

CART PATH *considerations*

Veteran Superintendent Jeff Broadbelt shares his thoughts (and some tips) about the importance of cart paths.

By JOHN B. CALSIN, JR.

The cart paths, or anything that looked like a path, was just worn dirt, rutted and bumpy. Terrible. And, they were in the wrong spots," said Jeff Broadbelt, manager of Downingtown Country Club and former superintendent at Chester Valley Country Club.

Downingtown CC, now a daily fee course near Philadelphia, was built as a resort course about 30 years ago. It was designed by George Fazio.

Under Broadbelt's guidance, the course is returning to excellence, and the cart path work has helped to make it that way.

Through the years, at both Chester Valley and Downingtown, Broadbelt has either designed, routed or constructed over seven miles of paths. He has some suggestions for others either laying out a new course or upgrading an existing one.

To begin with, he said about path layout, "if you don't feel comfortable with routing and



design, consult with a golf course architect.

"He believes most architects do not feel that this type of design work is beneath them. They can help.

One philosophy, of replacement is that of looking where the carts are creating new paths and then paving those dirt areas. He believes this works only about 30 percent of the time. One reason for this is the golfers themselves.

While golfers are not the enemy, they're the challenging part of the equation, often times, even more so than the topography of the course. If you let them, Broadbelt said, "golfers will drive right up on the green. You'll have to pave right on top of the green."

He said that by managing the placement of the paths, this says to the golfer: this is where we will maintain perfectly, and that is where the carts belong—on the path.

He has removed and then replaced "a ton of paths." he said they were in the wrong

place because they were either straight lines or they did not flow.

"There was one par three that was paved right down the center, so all you saw when you were standing on the tee was the path, instead of taking it down the left and then crossing over."

No straight lines

Broadbelt calls straight lines "a big distraction," unless they can be hidden by trees, for example.

The look of the placement is important too. He believes that the paths should "move". As fairways have contours that give them a softer feel and a flow, so too should cart paths.

"There should be some meandering to it," he said. "The more it resembles a creek, the more it is going to seem natural."

Take the high road

He suggests favoring the high side of a hilly fairway. While it might mean a little extra walking, putting it on the high side helps the golfers "see where they are driving."

Slicer-friendly

Nobody likes cart paths. But it is my feeling that if you have to have them, they ought to be where they can be easily used by the golfers. I do not like to be confined to a cart path that is placed so far from the fairway that it is a hike just to get there and a trip if you have to go into the far rough. The paths at the Country Club of Colorado have been placed very close to the fairways and tees, but are kept away from the greens. Generally, they are on the right side of the fairway to accommodate the slicers, who are in the majority. They were all constructed eight feet wide, but sometimes the grass encroaches. At the tees, they are wider.

It is my belief that by having a continuous path system, there is a great deal less wear on the course, even though we normally do not confine the carts to the paths except on par three holes and on a few holes that simply cannot take cart traffic. When we had paths only at the greens and tees, there was always a great deal of wear at the beginning and end of each one. That wear is spread much better with the continuous path, but perhaps the greatest benefit is to prevent the compaction during wet weather when carts are confined to the paths. □

Stan Metsker, CGCS, from "On the Course: The Life and Times of a Golf Course Superintendent," Metsker Publishing, Colorado Springs, Co. Used by permission.

Another question to ask is how is the hole usually played? For example, if players usually hit left on a certain hole, and there is a major hazard—deep woods—he suggests putting the path on the other side of the fairway so it is not in the way.

Another area to be aware of are the landing zones. While those are not etched in stone due to the differing skill levels of golfers, there are areas where balls usually land.

He suggests on a par five, for example, to keep the path wide on the drive up to the landing zone. "Keep it out of view if possible, and then come closer

so the golfer doesn't have to walk as far to the ball. Then curve it back out again." At the next zone, curve it back in. Then out and in at the green.

Wide paths better

How about the path's width? Golfers either like to drive next to each other and talk back and forth, or they like to zoom around a slower cart. That is why Broadbelt thinks eight- or nine-foot-wide paths are more realistic.

Often, paths are made narrower due more to the dimensions of the carts, which are about four feet. Then only a foot is added on each side.



Cart path placement says to the golfer: this is where we will maintain perfectly, and that is where the carts belong.

Consequently, because of the way golfers handle the carts, the grass is destroyed on either side of the path and just will not grow back.

Wider is better

A wider path helps maintenance crews move equipment on the course faster and with less wear and tear.

If there is not enough room near a tee or green to widen the path by paving it, try creating a type of curb using blocks with holes in them. Dirt can be put in the holes and grass planted in them. But the block, or paver, has the strength to stand up to carts being driven

over them.

Cost? Broadbelt's experience has them coming in at between \$14 and \$18 per square yard. He uses two inches of asphalt, compacted to 1½ inch over, usually, 6 inches of modified, compacted. If corners absolutely must be cut, don't scrimp on the asphalt. He suggests going with less modified.

Because golfers want carts, and carts generate revenue for golf courses, spend a little time on your cart paths. They can lead to positive word of mouth advertising your course. That means more income. □

Asphalt at \$5/ton!

Scott Gobel, Deer Track Golf Club, Crawfordsville, Ind., is looking forward to the deal he's getting on crushed asphalt, for his five-mile cart path project.

"We're having crushed asphalt brought in from one of the local interstate construction projects," says Scott Gobel of his good deal. At \$5 per ton (delivered!) Gobel knows he's going to save some serious cash. It's being trucked in from the road by the interstate contractor. All Gobel had to supply was the dump site. We have a pretty good path for them to follow. We've got a smaller dump truck owned by one of the course owners. We put some reducers in the back of the bed to narrow it, so it matches the width of the.

"The existing gravel paths are just kicking up too much dust," says Gobel. "I thought crushed asphalt would be bad material, but if you get it rolled out properly, it's not going to come back up. Very little prep work is required. Just put it down on a rolled surface. It seizes back up, so you have to make sure the surface is well-prepared. It's like a gravel. The bonding agent's been broken on it, but it's still in the mix. When we roll it, the bonding agent releases a little bit, so we get a little bit more of a bond."

Gobel has been at Deer Track for one year. He has worked both private and public courses. Deer Track is daily fee. □

Contractor rubble trouble

New cart paths were constructed at our course a couple of years ago. I was not there at the time, but can make a couple of comments, using hindsight.


▶ First, the cart paths are 4 feet wide, and that has proven to be a bit narrow, especially in the curves, for players and maintenance crew. Some courses solve the problem of driving off the path by installing curbs, but that would drive the cost up.

▶ We had a problem getting turf to grow along the paths in certain places, and are currently making repairs. It seems that the contractor backfilled with whatever could be found, as we are finding chunks of cement, pine cones, branches, decomposed granite (probably from a past repair effort) and more.

▶ As we excavated we also found that the forms used were about 3 inches, so at that depth is where the slag oozed under the form and now creates a barrier to roots. It might be best if the contract specified straight sides to about 6-inches, and require backfill with material consistent with surrounding soil (clean dirt).

▶ When the repairs are complete, we are going to try top-dressing the cart path approaches with crumb rubber (ground up rubber). We hope it will help reduce the wear that occurs in those areas. □

Ben Fish



This path at Hinckley Hills in Ohio was reinforced with landscape timbers, for stability and safety.