

Horton Smith Talks Sense

One of America's sensational young golfers with international experience, discusses without fear or favor what a golf course should be. Greenkeepers stand by.

I AM writing this article with the hope that the opinions of my golfing experience will be of benefit to the greenkeepers of America, and the further continuance of their splendid progressive work which has been a substantial contribution to the development of golf to its present state of enjoyment, popularity and greatness.

I congratulate the greenkeepers for this service. To me, condition is very important in the selection of an enjoyable golf course; I am happy to say therefore that I am pleased with the high standard of maintenance that exists at the many golf courses I have played.

GREENS SHOULD NOT BE MUSHY SOFT

ON REGULATION size greens I prefer greens that are not mushy soft. Many greens are watered so much that absolutely no skill is required to stop a ball on them. Mushy greens are also detrimental to ideal putting conditions, a half-topped mashie or iron will stop on many greens that I have played. This is wrong as the player who is off the proper line can play to the hole equally as well as the player who is perfectly placed from the tee.

The plan of the hole, the trapping and the size of the green should be considered in watering. Naturally, small, tightly trapped greens should



HORTON SMITH

be kept softer than large, open ones. I like a green that is turfy and medium soft, but I would condemn a green that is so mushy that a pitched ball would displace the turf entirely and form a divot hole that is over one-half inch deep. Of course, the green should be soft enough for the ball to make a noticeable impression.

I prefer seeded greens as, from my experience, it produces a softer, more upright and even growth of grass. For ideal putting surface upright growing grass is far superior to a grainy growth.

SMITH LIKES FAST GREENS

I LIKE a green on the fast side, as I feel it places a much greater premium on skill and a fine putting touch. I dislike a green where a ball will gain momentum of its own accord. Slick greens are not a fair test of putting skill, but fast ones are. On sharply contoured greens I prefer a higher cutting of the grass. This to be regulated according to the degree of the slope.

From a playing standpoint it makes absolutely no difference to me whether the same type of grass is on all the greens so long as the different types are good putting surfaces. I would not necessarily favor uniform

speed of greens. I would consider contour, as previously mentioned.

MOST TEES ARE TOO SOFT

*M*OST tees I play on during my travels are too soft, or too spongy. I like a firm tee, soft enough to allow spikes to enter easily, with the grass cut medium short. Long grass on a tee is bad, as the juice of the grass between the club and ball causes slipping or skidding. I like bent tees, and have played on some very good ones that seem to endure best of all types.

I do not think it essential to have tees set at right angles to the line of the hole. I think that we will see the time when there will be tee construction variation as a hazard to make the game more difficult. That is, have the tees contoured instead of level. My friend, Donald Ross, has advocated this for ten years. I look forward to such, at least for championship purposes.

I do not prefer either extreme width or narrowness in fairways. I would base this judgment on the type of the hole and the contour of the fairway. Medium type fairways are best. Not so soft that any ball will land dead, but soft enough to prevent extreme roll. I think a well hit low shot should be rewarded with a reasonable bounce and roll.

EXTREME WATERING OF FAIRWAYS IS BAD

I THINK extreme watering of fairways is bad, as excessive moisture causes the ball to slip or skid, instead of grip as it should when properly struck with the face of a club. After a good, strong turf foundation is established, a slight watering keeps it in ideal playing condition.

I am very strong for clean and bright flags and flag poles, and very much like to see the yardage clearly marked on each tee. Personally, I see no real purpose for yardage markers along the fairway.

Rough grass should never be allowed to grow higher than six inches; this height constitutes hazard enough, and allows the ball to be found easily. It also is much better for the general appearance of the course.

I am strongly against rock piles, unkept bushes, trees or ditches. A player with skill should be able to play from any position on the course. In other words, under normal conditions there should be no impossible lie within the reasonable playing zone of the golf course.

All water hazards and special hazards should be definitely outlined, as should all boundary lines. Prominent stakes with a connecting wire or cord form the best boundary line; the cord or wire should be on the ground. Of course, a fence serves the purpose also.

I like very much to have water and clean towels on the course. Personally, I play a clean ball each hole.

SETTING OF THE CUPS DESERVES CONSIDERATION

A POINT that deserves consideration is the setting of the cups. I notice all the difference in the world in this and all that is required is careful, conscientious work. I hate to see the edges of the cup irregular or broken. Cups should be changed frequently enough to prevent the edges from becoming rounded. When proper care is not taken, I have seen cups that "telescope," that is the edges bulge higher than the surface level. This makes putting extremely difficult and should be avoided.

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