

PLAY THE COURSE AS YOU FIND IT

Golf course setup is important for turfgrass management and the inherent challenge of the game.

by MATT NELSON

THOSE OF US who play golf realize that one of the most fascinating aspects of the game is the variability of conditions from day to day and golf course to golf course. Variability between golf courses is mostly attributed to design. Varying conditions at a particular golf course are due to changing weather, season of the year, grasses, and course setup.

Although golf course superintendents have no control over the weather, they do control setup of the golf course. Variety provides interest for the golfer, but it also allows the superintendent to manage wear on tees and greens. Many golfers understand the latter point until course setup causes difficulty with their game. Sometimes golfers are unhappy with a hole location, and equally common are golfers disgruntled with the location of the tee markers. Employees do choose inappropriate hole locations from time to time on steep or changing slopes, but demands for excessive green speed that does not conform with the architectural design of the putting greens often limits otherwise acceptable hole locations. When tee markers are located behind the yardage plaque or located on a side of a tee that forces players to hit shots they are not comfortable with, the Rules of Golf are often thrown out the window and the golf course superintendent is cursed as inept. Let's take a closer look at tee marker management.

Tee size should be determined by the following guideline: 100 sq. ft. of usable teeing area is necessary for every 1,000 rounds of golf played annually for par 4s and par 5s. Double this figure for par 3s, the 1st and 10th tees, and any other holes from which irons are regularly struck.

This guideline for area allows the golf course superintendent to rotate tee markers throughout the teeing area to

effectively manage wear, meaning tee markers will be located both in front of and behind the yardage plaque from time to time. It is not the length of each hole, but the overall length of the golf course that should be maintained for handicapping purposes. Thus, tee markers should be set to balance forward, middle, and back placements. The overall length of the golf course has to vary by 22 yards to result in a change of $\frac{1}{10}$ of one stroke in the course rating. Therefore, it is conceivable that a hole could play 35 yards longer than measured on a given day, as long as this additional length is compensated for on other holes.

Many golfers vaguely understand course rating and handicapping, especially when holes play longer or shorter than their official, measured length. There seems to be a group of adamant players at many golf courses who insist on playing from the permanent yardage plaque on the tee. Whatever game these people claim to be playing, it is not golf, and their so-called score cannot be posted for handicapping purposes. Rule 11-4 states that teeing off outside of the teeing ground (in front of, outside, or more than 2 club lengths behind the markers) results in a two-stroke penalty or disqualification in medal play, and a replay of the shot in match play. In my opinion, the penalty should be even more severe. These people who insist on playing from the permanent yardage plaque should be escorted off the golf course for their disrespect of the game of golf, their fellow members, and the golf course superintendent. These people do not understand the true fascinations, intrigue, variability, and unpredictability that make golf the greatest game of all. In addition, these people have no clue about what it entails to maintain the golf course to their expectations.

Lateral spacing of tee markers is another important component of effective tee management. Generally, a spacing of 5 to 7 paces provides ample teeing area with maximum rotation possibilities. This type of spacing also helps minimize inadvertent rule infractions. Simply placing the tee markers from one edge of the tee to the other and allowing golfers to play from anywhere between them will not evenly disperse wear, as players will tend to wear out the most favorable location. As stated previously, teeing off in front of, outside of, or more than two club lengths behind the tee markers results in a penalty. Moving tee markers to cater to your particular golf game is a violation of Rule 13-2 and should also result in removal from the golf course. If a tee marker location on the left side of a tee presents problems for your slice, tough luck! Go to the range and work on your slice. Hacking is no excuse to abandon the Rules of Golf. Furthermore, Rule 1-3 states that players shall not agree to exclude the operation of any Rule or to waive any penalty incurred. Rule 3-4 states that any competitor refusing to comply with a Rule affecting the rights of another competitor shall be disqualified.

Golf course setup is important not only for providing variety to the game we love, but is also an integral part of managing wear and maintaining premium playing conditions. Players who disrespectfully ignore course setup are not only cheaters, but are also compromising playing conditions for those people who play golf. Spread the word — play the game by the Rules, and play the golf course as you find it.

As an agronomist for the Green Section's Northeast Region, MATT NELSON can be found, as is, visiting golf courses throughout New York and New Jersey.