

# GOLF

## 'SCAPING

# Multi-course management tricks

**If you've got more than one golf course to maintain, you'll want to know these 'tricks' to avoid getting pelted with tomatoes from your audience: the players and members.**

■ You, as a golf course superintendent, are a juggler. You try to keep all the plates spinning at one time: equipment, personnel, greens committees, budgets, members.

Now imagine that someone just tossed more plates at you. Now you've got to juggle the management of six golf courses.

That's what John Betts faces when he gets up every morning. And, by all accounts, he's not managed to break any plates yet.

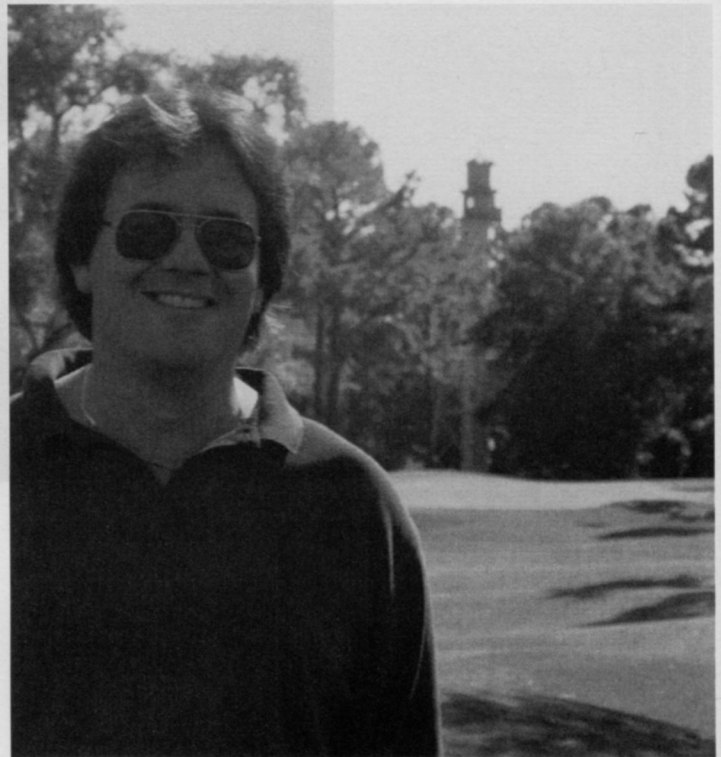
Betts oversees five high-profile courses in Hilton Head, S.C., where he's one of a very few Certified Golf Course Superintendents. He has another course in Charleston. Each of the courses has its own super, though, making the juggling act a little easier to pull off.

"We try to manage our operation by staff consensus," Betts says, "but at the same time realizing that time comes when somebody has to make a decision.

"I try to involve as many qualified people in the decision-making. I didn't write a book on this stuff, but we've been successful doing things this way. That's not to say that I haven't made some wrong decisions, though, and I will in the future."

**People power**—The courses and their superintendents are: Robert Bagonzi at the Robert Trent-Jones- and George

**John Betts:** says it's not easy to fool Mother Nature. 'But we're dense. We don't learn very quickly.'



Fazio-designed courses at Palmetto Dunes; Rich Maxfield at Palmetto Dunes's Art Hills course; Tom Metzger at the Robert Cupp and Hills courses at Palmetto Hall; and Tom Arneman at Coosaw Creek in Charleston.

"I consider myself the fireman," Betts observes. "I can tour the courses and see things that don't come out and grab my superintendents like they do me. There are enough fires that there's always something to be addressed. But I try to stay out of their hair on a day-to-day basis."

The key to keeping things spinning is keeping employees—beyond the individual superintendents—happy.

"It's hard, when you have 60 or 75 employees, to treat everybody as individuals," says Betts. "But we do a darned good job of being fair and con-

sistent. That's not to say that we don't have our problems, but when you have that many individuals, the potential for problems is greater.

"Our employees all basically get along, and they're all treated well. They work hard, and I would give a lot of them the shirt off my back."

**Tweaking Mom**—Because of the inherent problems with running resorts in a high-profile area like Hilton Head, the golfing season is getting longer. So Betts is finding that he's having to "tweak" Mother Nature.

"The season gets a week longer each year," notes Betts. "February 15th is now a little earlier. And we're busy until Thanksgiving."

"The toughest thing in this business is

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that a lot of times we think we're going to manipulate Mother Nature and try to force things to happen.

"In a resort area, the time of season when you're getting your peak dollar may not necessarily coincide with your peak maintenance. So you try and finagle, and a lot of times it hurts you. We'll try to push the bermudagrass out, stimulate it mechanically or with fertilizer. But it will come out when Mother Nature says it's ready to come out, not any time before. It's going to sit there until it gets the green light from her to move.

"What's funny is that you'd think you'd realize this is frivolous, but we keep hitting that brick wall because we're dense. We don't learn very quickly."

**Fresh paint**—Many of the decisions Betts must make on a regular basis are forced by the competitive situation on the island.

"In the last four years, it's gotten a hell of a lot tougher," Betts says. "Hilton Head has six new resorts, and you put the older courses up against 'fresh paint' and it's not apples to apples. That's why we're always looking at renovations."

The Cupp course, just opened last February, is the most interesting architecturally. It features a straight-line design that can only be appreciated by seeing it and playing it in person.

The Fazio course, on the other hand, was built in 1974, and will probably be renovated soon.

"When it was first built, it was one of the top 100 courses in the U.S.," notes Betts. "We don't really want to change that. But the problem is the age of the greens and the age of the grasses on the greens. I may have a half-dozen strains of bermudagrass out there now. They mow differently, take fertilizer differently, transition differently.

"In 1974, they may have been getting 23,000 rounds on its small putting surfaces and it probably handled that just fine. But now we're getting 45,000 to 47,000 rounds on that same confined area and we've got to struggle.

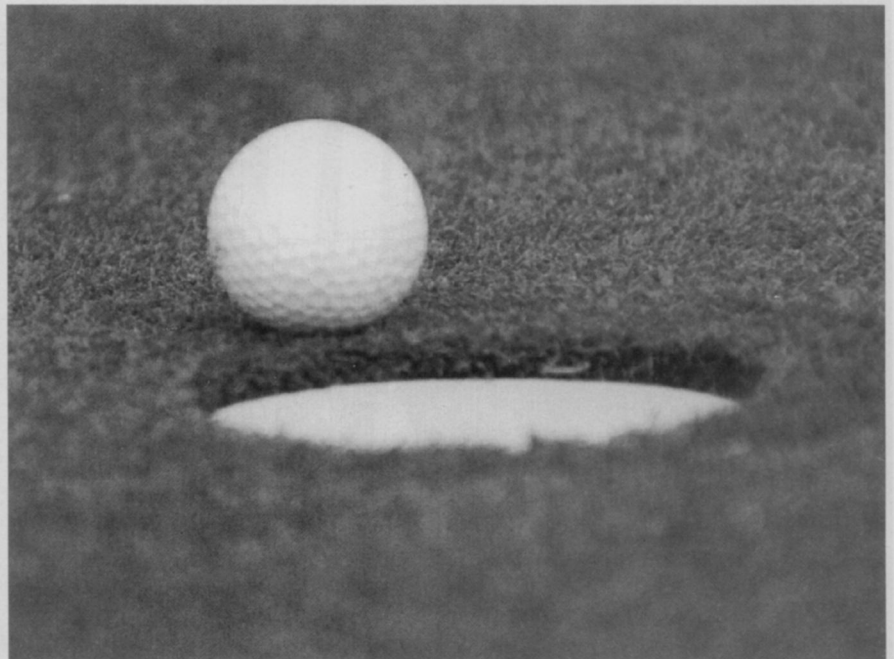
"So we're not going to change the look of the course, just expand it out a little bit. Playability will improve dramatically."

Despite the fact that Betts admits he could've used more business training at Michigan State University where he got his turf degree in 1981, he's still having fun.

"What's been fun and fast-paced is that we've maintained, renovated, and built—all at the same time."

—Jerry Roche

# How to have white golf holes, without the paint



by Scott Niven, CGCS

■ Golf courses today are designed and maintained in a way that maximizes aesthetic qualities by creating near-perfect definition of all features. A lot of time, effort and money goes into producing this manicured look, which is characterized by such things as:

- perfectly outlined bentgrass greens, tees and fairways with eye-catching patterns of stripes and a dark blue-grass border;

- bunkers with sharp edges and bright white sand to improve visibility and appeal;

- tees flanked by signs with handsome graphics depicting the layout of each hole;

- bright colored flags embroidered with attractive logos and painted flagsticks marked to indicate exact locations; and

- all sorts of plaques and yardage markers on sprinklers to aid players in choosing the correct club.

All of these things give the golf course a professional, appealing look and the sharp definition shows the golfer exactly where to play his shots.

Until now, we have stopped just short of doing everything possible in providing the ultimate in visual definition. The one location where we can still

A lip-out study demonstrated that the difference with the Hole Target is statistically insignificant.

improve—which, ironically, is the most important in all of golf—is in highlighting the hole itself.

Even if we frequently apply white paint to the metal cup, the one inch of exposed brownish soil just below the surface is still difficult to see from most areas of any golf green. So much so, the USGA and the PGA Tour will attempt to paint this exposed soil white for their tournaments so that TV viewers can see the hole better while watching at home.

Of course, those lucky participants get the benefits of a more visible hole as well, but most amateur golfers do not get to experience this luxury. Instead, they must putt to a soil-edged hole that they can't see very well. Unfortunately, regular painting of the soil edge is not practical because it's very difficult and time-consuming.

But thanks to a clever inventor from



Texas, we now have a patented device called the U.S. Golf Hole Target that simulates white paint on the edge of the hole. This white plastic collar covers the exposed soil above the metal cup to a level of 1/4-inch below the green's surface and creates a clean, bright, white and highly visible "target."

Some other less obvious benefits of this collar, besides a reduced need to tend the pin, are:

- 1) Preservation of the perfect 4 1/4-inch diameter of the hole, which can expand and contract during dry or wet weather.
- 2) Elimination of soil particles flaking off on high sand-based greens.
- 3) And a reduction in desiccation around the top of the hole.

The U.S. Golf Hole Targets are very easy to install and, since they are reusable, need only to be replaced at approximate two-week intervals. The cost averages less than two cents per golfer-round.

The biggest criticism I've heard of this new invention is one of fear that it might cause the ball to lip-out of the hole. This scenario has been looked into in great detail through a lip-out study that simu-

lated more than 4,000 putts under all types of weather conditions. It demonstrated, without a doubt, that the difference in lip-outs with or without the device is statistically insignificant.

The position of the Target, at 1/4-inch below the green's surface, was not chosen arbitrarily. The laws of physics were used to prove that once the centroid of an object, with the mass and weight of a golf ball, falls 1/4-inch into the hole, only gravity can then affect it to fall to the bottom of the hole.

The USGA has not yet approved of, or declared, the Target in conflict with the Rules of Golf. That decision will have to wait until 1996, when the rules can more accurately define what constitutes a metal cup liner versus a plastic collar. Until then, the definition of "hole" says:

"If a lining is used, it shall be sunk at least one inch below the surface of the putting surface unless the soil condition makes it *impracticable* to do so." (Surely, the exposed earth, subject to dehydration, erosion and instability, is *impracticable*, which by definition is "hard to manage; difficult to maintain." With this interpreta-

tion, using the Target for regular play at any golf club is perfectly legal.)




We've used the Target successfully every day at our club for more than a year, as have many other golf courses. I'd predict that it is only a matter of time until the USGA and the PGA Tour will make the Target standard equipment for their special events, as well as on all golf courses everywhere.

For more information on the patented U.S. Golf Hole Target, with headquarters in The Woodlands, Texas, phone (800) 256-7400.



—Scott E. Niven, CGCS, has been property manager of The Stanwich Club in Greenwich, Conn., since 1983. This prestigious club is ranked by "Golf Digest" as one of the top 100 courses.

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Product	Description	Benefit
	"The choice for all seasons, the herbicide for all reasons." -Sandoz	Proven herbicide is expertly incorporated into a selection of results-getting fertilizer formulas to provide great, one-step combination products.
	"The toughest thing to emerge since crabgrass." -Monsanto	Powerful herbicide, in combination with one of The Andersons proven fertilizer formulations, provides product range that gets two jobs done with a single application.
	"The herbicide for people interested in not applying herbicides." -DowElanco	A proven performer in combination with The Andersons famous fertilizer formulation. A single application provides long-term, weed-free results.

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