

## A Player's Perspective

# DON'T CLOSE OUR GOLF COURSES!

By Dr. David Cookson

I submit a golf course in Wisconsin should **never** be totally closed to play.

Now I am reasonable enough to recognize that when snow covers the course, or there is thawing of surface ground on top of otherwise frozen turf, that the course should not be played. I also strongly support the green superintendent in efforts to restrict cart use, or banning them altogether, when the course is saturated with moisture and consequent damage from carts would be unavoidable.

Still, the usual situation I see is where the over cautious green superintendent, after a hard rain, feels the course is "too wet" and stops play totally for usually far too long a period. The result is bitter animosity between some of the membership and the superintendent, and the loss of another playing day for the golfer who in our state endures a too short golfing season as it is. The green superintendent justifies his action because he feels golfers will damage the course, either by creating ruts and indentations in the wet turf, or by further compacting it by walking on it. These arguments are without merit. First, on an inclement day, very few golfers will play anyway; and those who will are generally knowledgeable and as concerned with course upkeep as the superintendent. They will repair any damage they create, and I believe leave the course in better condition than they found it. I would concur that carts may cause problems on a wet course, and the green superintendent should rightfully curtail their use, but walking golfers will not leave permanent damage. I personally have played golf when the greens were flooded and even unplayable in the fact that casual water interfered with any putt to the cup, and yet no subsequent damage to the course could be observed. This is not an isolated personal experience; I have played in Scotland, at Pebble Beach, in Puerto Rico, and New England in such circumstances, at places where the green superintendents were realistic about whether golfers were creating damage to their courses. If damage were to ensue (and it would not), the season is so short in Wisconsin that the superintendent should be ready and willing to repair it, as part of his responsibilities, rather than cut out the use of the course. Every day I play I see considerably more damage to the course originating from misuse of maintenance vehicles than you will see in a summer of membership play attributable to walking golfers after or during a rain. I might also add that the extensive use of water I have seen in recent summers, I have played often on wetter fairways and greens related to the usual watering practices of the superintendent, than were present on other occasions after a rain when the superintendent felt the course was too wet to play. Inconsistent!

In addition, the green superintendent should not delegate the responsibility for closing the course to an assistant, or even less, to the golf professional. The assistant has no credibility with the membership (no matter how good he is), and the pro has too many competing pressures; either he has an economic interest in using the carts, or he may feel he would rather close his shop and go home instead of staying around to cater to the few golfers who will play on a rainy or wet day. The obvious, and right policy, is that the golf course will always remain open to golfers who walk; and the green



superintendent alone will decide on when and how much golf carts will be restricted.

Golfers in Wisconsin are a hardy breed with a too brief season already. Don't totally close our courses in season — ever! You will have better rapport with and respect from your members; you will take away a lot of headaches for yourself; and you will be doing what is right for those who love to play the game.

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*"The wit of man has never invented a pastime equal to golf for its healthful recreation, its pleasurable excitement and its never ending source of amusement."*

Lord Balfour