

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Two helpful ideas for maintaining the practice facility.

by MATT NELSON



The use of turf marking paint, instead of ropes, to designate the hitting area on the practice tee improves presentation, makes mowing easier and more efficient, and improves safety for golfers.



Color-coded yardage posts on the edges of the practice tee give golfers a quick reference to estimate distance to target greens. The colored sections of the yardage posts correspond to the color of the flag on the target greens.

PRACTICE FACILITIES at golf courses across the country seem to be receiving more and more use. This is evidenced, in part, by the increased time spent at practice areas during Green Section Turf Advisory Service visits. Perhaps the American golfer is finally realizing that practice really does improve one's game, or maybe people are finding less and less free time to play nine or 18 holes, but enough time to hit balls for an hour or so. Regardless, the increased use of practice areas has increased the demand on the golf course superintendent to provide acceptable turf and maintain practice areas that simulate golf course conditions as closely as possible. Practice facility upgrades that include increased teeing area, target greens complete with real or artificial bunkers, and short-game practice areas are becoming common, at least at golf courses that have the necessary space.

The primary issue with teeing quality at the driving range is adequate usable teeing space. Even clubs with 1.0-1.5 acres of teeing space sometimes find this to be inadequate and occasionally have to rely on artificial mats. Artificial mats are useful during periods of inclement weather, winter months, or for large outings and should be a part of almost any practice tee, but they are not the same as hitting off of real grass. Without sufficient area, however, golf course superintendents find it impossible to regenerate quality turf-grass since tee marker rotation possibilities become inadequate. In other words, worn areas do not have enough time to recover before they are in use again.

Once sufficient space has been provided at the practice tee, two tips from Harry Bahrenburg, golf course superintendent, and Ken Going, Green Committee Chairman at the Huntington Crescent Club in Huntington, N.Y., may improve the playing quality at your practice facility. Rather than using ropes to delineate the designated hitting area on the practice tee, Mr. Bahrenburg uses white marking paint applied through a wide striping nozzle. A string line is used to insure that the lines are straight. Presentation and delineation are improved as people do not inadvertently or intentionally move the rope. Ropes also present a certain liability as it is quite possible to snag a rope while hitting a little too close and possibly injure oneself or others. It also is much easier to mow the tee without

having to coil and replace the marking ropes.

The hitting stations are separated with a white 2x4 equipped with stakes to hold it into the turf. Bag stands, club scrubs, chairs, and garbage cans also are standard items at the Huntington Crescent Club practice facility. Mr. Bahrenburg changes the six- to eight-foot-wide hitting area once per week and rotates from the front of the tee to the back. The tee is mowed two to three times per week. The worn area is top-dressed, leveled, overseeded, and fertilized lightly with a starter fertilizer to encourage recovery and new seedling establishment. Irrigation is applied as needed to encourage seedling establishment, but Mr. Bahrenburg has found the tee to perform best when kept firm. A combination of perennial

ryegrass and chewings fescue is used at the Huntington Crescent Club, but whatever turfgrass species is best suited to your region should be used on the practice tee. Of the cool-season turfgrasses, perennial ryegrass has the greatest wear tolerance and is the quickest and easiest to establish.

The next tip is the use of color-coded yardage posts placed on either end of the practice tee. These serve as quick reference points for golfers to determine the distance to the various target greens at the practice facility. The color-coded yardage on the post corresponds to the color of the flag placed on the respective target green. The yardage posts are much more convenient than in-ground distance markers and are definitely an improvement over those practice facilities with the standard

100-, 150-, and 200-yard markers without an established reference point on the tee.

As more people are introduced to the game of golf and existing golfers strive to improve their games, golf course superintendents will face an increasing challenge when it comes to maintenance of the practice facility. These two turf tips illustrate that innovative ideas such as these will be required by golf course superintendents across a greater range of the golf course, including the practice facility. As it is often said, nothing can replace experience. After all, *practice makes perfect!*

MATT NELSON "practices" agronomy throughout the Northeast Region, conducting Turf Advisory Service visits in New Jersey and New York.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Using pop-up sprinklers to irrigate steep bunker faces.

by PAUL VERMEULEN

EVERY SPRING tourists by the hundreds of thousands flock to the southern states to soak up the warm rays of the sun. If they are not careful about overindulgence, however, overexposure to the sun and/or failing to apply ample amounts of sunscreen can lead to serious problems. In the short term, exuberant sunbathers can develop first-degree burns and, in the long term, the increased risk of skin cancer and premature wrinkling should be enough to warrant extra precaution.

While not life-threatening to people, the overexposure of turfed bunker faces can lead to serious problems for golf course superintendents. Turfed bunker faces are the steep, grassy embankments along bunker edges that compel golfers to hit a high, lofted club out of a hazard. The best example would be the so-called revetted bunker faces found throughout Great Britain.

Revetted bunker faces are constructed by stacking thick pieces of sod to establish an almost vertical angle. By stacking the sod in this fashion, the turf becomes very difficult to irrigate and, consequently, suffers from drought symptoms long before other areas on the course. When the



To ensure that the sod on steep bunker faces is properly irrigated, sprinkler heads can be installed perpendicular to the embankment. The best models for this application are the low-precipitation mist heads that throw water over a 60° angle on either side.

drought symptoms cannot be taken care of in a timely manner, the turf slowly perishes and the dry soil underneath becomes loose and eventually collapses.

The life expectancy of turfed bunker faces depends greatly on their orientation to the sun. Bunker faces that are exposed to the sun for longer periods due to their southern orientation can dry out and crumble in one to three years time, whereas bunker faces with a northern orientation last up to twice as long.

The rapid deterioration of revetted bunker faces with a southern exposure became a serious issue for John Philp, Links Supervisor at Carnoustie Golf Links in Scotland, as he began to plan maintenance activities for the 1999 British Open. If a solution could not be found, then John and his staff would have to rebuild dozens of revetted bunker faces within the 12-month period before the Open to have the course in tip-top condition. Making such an effort would overwhelm both his staff and his supply of sod, which is grown on site to ensure quality control.

In search of a solution, John began investigating the various sprinkler system designs that have been used to apply supplemental irrigation to steep bunker faces around the world. This investigation led him to two conclusions. First, sprinkler systems that are