for the entire 2.3 acre complex are planned to be in the .200 to .250 range as the slope and contours of the green will not require speeds above eight on the Stimpmeter to be challenging and also to maintain the health of the fine fescue. Speeds in excess of this target will, as you would imagine, likely result in the loss of some of the most interesting pin locations.

The entire complex is

mowed with a flex head triplex and rolled with a side-to-side roller. Mowing and rolling take approximately two hours to complete for a total of four man hours. The common practices of alternating mowing and rolling, as well as target rolling (only rolling the area in proximity to the cups) will be employed when appropriate, based on conditions.

The complex is topdressed every three weeks at a rate that matches the current growth. Native sand that is mined on-site is used. As with the other greens at Bandon, the surface will be regularly cultivated, however no hollow tining will be performed due to the native sand construction, regular topdressing and low thatch production of fine fescue. Cultivation practices will include slicing, solid tining and verti-draining.

The routing of the putting course will change each day.

The green is divided into six sections with five hole locations per section. Three locations from each section are used for a given day's routing, thereby allowing two to recover.

From the fine fescue turf to the massive square footage, this is obviously not your everyday American practice putting green, but the architecture arguably puts it in a class by itself. No offense to other putting courses. Admittedly (and regrettably), I've never seen the Punchbowl in person, but believe me, it doesn't take a genius to recognize the sheer awesomeness of this place.

There is almost 20 feet of elevation change from a plateau on the north end, down the massive Punchbowl on the south end, with many dramatic contours and elevation changes. Further adding to the mystique are the naturally occurring dunes that have been incorporated into the complex. No greater authority than Tom Doak himself said, "You will find every kind of putt you can imagine out there and probably a few you never dreamed of."

So if you find yourself complaining that your putting green is too big, I suppose you can be thankful that it's not 2.3 acres. If you wish it was bigger (get your mind out of the gutter, you're an adult), you can dream about the Punchbowl.

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