

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.

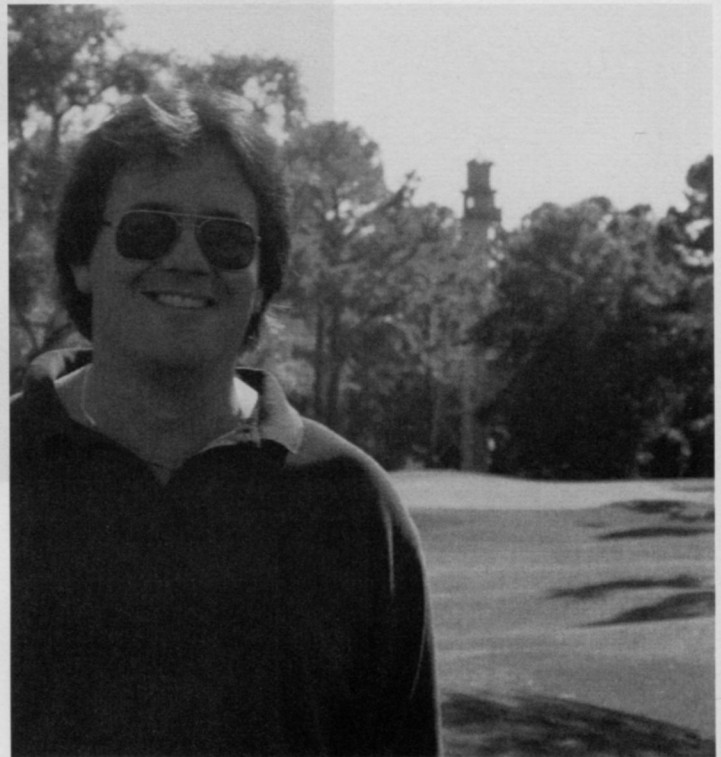
Betts oversees five high-profile courses in Hilton Head, S.C., where he's one of a very few Certified Golf Course Superintendents. He has another course in Charleston. Each of the courses has its own super, though, making the juggling act a little easier to pull off.

"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.

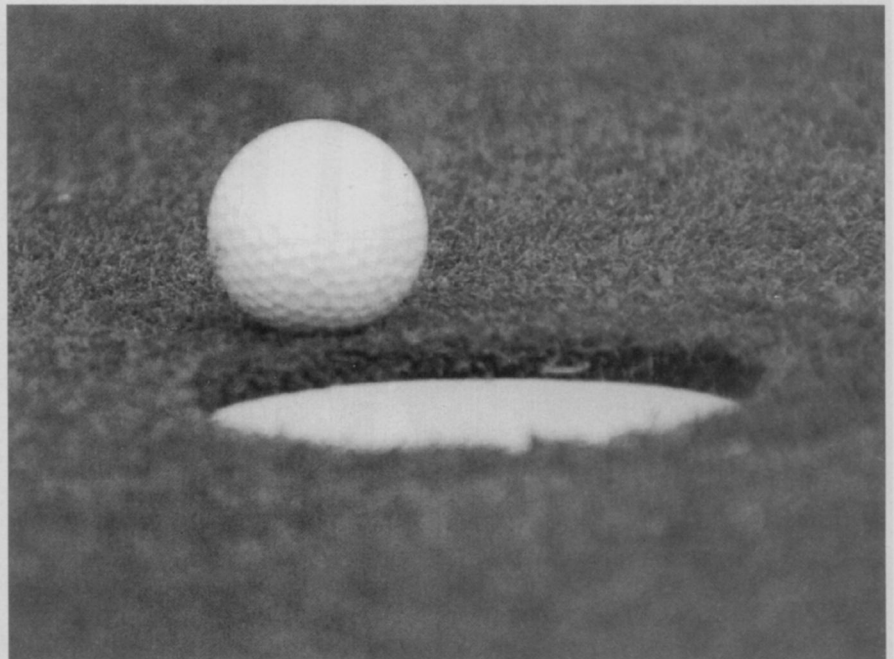
"So we're not going to change the look of the course, just expand it out a little bit. Playability will improve dramatically."

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