



Summer Notes

By Dr. David U. Cookson

My schedule this summer has taken me as usual to a variety of golf courses in different areas, so I thought this month I would share some of the conclusions I have reached during my travels. Certainly the most memorable experience was spending the week of the U.S. Open at Shinnecock Hills. I had never been there before, and thus, despite all the advance publicity and media saturation of details of the course in all aspects, I was utterly surprised and captivated by this super golf course gem. It is the quintessential natural golf course, and yet a magnificent measure of golfing skill and mental testing. The overwhelming realization that occurs on reflecting on the Shinnecock experience is that modern day golf course architecture is too often contrived and artificial; far too much soil moved and revamping of the natural terrain. Shinnecock proves the eternal virtue of simplicity and purity of design, a railroad tie or an artificial waterfall would be an obscenity on such a course. I hope everyone who reads this will one day walk some of the holes at Shinnecock; it is an experience to be savored and anticipated, and rarely to be repeated any place else world wide. The course is absolute untainted pure golf, a masterpiece of all that is best about golf course set up and design.

Unfortunately, another strong impression I formed this summer is that the message about over-watering has not made much headway in a lot of places. I have played on soggy fairways with muddy lies on too long grass, allowing only a fairway shot similar to that usually found only in the rough, far too often, and always with the explanation that the Poa annua is being saved by frequent watering. Fortunately, here in Wisconsin many clubs have recognized the untoward effects of too much water, and their members are playing tight fairway lies on a relatively firm and dry surface throughout the summer; but as one travels eastward it would appear that this message has not yet spread very far in that direction. Even in Wisconsin, some clubs persist in subjecting their members to unplayable fairway conditions with the excuse that they

are only trying to save grass. Any experienced golfer would prefer to play off bare ground than off mud, a choice which need not have to be made since it is evident to me by past experience that we kill more Poa annua by overwatering than is damaged by wilt effect on turf not sufficiently syringed. At our course we use about one third the water now that we used to, and have been fortunate to play on excellent fairways all summer with essentially no turf loss due to stress, and this on fairways predominately Poa annua. I strongly urge that if you are one of the green superintendents skeptical about the beneficial effect of water conservation that you at least test it, and I am sure you will note turf improvement, and a marked decline in membership dissension and dissatisfaction.

Again, I have often noted situations where trees need trimming where branches interfere with fair play of a hole. Most of these places are in spots one would not notice unless one was playing the hole, so I suggest next time you are playing check on this possi-

bility, or get one of your green committee members to play with this in mind. I know from experience that during a summer apparently properly trimmed trees encroach again before one becomes aware of it, and now is the time to locate these areas before the leaves fall.

Lastly, I have been impressed by the general continued improvement in greens around the country, and especially here in our state. At my own club, I just recently have been reminded of the benefits of a light top dressing on green speed, smoothness and consistency. We had become dilatory about doing this often enough, but our experience this summer has reminded us of its value. If your greens are slow, bumpy, or inconsistent, you might also find a light top dressing program to be as helpful as we did.

I have written before that golf course maintenance gets better everywhere each year, but diligence is still required, as well as being alert to new ideas and concepts. As I have observed this summer, this particularly applies to the careful use of water.

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