



Closing the Golf Course on Mondays

By Mark Kienert

This past summer, the Bull's Eye Country Club's Board of Directors passed a resolution that in effect closed the golf course on Mondays for maintenance. The course would be closed each Monday during the golf season until 2:30 PM when it would be open once again for regular play. The golf course would also open earlier in the day to facilitate any dates sold for golf outings but would remain closed up until the time golf was scheduled to play.

This is not new to the golfing world by any means. I've worked at two exclusive Milwaukee area country clubs that were closed on Mondays, both the clubhouse and the course. However, there was constant pressure to open the course at 1 P.M. or earlier.

What precipitated this measure was a new reciprocal agreement the Bull's Eye Country Club made with another "sister" country club in the area that is closed for maintenance on an every other Monday schedule during the golfing season. Also, when reviewing our play, we discovered that our golf course was being used heavily on Mondays by the members of yet another country club in our area that had virtually every Monday sold out for golf outings and as such, was not available for our members to play. Using this issue as a spring board and also equipped with a the very sensitive topic of pesticide labels that prohibit the reentry of workers into a field (greens, tees, fairways, or roughs) sprayed with a product for a minimum of 12 hours after drying, I sought to protect my resume by approaching the board with a proposal that would close the course on Mondays for maintenance. The vote, you will be surprised to learn, was unanimous and without much discussion.

I felt at the time that any pesticide issue brought to the forefront could quite possibly create a backlash of sorts and eliminate the use of those products on the golf course. This was a risk I was willing to take. I've always sought to use the safest of products and always use more protective gear than the label

requires to make the application. We've sought to educate our crew members and applicators. However I've sensed a change in attitude of the golfer when they see our men driving about the golf course in their protective "moon suits." My concern was not to use any "chemical scare tactic", but to educate the Board members of the labeling changes that have taken place for many products during the re-registration process required by the EPA.

Those small changes will lead to only stricter label regulations in the future. It seems to me that many of the pesticide labeling changes use wording that protect the manufacturer. I anticipate the day that state legislation will mandate how and when pesticides are applied to the golf course. Only with the cooperation between those of us who carry out the necessary maintenance practices on the golf courses and those who play the game will the tradition well groomed golf courses carry on into the next century. Some form of compromise will have to be established in the marketplace, or we will lose one of our most valuable tools. You can say goodbye to the 10 feet stimpmeter readings. One form of compromise is closing the course for a period at least long enough to safely make applications and to allow products to dry and become "stay fast" before customers arrive. We also need products that can be sprayed with less water for faster drying and not produce drift. What we don't need are more products that use distilled petroleum products of an aromatic nature that draw attention to the fact that we were out spraying earlier in the day.

I reported back to the Board that this was the greatest piece of legislation ever passed at this country club. It was quite simply like a breath of fresh air that swept across the golf course, for the crew and for myself. "What an opportunity," I remember thinking to myself. The benefits were enormous and immediate as I took full advantage of the closed setting to maintain the course. Fungicide applications, top-dressing programs, fertilization pro-

grams and cultural programs could now be completed without the operator having to tip toe his way through golfers. I very much enjoyed the ability to complete fairway spraying on a single day. We found we could now take our time to complete the assignments. The crew did a better job of completing their assignments as they were able to work without having to pull back to let golfers through. I saw a definite improvement in the quality of work as employees took their time. No more short cuts. Some assignments that took eight or nine hours now took six. We found that we could afford to take the time to make equipment repairs.

We discovered that our play on Mondays did not fall off that much. Players that normally played on Mondays now played later in the day. The only pressure of playing came at the end of the year when the days became shorter. It was pointed out that the shorter day also affected the amount of work we were able to do. I also found that programs that had been postponed could now be tackled. Noisy, labor intensive work that would have affected play to some degree was accomplished and finished before any

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golfers arrived on the course. I can recall the time that during a foursome of ladies were involved in a match play event. Earlier in the day, a topdressing application associated with a spiking and overseeding had been made. Sometimes we use hand water hoses to "rinse" the topdressing and seed down into the turf. The quick sweep of water to the putting surface knocks the sand particles down into the mat to reduce the potential of premature bed-knife wear. On this day, I happened to arrive at the green to help remove the hose from play. I noticed sand debris left behind by the hose. The sand formed a long ridge as the hose was pulled along the flag pole. When I discussed this with my employee he told me he was trying to stay ahead of this group of better players, but they were too fast for him and he couldn't keep pace. As we watched, one of the players was the last to putt for her side. Wouldn't you know it—her ball struck this small ridge and proceeded to follow it all the way into the cup. The next lady to putt is one of the nicest people on the face of this earth. To make a long story short, her putt was at a cross angle but outside of this line of sand. Her putt struck this sand and turned away from the hole, stopping on the lip just to the right. This putt would have tied the hole. She didn't say a word. She didn't have to. I was already sick inside myself for the unfair influence caused by our maintenance. As the USGA's Jim Latham would later say at the Symposium, the "Rub of the Green" is seldom used by golfers today and maybe it should become a phrase that is used far more frequently. Well this "rub" was caused by the crew and I didn't like the affect it had on play. Our impact to those matches has all but been eliminated as a result of the course being closed.

We have discovered that we are now in a position to groom the course during the remainder of the week. In the past, parts of other days were used to finish up cultural programs. Time was always lost when reorganizing the crew for secondary work. Some of the work that we were able to complete just for fairways now comes very close to matching that found on greens. Aerification of fairways could be done during a period of time that would normally be considered off limits. Also our clean up was faster as we were able to use the warmer sun found in August.

I cannot say enough about the members of the Bull's Eye Country Club Board for their wisdom in placing a high priority on maintenance. A healthier turf-

grass plant will be there for all members to enjoy and that is what this game is all about. It has been my experience in this industry to note that clubs will compare themselves to others in the area or districts in which they are members. If this only serves as a model for other superintendents to use as a means of improving golf course conditions, please use it. As a superintendent I know how frustrating it can be trying to establish a sound maintenance program only to have to delay projects as a result of play considerations to that of another day. Sometime the only way I was able to do

things was to be callous and go ahead and do it. Not any more.

Monday golf course closing is good for the game of golf. It used to be that way in the past. What a great tonic for the attitude. We can now just focus on the task at hand and to do the best job possible. No longer do I have to sweat out the fact that I was about to interfere with someone's match or the condition of the course during maintenance procedures that would cause someone to ask for their green fees money back. We are doing the same work as in the past, the golfer can hardly tell it. ♣

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