



PREPARING THE COURSE FOR A SEASON'S PLAY

By Dr. David U. Cookson

Talking about getting a course ready for play is an appropriate topic for a March newsletter, but also likely to be dull, and perhaps presumptuous for a non-professional to discuss. I will confine my remarks to circumstances I have encountered that irritate the golfer, yet need not happen if proper communication and understanding exist between the green superintendent and his membership.

As most of you are aware, my sympathies generally lie with the golfer concerning golf course matters. In Wisconsin, he or she has been unable to play the course for at least five months when spring finally arrives. We feel cooped up, and then we are released. We don't feel we should be confronted with unnecessary obstacles to a full enjoyment of our first rounds, and we don't feel sympathetic to excuses for poor conditions from the green superintendent. I am fully aware that your crews are understaffed in the spring, but it is the green superintendent's job to utilize his available personnel efficiently and effectively. First of all, the leaves, downed branches, and other debris left over from last fall and winter must be totally cleaned up; not just in the fairways and on the greens, but all over the course. This is top priority; too often I have played Wisconsin courses in *June* that still have large collections of leaves cluttering the course. This work should largely be taken care of prior to the course opening, and certainly completed within a few days thereafter. I include in this that bunkers should be cleaned and raked; too often these are neglected in early spring and remain on the bottom of the priority list. A top superintendent establishes his first priority getting the *whole* course in condition for play immediately.

Secondly, temporary tees and greens should be avoided at all costs, and if absolutely necessary (yes, even I admit this is rarely a circumstance), should be abandoned the moment one can. If a green is partially playable, use that part for cupping; there are not

many situations where significant damage will occur from the few players walking on the unplayable portion, or it can be marked as ground under repair. One can use the front portion of the tee, or the very back, and avoid a temporary tee. Spring growth will quickly erase the effects of overuse; one can be too cautious concerning use of greens and tees that are a little slow in regaining vitality from winter dormancy. If one must use temporary greens, put a cup in the ground and mow the area around it so one can properly putt. The practice of using a plate, or flagstick without a cup, for a temporary green to mark the hole can only be vigorously condemned. Thirdly, if construction projects started in the fall have not been completely done by an early winter, get them done quickly. The membership is not pleased with unfinished construction on the course any more than it tolerates persistent debris. What is left to be done might seem minor to the green superintendent. Be sure to completely finish old projects before starting new ones planned for spring; it is easier to do one thing at a time and the course will be much more tidy. If there is a good reason that old projects cannot be soon completed, it is a good idea that your Green Chairman communicate the situation to the membership so everyone understands it. The reason should be a valid one, and not the often heard lament that there isn't enough time with the manpower available.

Fourthly, not just in spring but all through the season, the ground crew must be made aware that the golfer has a fragile mind, and that he cannot concentrate on his game with noisy and interfering workers zipping around the course oblivious to the distractions they are creating. Annoyance and anger related to this situation ultimately are directed toward the green superintendent. Take time to organize work details that will be out of sight during periods of heavy play, and similarly perform the noisy procedures before play starts. Consider an earlier starting

time in the morning than you have been used to in order to get most tasks completed before the course is being used. Be sure to carefully instruct your crew to be cognizant of the players so that distractions by them can be avoided or minimized.

Lastly, make a resolution to communicate promptly this season with your Green Chairman, Board of Directors, and membership if any significant problems are developing. If the membership understands a problem it will be supportive and sympathetic to it; but if they are unaware of the reasons behind the situation or the extent of the difficulty, rumors will fly and the whole situation deteriorates. It is usually only inertia by either the green superintendent or the Green Chairman that allows a communications failure of this sort to develop, and this must be resisted. An informed golfing membership leads to much easier problem resolution. Another important facet of good communication is to make certain that you are completely aware of the golfing events planned at your club. It is embarrassing and disturbing to all to discover that green aeration is to be done just prior to a major club event, because of communication breakdown between the pro shop and the maintenance building. This kind of problem is totally avoidable, and should be.

By the above, I am not presuming to overlook problems of adverse winter conditions, or bad spring weather and its effect on ideal course preparation. Still, I think intelligent use of time, and defining priorities with the golfer in mind can ensure a smooth and pleasant course opening for all concerned.

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