

RESHAPING FAIRWAYS

By Todd Clark and Monroe S. Miller

I. DESIGN

By Todd Clark

Today, many vintage golf courses are searching for alternative solutions for modernizing and improving their course without jeopardizing the existing character or style. One solution that can enhance the appearance, playability and condition of the course without a complete renovation is to reshape the fairways.

From a design standpoint, the fairway is the only element that can be used to connect the critical components of a hole. These components include roughs, mounds, trees, sand bunkers, water and greens, as they define the layout and strategy of each hole. A contoured fairway shape will help to define the landing areas as it expands and contracts around each component. This in and out movement will tell a golfer where the premium ball positions are located and how to approach the hole to fit their style of play. The fairway shape alone can be a simple defensive element as it narrows at the end of landing areas for definition and difficulty.

Due to the improvement of modern mowing equipment, these contour mowing patterns can be maintained as the fairway widens and narrows, a task more difficult with tractors and gang mowers. Reshaping also creates an extremely attractive contrast between the fairway grasses and the rough grasses. Advances in plant controls give course managers the necessary tools to maintain the species integrity of each area of the reshaping.

Fairway reshaping provides an opportunity to improve the appearance and condition of a golf course at a reasonable cost. For the golf players, the contrast of grasses and the shaping itself make the golf course more interesting, more challenging and more aesthetically pleasing to play.

The accompanying sketches of before and after illustrate the principles of fairway reshaping.

II. EXECUTION

By Monroe S. Miller

One of the best, most practical and useful lectures I've listened to at our Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium was given by Kevin Dushane a number of years ago. Through words and slides he described how he was redefining the fairways at Bloomfield Hills CC. The method he described involved the use of a non-selective herbicide on the primary rough adjacent to fairways and a follow up reseeding plan. It worked beautifully for Kevin.

I followed up with him on specifics and tried the same method on our golf course. Only one side of a fairway was attempted. Good thing, too. The results were marginal for me.

There were no problems with the *Roundup* applications, the close mowing and clipping removal, the double aerification of the seeding itself. The problem, simply stated, was keeping people out of the work area. Even the most successful of golf players loathe leaving a ball in a GUR area

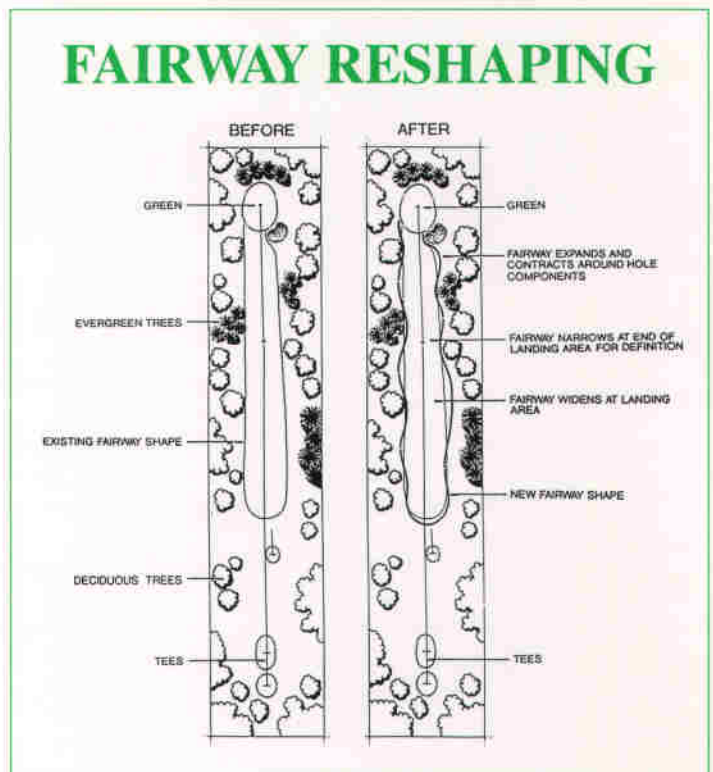
and will tromp through the mud to retrieve it. Others don't like detours. We used hundreds of stakes, thousands of feet of rope and untold signs. On ONE side of ONE fairway. Any attempt at a wholesale effort using this technique would have been foolish.

We needed to find a better way to get to the same end. Obviously, there aren't many choices—it's either seed or sod.

So we decided to use sod to reshape and contour our fairways. It has worked out very well. Each year part of our summer work is to reshape two or three fairways. Our green committee determines the annual choices and I budget accordingly.

The shaping isn't done haphazardly or without reason. We employ our golf course architect—Dick Nugent Associates—to do the contour design. Todd Clark, a designer in the Nugent office, has done the actual design for several years now. We receive a blueprint plan, but also have Todd travel to Madison to do the "field fitting" and actual staking. He was kind enough to co-author this piece with me. The example he shows is our fourth fairway, before and after.

Final approval is given by the green committee chairman or a person he designates. We've found the best way to handle this part of the process is to lay out the actual contour lines with one-inch hose. Fortunately, we have





BEFORE — notice the nice straight edges!

thousands of feet of it, and all of it is needed. This takes any guess work out of the chairman's job and allows him to make any adjustments with ease. It also provides a smooth guide for the painting we do for the actual sod cutting.

We remove at least 16 feet on the entire perimeter of the golf hole and around the green. Often as many as 30 feet of the tangled mix of grasses are cut, rolled and hauled off the golf course.

From here to completion is the back-breaking part of the job. It is strictly low technology. The sod is cut, rolled, loaded into trucksters or into a frontend loader. Where con-



Getting ready for loading and removal.



Cutting requires a good operator and a sharp knife.

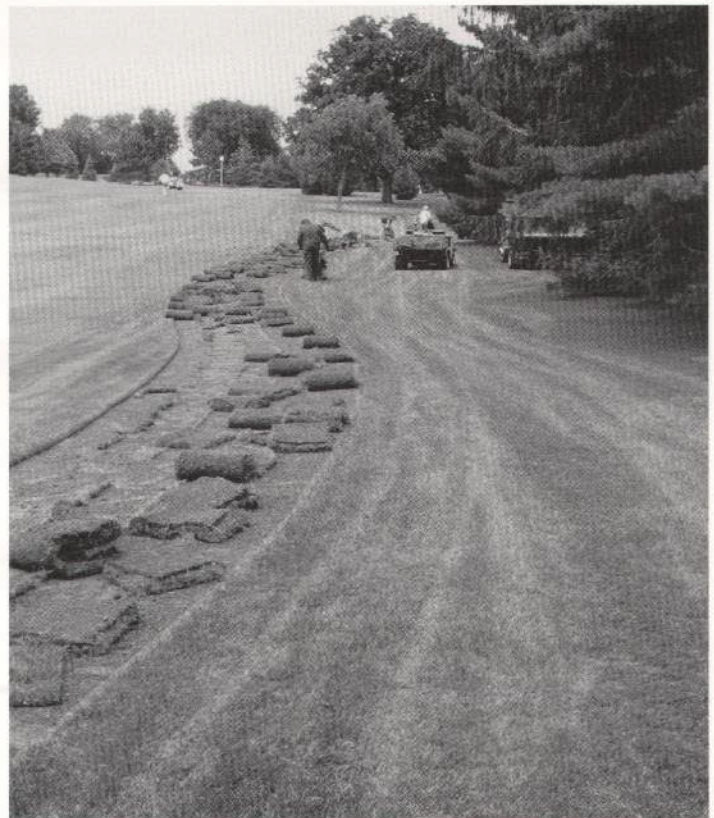
venient exit exists, we use a one-ton truck. The sod we remove is composted for a year or two and becomes a beautiful, rich soil for finish work around the golf course.

The skinned area is fertilized with starter fertilizer and cultivated with a Gill pulverizer. Then it is ready for sod.

Lots of sod. The simple arithmetic you do to determine the amount to order is scary at first. Now we place orders for semi-loads, not square yards or even pallets! Our entire staff works at it, split into hauling and laying crews. It goes more quickly than you would think.

Best for us has been to strip one-half of a fairway on day one and prepare it for sod; sod that half the next day. Day three is a repeat of day one, and day four is like day two. In one week a golf hole is transformed from looking like the airport runway fairway for forty (or more) years ago to the contemporary and more sporting look of the 1990s.

Todd presented the architect's perspective on reshaping. There are others. The color contrast between the new



Just getting started with the cutting and rolling and loading.

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A loader and a one-tone truck work well when near the perimeter of the course.



There is no small amount of hand work involved.

Kentucky bluegrass cultivars and *Poa annua*/bentgrass is nearly spectacular. It is what most caught my eye on Kevin Dushane's slides at the Symposium. The definition of features—fairway, green and bunkers—is a delight. Playability is greatly improved because golfers no longer have to try to hit from one inch high *Poa annua*/bentgrass that was adjacent to the fairway; that slightly errant shot can now be more fairly played. And a grass area that was difficult to maintain without fungicides/aerification/water now is more healthy with little attention.

The list of advantages could go on. A final point is worth noting. The investment in work and time is formidable and requires an effort to keep the sod used for reshaping free of contaminants, especially annual bluegrass. What has worked for us is a fall application of *Prograss* and a spring application of a pre-emergence herbicide. As time goes on I'll know if these are annual or biennial applications.

At the outset of the project we contracted a couple of fairways. We now know that it is quicker and less expensive to

do the work in mid-summer with our own employees.

Fairway reshaping, in my view, is one of those things that gives a maximum return for the time, effort and cost involved. Give it a try—I think you will agree. 🙌



The new shape becomes apparent quickly.



Hand raking to clean up the last of the mess before fertilizing and cultivation.



AFTER—What a difference a week makes!



These projects require a LOT of sod!



One of our previous projects—from 1992—the ninth fairway at Blackhawk Country Club.