



THE IMPACT OF BACK-NINE TEE TIMES

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A surge in the number of rounds played at many golf courses in 2020 has some decision-makers trying to figure out how more golfers can be accommodated on their golf course at one time. Adding back-nine starting times is one strategy often discussed when looking at this issue but consideration must be given to how this will impact maintenance, pace of play and the overall golfer experience.

Golf course maintenance teams develop a strategic plan for each day where one of the main goals is to work ahead of play for as long as possible to be more efficient and reduce the number of interruptions experienced by both employees and golfers. When play only begins on the first tee, hours can be spent maintaining the course without golfers or members of the maintenance team crossing paths. If golfers are able to begin play on the front and back nine first thing in the morning, the logistics of setting up the golf course are completely altered because both nines must be prepared at the same time. If additional labor and equipment are not provided, sacrifices will have to be made in overall course maintenance and presentation due to the inevitable reduction in efficiency as play disrupts maintenance more frequently.

Depending on how many additional rounds are played, turf health becomes more of a concern due to the increased foot traffic and cart traffic over the course of a season. Supplemental maintenance practices may be necessary to mitigate the impact of this additional stress, but finding opportunities to complete these practices becomes increasingly difficult if more rounds are being played and golfers are starting on both nines each morning.

The impact of adding back-nine tee times is not only felt on the maintenance side. As golfers finish their first nine holes, they could encounter a logjam as they make the turn if the tee sheet is full. The flow of a round could easily be disrupted if all of a sudden there is a significant delay before the next hole can be played. The golf professional, golf shop staff and starter may also find extra demands placed on their time as they help manage the flow of traffic between golfers coming off the back nine and those arriving to start at the first tee.

It is understandable that courses want to accommodate a higher demand for golf but a decision such as adding back-nine starting times must be examined from every angle. In addition to offering more tee times and potentially bringing in more revenue, there will certainly be an impact on how the agronomic team approaches preparing the golf course in the morning and, depending on how many rounds are being played, the golfer experience could be negatively affected as well.



For information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service Contact the Green Section Staff.

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