SOME THINGS SHOULD CHANGE . . . AND SOME THINGS SHOULD NEVER CHANGE

By Warren J. Rebholz, Executive Director Minnesota Golf Association

I have been asked to review changes in golf course preparation that I have observed in the last 20 years of conducting competitions all over the state of Minnesota.

It's sort of strange to start an article on changes by making the statement that one of the most important considerations in golf course preparation has *not* changed, and I hope never will! That consideration is the 100% cooperation I have and continue to receive from the golf course superintendents at every site where a tournament is scheduled. Rarely can I make a universal statement, but in all my 20 years I have not met one (even one) superintendent who wasn't interested and willing to cooperate to the fullest of his/her ability to put the course in the finest condition possible for the golf competition. I, in turn, have never been unreasonable in what I have asked of the golf course.

The first thing I can think of that has made in important improvement in conditioning a golf course is the stempmeter. I know it has led to some problems as well, but, for tournament golf, it gives us a measurement of green speed so that we can make a good judgment of which direction "up or down" we wish to go. In most cases we probably try to speed the greens up, maybe six inches. For our Amateur Championship I like to use 9½ feet unless the greens are really undulating.

The advent of triplex mowing of fairways has made a big difference in tournament preparation. Nicely mowed triplex fairways generally run faster than conventional mowing, which shortens the way the course plays but also allows errant shots to reach the rough faster. It also pretty much eliminates the "flyer" lie. Because these fairways are cut quite short, if you have to skip a cutting because of weather it will not make that much difference the next day.

Speaking of bad weather—which is what turns golf administrators' hair grey if they have any—much improved methods of draining golf courses allow us to get players back on the course much faster after a rain delay. Along this same line, irrigation systems that are able to selectively control the amount of water put on a given area reduce those chronic casual water soft spots that used to plague golf courses.

Modern rotary rough mowers are able to cut three-inch grass at a nice, even height without the problem of grass bending over and not getting cut. If the rough is uniform and thick, three inches is plenty for the state's best amateurs. We like a secondary cut of rough at two inches just off the fairway the width of a mower. The area around the bunkers and greens is treated the same way.

The mechanical sand rake is another time-saver that allows for very early start times. This machine does a very acceptable job, but it is only as good as the operator and the staff person who does the sand clean-up with a rake to put the finishing touches on the bunker. The driver must take care not to continually gouge the edges of the bunker which undercuts the face and, in the long run, could cause a collapse, or at least an unsightly overhang.

I can't speak of chemicals with any real knowledge, but I do know that great strides have been made in the last 20 years. The condition of modern golf courses depends on their ability to head off turf diseases. This results in turf conditions that are fairly constant, avoiding the extremes of no grass or too much grass. Modern golf courses come out of the winter in much better shape because of chemicals and the ability to cover greens and tees with a plastic material. This gives us a bigger jump on the start of the golf season and makes the scheduled May golf competitions able to be played on finely conditioned courses.

In the last 20 years I have established some wonderful relationships with golf course superintendents. I am truly impressed by their continued efforts to learn more and improve their course conditions. I can't predict what will happen in the next 20 years, but progress will be made that probably will do away with aerifying and other turf techniques that cut into the quality conditions each season.

I have to believe that modern golfers are spoiled by the superb conditions they play under. Sadly, this has eliminated some of the skills that more variable conditions forced golfers to acquire. Still and all, golf will continue to grow, maybe not at a "breakneck" speed but steadily, because it is played outdoors and has such a wide variety of circumstances that it is never boring but endlessly fascinating.

MGA Names New Executive Director

The Minnesota Golf Association (MGA) Board of Directors has selected Ross T. Galarneault to succeed Executive Director Warren J. Rebholz, who will retire on January 1, 1993.

Rebholz announced his retirement just over a year ago. He will step down after a 20-year career as the MGA Executive Director.

Galarneault has been on staff at the MGA for the past eight years. He joined the MGA as a part-time intern in 1984 and became its Technical Director in 1985. In 1990, he was elevated to his current position, Assistant Executive Director.

A native of St. Cloud, Minn., Galarneault was awarded an Evans Scholarship and attended the University of Minnesota. He was graduated from the university's Institute of Technology in 1984 with a BS in Computer Science with an emphasis in Management Information Systems.

Galarneault has been active in various aspects of golf administration. He is currently the Executive Director of the International Association of Golf Administrators and serves on the USGA Handicap Manual Drafting Committee.