



THE GOLF COURSE

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Building New Tees

With many golf courses around the nation having recently celebrated their Centenary or about to, the age of our golf facilities is all too apparent. Although age and with it history and tradition have unparalleled qualities, there is no doubt that the modern popularity of the game is creating problems on many sites. On teeing grounds that were built to accommodate 100 - 150 rounds per week, there is now a requirement for between 100 - 150 rounds per day!

This undoubtedly causes problems, not only on the tee itself but also on its immediate periphery where entrance and exit demands are all too frequently inadequate. The result is a teeing surface or set of teeing surfaces that gradually lose their appeal, both in terms of playability and aesthetics. Problems are compounded where the teeing area is small, where drainage is poor or where growth is slow for example under trees.

Many Clubs have, because of above circumstances, embarked upon a rebuilding programme. However, it is a frequent occurrence to find new teeing surfaces failing to meet golfers' expectations. In order to minimise the risk of failure there are a set of rules to adhere to:

1. Avoid the extension of existing surface. It is difficult to achieve a match in terms of sward composition and particularly playing levels.
2. Ensure that the proposed surface is adequately sized:

Par 4 and Par 5	Men 250 m ²
	Ladies 85 m ²
Par 3	Men 330 m ²
	Ladies 85 m ²
3. Cater for winter needs. Golfers want to play from turf but it is essential that the main summer area is renovated and rested.
4. Avoid choosing sites where the management of the complete sward will be difficult to achieve ie shade, root penetration etc.

5. Allow for movement of golfers around the teeing surface and ensure adequate entrance and exit points.
6. Minimise the construction of steep and unmanageable banks, which will restrict the access of both golfers and maintenance machinery.
7. Avoid tiering the surface simply for the sake of it.
8. Budget for turning areas for machinery on ends and sides of tees, particularly where they are raised.

With the above considerations in mind, work can commence by forming the shape of the tee in the subsoil. The surface should be smooth and evenly firmed with perhaps a slight fall from front to back is 1:70 - 1:100. Do bear in mind that one large teeing area is less trouble to maintain, but constant use by golfers can create serious wear patterns in certain instances. It may be pertinent therefore to create two smaller surfaces in certain instances to ease turf pressure.

Elevation may sometimes be necessary for visibility purposes. If so the formation surface should be built up using clean subsoil fill as free from heavy clay and large stones as possible. It should be built up in no more than 226 mm (9 in) layers and firmed to avoid soft spots. If rubble or coarse material is used it should be blinded with coarse sand in order to support the topsoil. In certain circumstances it may be pertinent to install drainage into the base of the tee.

The next stage involves the placement of rootzone material. Here there is a requirement for a minimum 200 mm (8 in) firm depth of sandy topsoil or a friable sand/soil mix with 150 mm (6 in) depth of similar material on the banks.

A smooth and evenly firmed turf bed shall then be produced by alternate raking and heeling. A pre-turfing fertilizer for example 9:7:7, or similar should then be applied and gently raked into the soil profile.

The surface must be turfed with good quality turf either from a commercial supplier or a turf nursery. The turf should comprise fine grasses such as *Agrostis spp* and *Festuca spp* and be free from fibre accumulation and clay contamination at the base. Once laid, the turf shall be settled using a light roller or similar implement weighing no more than 250 kg (5 cwt). The surface shall then be top dressed.

It is usual to complete such work during the autumn which then allows the new surface 5 - 6 months establishment prior to play. It is vital that this period is given - playing the surface too early will defeat the object of the operation in the first place.

What Do You Want from a Golf Green?

The above question is one asked regularly by myself and my colleagues when addressing a group of Golf Club members. Answers received vary greatly. The most common response is “we want our greens to be fast”. This can be divisive at the best of times. Although most require their surfaces to be fast, when it is pointed out that stimpmeter readings in excess of 9.5 would make

most look foolish, there is a degree of acceptance of moderation. Furthermore, when it is also suggested that the production of fast surfaces leads to sward stress and the ingress of undesirable grasses, the reticence of producing such surfaces is sometimes understood. There remains however an element of every membership that does not understand, or simply does not want to understand. Quite simply, no golf course in the UK can produce tournament paced surfaces week in week out.

Another common response is the desire for a true, uniform and consistent putting surface. Obviously, these are important characteristics and I would suggest, more meritable than pace. They are characteristics that everybody strives for but it becomes difficult to explain to Golf Club members that the provision of uniformity and consistency comes from an appropriate management regime that includes disruptive aeration.

It is rare to encounter any more diverse responses but the most important aspect of golf green performance has not been mentioned.

Free drainage and what it conveys is essential to the long term playability of a green, hence the reason for most of the world's best courses existing on sandy terrain. Where this is not the case the environment is often manipulated to artificially create it. A firm, free draining environment, together with the British Climate creates a unique type of golf. To quote the famous Golf Course Architect Dr Alister MacKenzie:

“There is nothing like the same excitement in watching the flight of the ball through the air than there is playing a shot along the ground and seeing ones ball climbing over hillocks through hollows, curving right or left or left to right and finally lying dead at the hole.”

Furthermore: “With the former, it is only the result which gives satisfaction. The manner in which a shot is played is a greater lasting pleasure. The fascination and lasting interest of the game of golf would be vastly increased if one were always face with an approaching problem.”

This scenario is unfortunately a decreasingly common one at most British golf courses. Influenced by television and American golf in particular, many call for soft surface upon which they can flatter themselves using hard, two piece construction golf balls. The plain truth is that this demand in itself has done more to damage the integrity of British Golf than any other. What is more, the totally unnecessary watering and fertilizer policies that promote such surfaces create a multitude of problems - particularly during the winter months. Winter closure, poor drainage, thatch, disease and a profusion of annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*) are the classic symptoms. An expensive management regime results as does a golf course that is perhaps only playable 8 or 9 months a year.

On clay based soils inland from the sea, there has to be a degree of acceptance that some winter softness is inevitable. It is however with a degree of alarm that on classic sandy soils, by the sea or inland, that such declines are noted. Is it not quite ironic that the Americans come to our shores to play golf and extol its virtues, yet slowly but surely through ignorance alone we present courses more akin to their type of game than ours.

Although very few, if any, respondees say it (or even realise it), it is year round golf that most club members want. They have no idea how to achieve this and know even less of the connection between excessive use of resources through the growing season and winter closure. There is also very limited knowledge of the difference between types of terrain and the restrictions they impose. We can, bar extremes of weather, provide good year round conditions at most British clubs provided of course the management regime is correct. The sad thing is that very few reach their true potential because they are prevented from doing so by the very people who misguidedly seek to improve them.

Judging by the amount of variation in responses it must be concluded that there are many golfers up and down the country, some in positions of responsibility, who are unaware of the dangers of inappropriate management, and the changes these can bring about. This is a damning indictment of the golfing population and when it is considered that many of these people in the form of committees are responsible for the day to day management of the nations' golf courses, it is hardly surprising that so many courses are in a state of decline.

A number of notable golfing figures have stated and put in print over the last few years that the quality of surface at golf clubs up and down the land is declining - this in an environment where greenkeeping knowledge and expertise are undoubtedly improving.

It is my opinion that the decline in standards we are presently seeing (initiated in most cases in the 70's and 80's) is directly related to the dictate of uneducated club members. Such declines are particularly galling when they are viewed at some of the nations' top courses. The very essence of British golf ie firm and running conditions, have so frequently been lost. To correct this, an education process stressing the values and issues must be made more available. This, I feel, is the "first rung on the ladder in improving standards". As custodians of the nations' assets we have a duty to learn and to support those who know better. Not only is this important at committee level but at member level as well.

It is no coincidence that those courses that have avoided decline have had committee members with the humility to accept that they know very little. In such circumstances the Head Greenkeeper, Course Manager has been allowed to pursue recognised ideals - moderate pace, true and consistent surfaces, and firmness and resiliency. What naturally comes with this, given time, is traditional year round British golf.

Uninformed interference, however well intentioned, is destructive. It will hopefully become less of an issue as the quality and availability of good Course Managers becomes more widespread in the months and years ahead.

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