

TRUTHS AND CONSEQUENCES

Chemicals were favorite targets for environmentalists during the 80s. The future holds more of the same scrutiny.

"Be prepared," says Jerry Lemons of Old Hickory Country Club. "When there's a tragedy, it jumps out at us. That's when we in the business get hurt the most. Pesticides are guilty before proven innocent."

GCSAA's Pat Jones says resistance from persons who do not want to see a golf course built in their neighborhoods is a towering hazard many developers must clear to reach the green. And the best defense is to stay one step ahead.

"GCSAA's role," explains Jones, "is to educate the public, develop factual information and data, and prove to the public and government regulators that golf courses are safe places to be, are not damaging to the environment, and—if anything—are an environmental benefit."

Remembering the drought of 1987-88, superintendents want more sensitized irrigation systems that conserve more water. Systems are now hooked into weather stations that adjust the watering cycle based on daily evaporation rates; soil sensors corroborate with weather system information.

"We're seeing the trend to double- and triple-row irrigation," says architect Michael Hurdzan. "We're going to two or three systems of sprinkler heads around a green as well."

Lemons says the cost of lightweight mowers can outweigh the gains.

"On warm-season grass courses especially," he says, "wear and tear is not as critical as on bentgrass fairways. In the South, it's been one of those fads that has pushed down our way. You can still use the tractor-type mowers, and maybe go to a 10-bladed unit rather than a seven-bladed one.

"We've got 120,000 square feet of greens," says Lemons. "And we want to maintain high stimpmeter readings. Smaller triplex mowers are used on greens and approaches. We have Bermuda fairways, and we overseed with rye in the fall. By the time we get the Bermuda pumped up to take over the rye, we're on a five-day cutting schedule."

"The competition has forced us to lightweight mowing of fairways," says Brice Gordon of the Audubon Country Club, Louisville, Ky.

"You've got tremendous-looking courses out there," says Gordon, "thanks to the new varieties of grass and new equipment. It's a positive development. We now mow fairways six times a week at 1/2-inch. People want that quality."

Hurdzan also notices greens getting flatter, but not without drawbacks. "Lower cutting heights are due to less slope. They're mowing so close that if we put very much pitch to a green, the ball starts rolling too much. So we're forced to design flatter greens.

"Consequently, the flat greens don't have surface drainage. And shots don't hold as well, so superintendents are forced to over-water. Before, we could bank them. All the water goes through the soil profile, so we have more disease problems as a result of that."

The solution then is to increase the infiltration rate of greens, to dry them down.

Rolling mounds, wrap-around bunkers and elaborate water hazards have satisfied golfers' desires for challenging (some say impossible) shots and beautiful scenery. But design often becomes a game of one-upmanship, leading to time-consuming, costly maintenance.

Jones believes that with the heavy public demand for golf there follows a demand for relatively inexpensive tracks of \$2-4 million. "Without proper maintenance and a proper superintendent, the more expensive courses can be difficult to maintain. You might spend \$1 million a year to keep the place going."

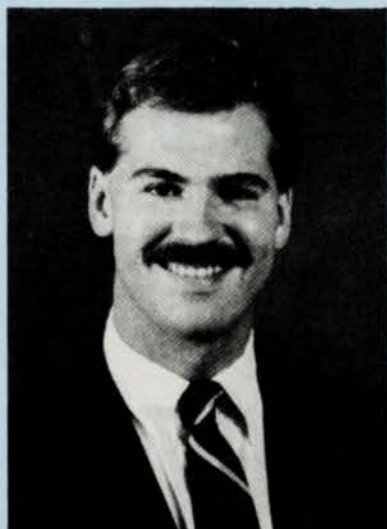
Lemons recently re-designed and rebuilt the greens and bunkers of Old Hickory Country Club in Tennessee. He believes that many current designs neglect maintenance concerns, and will frequently build huge mounds into designs "to keep up with the big boys."

Lemons asks, "How long can the course be maintained at the dollar figures that are received from public golfers? Big-name designers spend upwards of \$6 million, and often create nightmares for maintenance."

Lemons is using foresight. His concern is the capital required to maintain that look. "If the economy goes bad in the future," Lemons asks, "can we afford million dollar maintenance budgets?"

The answer: "Design for maintenance, and realize that form follows function."

—Terry McIver □



Pat Jones



Michael Hurdzan



Brice Gordon