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**CLOSED FOR
MAINTENANCE**

A

ere we go. . . . Another season of extremes has begun. Winter came on suddenly, taking us all by surprise. The unexpected snowfall and single-digit temperatures left many of us with frozen cups in our greens, topdressing sitting in our bins, and snow mold control in our storage facilities. Those of us in the middle of construction projects have had to work around the alternating “warm” and frigidly cold days we’ve been having. As superintendents, we are continually reminded of how most of what we do is dependent on weather, which can be unpredictable and is, unfortunately, completely out of our control.

What should be in our control, however, is the accessibility we have to our golf courses during the season. By accessibility, I mean agreed upon time, on a weekly basis, that the golf course is closed for maintenance. Securing accessibility to the course is essential to achieving not only quality playing conditions and improved job performance, but also enhanced public relations.

Of course, you’re probably wondering why the heck I’m talking about course maintenance in the dead of winter. There’s a method to my madness. Let me explain. . . .

Communicating the Need for Accessibility: Why and Why Now?

First, this is the time of year club managers and officials begin thinking about generating income for the coming season. They agree to book outings and events, often forgetting to consider the maintenance schedules and needs of their “behind-the-scenes” superintendent. They assume we’ll do what we’ve frequently done in the past: “find a way to get the work done.”

What, in fact, happens, however, is that we end up with tasks half completed—or not done at all. We are forced to weave in and out of play, inconveniencing golfers and spending more time and money to complete a job than if we were able to do it without interruption. Quality conditions and member satisfaction are achieved on a hit-or-miss basis.



*Will Heintz
MetGCSA President*

We look like poor managers; our operations appear haphazard; and our membership leaves the course irritated. And worse still, we feel a lack of power and influence that, in the thick of a challenging season, create stress and dissatisfaction.

Insuring Quality Performance

This scenario can be prevented by taking the time at year-end or year-beginning to communicate your needs to the “powers that be” for course accessibility, even if it’s just to close the course to play from 5 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Mondays and maybe two or three days during the spring and fall for aerification. This allows sufficient quality time, for most of us, to get our work done and to do it well.

What’s more, communicating our needs for accessibility and learning about the needs of the other departments exposes schedule conflicts long before they have a chance to occur. This creates a spirit of flexibility and cooperation that goes a long way toward building professional, conflict-free relationships among departments, coworkers, and club members.

With winter here and the 2005 golf season behind us, now is truly a good time to preview the 2006 Outing and Member Events Schedule. An early preview will help to set the stage for a more productive and enjoyable 2006 golf season for all.

Here’s to a harmonious—and successful—2006 golf season. Happy New Year!

*Will Heintz
President*

Feature

MGA's Gene Westmoreland Receives the Met's 2005 John Reid Lifetime Achievement Award

by Glenn Perry, CGCS



In keeping with the strong tradition of presenting the John Reid Lifetime Achievement Award to a person who exemplifies all that is great about the game of golf, the MetGCSA has chosen Gene Westmoreland to receive its 2005 Reid Award.

In announcing Gene's selection, MetGCSA President Will Heintz describes him as "a wonderful supporter of the golf course superintendent."

Will continues, "Gene, who for the uninitiated is the MGA's assistant executive director and tournament director, has remarkable insight into the superintendent as a professional. But just as important, he is, as the award criteria states, 'committed to the game of golf and the science of golf course management.' We are proud to add his name to our list of Reid Award recipients."

Past Reid Award winner and Met PGA Section Executive Director Charles Robson was equally pleased to learn of Gene's honor: "When I think of Gene, I think of the ultimate professional. Whether he's making a ruling, running an event, marking a golf course, chairing a meeting, or addressing a crowd, Gene is always in control and presents an image that not only reflects well on the MGA, but on the game and administration of golf.

"In keeping with the ideals of the John Reid Award," adds Charlie, "his knowledge of and his commitment to the game have helped to set an incredible standard for everyone in the golf community. His selection is not only an honor for him and the MGA, but also the MetGCSA."

Gene's Entrée Into the Golf World

Gene, like many of those who choose the golf business as a career, started out as a caddy. As soon as he was old enough to carry a bag, he began working—and playing whenever he could—at Harrison Country Club, today's Willow Ridge in Harrison, NY.



After graduating from Pace University with a degree in accounting and marketing, he accepted a position in 1966 at his alma mater's Westchester and New York City campuses. He began as an assistant basketball and baseball coach, then was elevated to associate director of athletics, and finally, head basketball and baseball coach. A sports enthusiast, Gene spent summers during his tenure there playing competitive golf. He was a four handicap.

Gene's transition into the golf world began in 1978. After answering an ad in *The New York Times* for an MGA tournament "field team" member, he began working summers—on a per diem basis—with Jay Mottola, who's now the MGA's executive director. He remained at Pace while assisting at MGA championships for the next three years.

Finally, in 1980, he said a fond farewell to the university and accepted a full-time position with the MGA, directing the planning and execution of all MGA-sponsored golf events. "Though my title has never changed, my role, like the game of golf, has evolved and expanded over the years," says Gene.

When talking with Gene about his job, it's obvious that he loves what he does and enjoys tending to all the details that make an event a success. "I feel a tremendous sense of satisfaction at the conclusion of each and every MGA event—from junior tournaments and qualifiers right on through to the majors," says Gene. "When an event is a success, I know it—whether anyone says anything or not. It makes me feel good when all the effort that goes into planning results in a good event."

Promoting the Superintendent

Gene's commitment to promoting the game of golf goes well beyond his work with the MGA. Says Jay Mottola, another past recipient of the Reid Award, "For more than 20 years, Gene has worked closely with the area's golf course superintendents,

and he knows and values the critically important role they play in the success of our clubs and the game of golf."

Gene has served on the executive committee of the Tri-State Turf Research Foundation since its inception in 1990, supporting research that helps superintendents combat turf-related challenges and concerns.

Gene has also worked long and hard to put a dose of reality into tournament preparations. He frequently lectures and writes on the do's and don'ts of tournament prepwork and is currently teaching a class at Rutgers' Cook College titled, "How to Prepare Your Course to Host an Event."

To Gene, an ideal tournament setup does not necessarily mean the greens should be their fastest; more important is that the course setup match the expectations of the day. Explains Gene, "The best setup is one that is in perfect harmony with the size of the field, the weather, and the players' skill level."

According to Jay Mottola, Gene has always been a voice of reason on issues like green speed and height of cut. "Gene is probably the only tournament director," says Jay, "who has gone into a major MGA championship and told the superintendent that it was okay to raise the height of cut and lower the speed of the greens!"

Of course, Gene is quick to remind us of the golden rules of tournament preparation: "The course, naturally, should be in good condition," says Gene. "In addition, all hazards should be properly and clearly marked; 'out of bounds' must be marked and visible; hole locations should be challenging and

logical while requiring a variety of shots and putts; and nothing should ever be done to slow play unnecessarily, such as excessive rough or excessively firm greens."

The Downside to Escalating Expectations

Knowing full well the escalating demands placed on superintendents today, Gene is the first to sympathize with the challenge of surviving what seems to be an ever-expanding golf season: "The season no longer runs from Memorial Day to Labor Day," acknowledges Gene. "It goes from the time the snow melts to the first big snowfall—and sometimes beyond."

Along with the lengthier season is an extended to-do list for superintendents. "No longer is the superintendent simply a greenskeeper, but rather a sophisticated manager in charge of the club's most valuable asset," says Gene. "Superintendents must be conversant with today's employment and environmental laws, control a large budget and staff while staying on top of technical changes, and they must be articulate and able to deal with an upscale membership and board."

To help superintendents manage their increasingly complex operation while maintaining a professional working relationship with their green committee and membership, Gene helped initiate the MGA's Green Chairman Education Series. "The intent of the sessions is to foster a better understanding—and line of communication—between the superintendent and green chairman," says Gene, who feels that the ongoing series of educational sessions have, in many cases, helped bridge the significant gap in understanding that green chairmen have about the superintendent's role and high level of responsibility.

One perception Gene hasn't been able to change, however, is the one relating to the "Augusta Effect."

"People watch televised golf, they see the

“I can think of no more deserving person in the golfing community to receive the Reid Award than Gene Westmoreland.”

— Jay Mattola

level of conditioning that can be achieved by today's talented superintendents, and they have the false expectation that superintendents can—and should—achieve those conditions on a *daily* basis,” says Gene. And then, of course, there's a price to pay—in more ways than one.

As Gene points out, “Maintaining a high level of course conditioning costs money. These rising costs have forced clubs to expand the number of revenue-producing events, which reduces the time superintendents have to work their magic. It's a Catch 22,” adds Gene.

There's another challenge Gene sees with creating faster greens that has less to do with the superintendent and more to do with the game itself: “Super-fast greens create difficulties with hole locations and, worse, jeopardize the very playability of the older, smaller putting greens,” says Gene, adding, “Couple speed with high rough, and the pace of play will slow to crawl, no matter what the skill level of the golfers.”

Committed Through and Through

In addition to the superintendent, Gene has promoted the growth and development of numerous other contributors to the golf industry: a long line of former assistants and interns. “I really enjoy working with young people and watching them move on to successful careers in the golf industry.”

There's Jamie Conklin who's now a rules official for the PGA Tour; Barry McLoughlin who's the executive director of the First Tee at Moshulu; Tom Dunnam who's the MGA director of handicapping, course ratings, and member services; Peter Morrice who's a senior writer at *Golf Digest*; Tom Monteverdi who's an assistant golf professional at Greenwich Country Club; and Peter Speziale who happens to be an aspiring golf course superintendent.

“Despite all Gene's done to advance the role of the golf course superintendent and others in the golf industry,” says Jay Mattola, “he continues to give back to the

game of golf in a number of different ways.”

Listing Gene's contributions, Jay says: “He was the only non-executive director ever elected president of the International Association of Golf Administrators. He's a member of Winged Foot, serving on its Board of Governors. In 2004, when the U.S. Amateur was held at Winged Foot, Gene served on the Executive Committee, and he's serving as the co-chair of the Scoring Committee for this year's U.S. Open. Gene is also a member of the USGA's Mid-Am Committee and has served on the Rules Committee at six USGA National Championships. He currently writes a column on the Rules of Golf for *Met Golfer* and the *Suburban Golfer* and did the same for the *Senior Golfer* when it was still being published.”

As a final note, Jay says, “I can think of no more deserving person in the golfing community to receive the Reid Award than Gene Westmoreland.”

Life After Golf

Gene refers to himself as the weekend commuter. His wife of 15 years, Mary, is a colonel in the United States Army, stationed for the past 3 1/2 years at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Gene spends most weekends with Mary in our nation's capitol.

He has two stepchildren, Christopher and Eileen Pawloski, and one grandson, Mychal Wilson. Mychal is Eileen's son. Both Christopher and Eileen are captains in the U.S. Army, following in their mother's military footsteps. Eileen is currently stationed in Germany, Christopher in Tacoma, WA.

When he's not en route to or from D.C., Gene enjoys playing a few sports, with golf high on his list. Though he boasted a 4 handicap in his youth, he now plays to a 14—usually at Winged Foot, where as a member, he feels “blessed” to be able to continue to play the game he loves on such an historic track.

Always on the move, Gene plays racquetball and, until last year, basketball. He enjoys birding as well, which for him means merely being outdoors with his eyes and ears open.

Being a golf and wildlife enthusiast, it only follows that he's a strong proponent of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for golf courses. He firmly believes that golf course superintendents should remind their membership and their community that golf courses are one of the best animal and plant sanctuaries in the community.

“Superintendents should get the word out that their golf courses are some of the best nature preserves in the Met area and are home to a surprisingly diverse number of wildlife and plant species,” says Gene. “By achieving community recognition, the superintendent can help to alleviate much of the misinformation about golf courses and their impact on the environment.”

A High Honor

When asked how he felt about being chosen for the Met's coveted award, Gene responded, “I am honored to receive the John Reid Lifetime Achievement Award and to be recognized by a group of individuals and an organization that has added so much to the game of golf.”

Gene is the 17th recipient of Reid Award, which was initiated in 1986 and named after the man affectionately known as the “Father of American Golf.”

John Reid was not only the first to play golf in this country (in 1888), he was also instrumental in forming the first golf club at St. Andrews and, later, the USGA and the MGA. Probably even more important to superintendents is that John Reid, by recognizing that golf courses required daily maintenance and care, was, in large part, responsible for establishing the golf course management profession.

Glenn Perry, co-editor of the Tee to Green, is superintendent at Rolling Hills Country Club in Wilton, CT.

Neither Sleet, Nor Rain, Nor *Hurricane* Can Stop the Conference and Show

GCSAA Unveils Special Plans for Its 2006 Conference and Show

Despite what, at first, seemed a conference and show stopper, Hurricane Katrina proved nothing more than a bump in the road for 2006 Golf Industry Show planners, who quickly relocated the conference from New Orleans to Atlanta, GA.

As originally planned, the GCSAA Education Conference will run February 6 to 11, with the Golf Industry Show opening on the 9th. This year, like every year, GCSAA has a whole host of special events and speakers planned. The Education Conference's Opening Session, set for 9 a.m. on February 9, will feature as its keynote speaker golf legend Nancy Lopez.

One of the most celebrated players in women's golf, Lopez has been a star since her youth. She began playing golf at the age of 8 under the guidance of her father, Domingo, and turned professional after her sophomore year of college. She was named "Player of the Year" by the Ladies Professional Golf Association four times (1978-79, 1985, and 1988) and was inducted into the LPGA Tour Hall of Fame in 1987 when she was only 30 years old.

The 2000 recipient of GCSAA's highest honor, the Old Tom Morris Award, Lopez was the captain of the victorious 2005 U.S. Solheim Cup Team and has 48 LPGA Tour victories to her name.

Lopez's appearance at the GCSAA Education Conference Opening Session will be in a question-and-answer format, where attendees will have the opportunity to query her. But Nancy Lopez is only one of several high-profile speakers who will appear during the week.

Joining her at the Opening Session will be Dr. Joe Duich, professor emeritus at Pennsylvania State University. He will receive the 2006 Old Tom Morris Award. The Golf Industry Show General Session, 8:30-9:45 a.m., February 10, will feature a presentation by Marcus Buckingham. Recognized as a prominent author, speaker, and business consultant, Buckingham specializes in inspiring people to find their strengths and long-lasting personal success.

The President's Celebration, 6 p.m.,

February 11, will mark the passing of the gavel by our very own Tim O'Neill, president of GCSAA. Music and entertainment will be provided by Big Bad Voodoo Daddy.

Who's Who on the Slate of Candidates

Speaking of a changing of the guard, a full slate of candidates will be vying for GCSAA Board of Director slots at the February 10 Annual Meeting. Voting members are being asked to elect three officers and two directors. The following candidates will appear on the ballot:

For President

Sean A. Hoolehan, CGCS, at Wildhorse Resort and Casino in Pendleton, OR

For Vice President

Ricky D. Heine, CGCS, general manager and director of grounds at The Golf Club Star Ranch in Austin, TX

For Secretary/Treasurer

- David S. Downing II, CGCS, director of golf operations at The Pearl Golf Links and Ocean Isle Beach Golf Course in Sunset Beach, NC

- Mark D. Kuhns, CGCS, director of grounds at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, NJ

For Director

- Gregg A. Blew, CGCS, at Wellshire Golf Club in Denver, CO

- Gary K. Carls, CGCS, golf operations supervisor at Sunnyvale/Sunken Gardens Golf Course in Sunnyvale, CA

- Patrick R. Finlen, CGCS, director of golf maintenance operations at The Olympic Club in San Francisco, CA

- John C. Miller, CGCS, at The Golf Club at Yankee Trace in Centerville, OH

- Sanford G. Queen, CGCS, manager of golf course operations at Overland Park (Kansas) Golf Club

Mark J. Woodward, CGCS, golf operations

manager for the City of San Diego, is retiring from the board of directors after serving the last year as immediate past president.

Timothy T. O'Neill, CGCS, property manager of the Country Club of Darien in Darien, CT, will serve on the board for one year as immediate past president.

James R. Fitzroy, CGCS, director/superintendent of Wollaston Recreational Facility/Presidents Golf Club in North Quincy, MA, and Robert M. Randquist, CGCS, director of golf course and grounds at Boca Rio Golf Club in Boca Raton, FL, each have one year remaining on their two-year director terms.

About the GCSAA Education Conference and Golf Industry Show

The GCSAA Education Conference, held in conjunction with the Golf Industry Show, is the largest educational conference in the turfgrass management industry. More than 100 seminars and 50 additional hours of educational sessions are offered, covering—as most of you know—all ranges of golf course management, including agronomics, communication, and business management.

The inaugural Golf Industry Show was conducted last February in Orlando in which GCSAA joined forces with the National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA) to present an innovative trade show that features unparalleled networking opportunities and hands-on access to golf course and facility management solutions for professional members of the golf industry.

The Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) will join as a presenting partner in 2007. Also participating as supporting organizations are the Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBA), the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA), and the National Golf Foundation (NGF).

If you're late in registering for the GCSAA Education Conference and Golf Industry Show there's a little time left to do it online at www.golfindustryshow.com or through faxback services at (888) 838-4419. Advance registration is open until January 17.

MetGCSA 2006 Calendar of Events in the Making

Our 2006 Meeting and Social Calendar is nearing completion. We do, however, need volunteers to host a few remaining professional events. To secure a golf meeting, don't delay in calling either of our Tournament Committee co-chairs: Blake Halderman at 914-946-1074 or Chuck Denny at 914-669-5959. Our Social & Welfare Committee co-chairs are Tom Leahy (914-941-8281) and Bob Nielsen (914-234-3779). Both are available to discuss any upcoming social events.

Educational Events

NYSTA's Annual Lobby Day: Turfgrass Advocacy 2006

Wednesday, February 1

Empire State Plaza Concourse, Albany, NY
NYSTA extends this complimentary offer to all green industry professionals. Lobby day offers a priority issue briefing session to inform you about current legislation that could affect the turfgrass and green industry, legislative appointments with your local elected officials, and a luncheon with a legislator. Join NYSTA in Albany and have a chance to be heard.

Please contact Jill Cyr for more information at jill@nysta.org or 800-873-8873 or 518-783-1229. Registration deadline is Friday, January 20!

NYSTA Southeast Regional Conference

Monday, February 27

Holiday Inn Suffern, Suffern, NY

Geared toward landscape and turfgrass professionals, this conference will include a trade show and a variety of sessions on topics related to golf turf, lawn and landscape and sports turf. Participants will hear talks on the best plant and site selection methods for controlling insect infestation and diseases, plant health care for the reduction of pesticides, and identifying trees and their key pests. The early bird session will include a talk from Michigan State's Dr. Joe Vargas, followed by legislative and regulatory updates.

To obtain a conference brochure and registration form, call NYSTA at 800-873-8873 or 518-783-1229, or contact the organization by email: nysta@nysta.org.

The 9th Annual New England Regional Turfgrass Conference & Show

Monday - Thursday, March 6 - 9

Rhode Island Convention Center, Providence, RI

This year's annual conference and show's educational sessions will bring you cutting edge turfgrass management tactics and techniques, while the three-day trade show will offer you easy access to the latest in equipment, products, and supplies offered by more than 400 exhibitors. Call the NERTF Office at 401-841-5490 for further information.

MetGCSA Events

Business Meeting

Tuesday or Wednesday, March 21 or 22

Metropolis Country Club
White Plains, NY
Host: Tony Grasso

Two-Ball Qualifier

Tuesday, April 25

Centennial Golf Club
Carmel, NY
Host: Will Heintz

Superintendent/Guest Tournament

Tuesday, May 9

Wykagyl Country Club
New Rochelle, NY
Host: Mike Scott

Family Picnic

Date & Site OPEN

Invitational Tournament

Wednesday, June 21

GlenArbor Golf Club
Bedford Hills, NY
Host: Ken Benoit, CGCS

Education Meeting

July

Date & Site OPEN

Poa Annual Tournament

August

Date & Site OPEN

Summer Social

August

Old Oaks Country Club
Purchase, NY
Host: Mark Millett

MetGCSA Championship and Met Area Team Championship Qualifier

Tuesday, September 5

Hudson National Golf Club
Croton-on-Hudson, NY
Host: Chris Smith, CGCS

Superintendent/Green Chairman Tournament

Tuesday, October 31

Sleepy Hollow Country Club
Scarborough, NY
Host: Tom Leahy, CGCS

Annual Assistants Tournament

Date & Site OPEN

Met Area Team Championship

Date & Site TBA

Annual Meeting

November

Date & Site OPEN

MetGCSA Christmas Party

Saturday, December 2

Mount Kisco Country Club
Mount Kisco, NY
Host: Fred Scheyhing, CGCS

Century Country Club Hosts Season Finale

The final stop on the 2005 tournament schedule brought us to Century Country Club in Purchase, NY, for the Superintendent/Green Chairman competition.

Contestants enjoyed a blustery, sunny day and challenging course conditions, courtesy of host Superintendent Kevin Seibel. The Par Four 12th hole was driveable, playing downwind with the tees forward, and the Par Three 17th hole played 250-plus dead into the wind.

Special thanks to Kevin and his crew—and to the clubhouse and dining room staff—for making this a special day.

Here are the winning scores:

Low Net Winners

- 66 Chuck Denny/Don Vollrath, *Salem GC*
- 68 Rich Browne/Pat Catharon, *Garrison GC*
- 71 Matt Severino/Dennis O'Leary, *Scarsdale GC*

Low Gross Winners

- 75 Jim Swiatlowski/Steve Claisse, *Montammy GC*
- 80 Dave Dudones/Mike Morton, *North Jersey CC*
- 82 Glen Dube/Larry Andronaco, *Oak Hills Park Golf Course*

Closest to the Pin

- Eric O'Neill, *Towers CC* Hole #13, 7'
- Jim Gilland, *Pelham CC* Hole #17, 10' 5"
- Glen Dube, *Oak Hills Park GC* Hole #17, 6' 7"
- Mike Morton, *North Jersey CC* Hole #4, 5' 5"

— Chuck Denny

The Leaders in the Annual Assistants Championship

On October 20, MetGCSA assistants were able to experience life as a member of Anglebrook Golf Club, the site of this year's MetGCSA Assistants Championship. The weather was great, the course was superbly conditioned, and our gracious hosts, Assistant Superintendent Scott Imbro and Superintendent Lou Quick, provided contestants with a memorable event.

PGA Pro Rob Davis scored the tournament, which ended with the following leaders:

First Place Team

- 59 Mike Brunelle, *Bedford Golf & Tennis Club*
- Michael Guinan, *Blind Brook Club*
- Scott Olson, *Scarsdale GC*

Second Place Team

- 60 Jake Kellar, *GlenArbor GC*
- Todd Krantz, *GlenArbor GC*
- Bryan Diggle, *Turf Products Corporation*

Third Place Team

- 62 Adam Poplawski, *Old Oaks CC*
- Brett Richards, *Sleepy Hollow CC*
- John Dzurilla, *Century CC*
- Andrew Hannah, *Century CC*

Closest to the Pin

- Andrew Hannah, *Century CC* 12' 4"

Longest Drive

- Jake Green, *CC of New Canaan*

Members On the Move

• **Jason Podris**, formerly an assistant at Century Country Club in Purchase, NY, has accepted an assistant superintendent's position at The K Club in Straffan, County Kildare, Ireland. His phone number in Ireland: 011 353 86871 5977.

• **Rick Schock**, formerly with Turf Products Corporation in Enfield, CT, has accepted the superintendent's position at Aspetuck Valley Country Club in Weston, CT.

New Members

We'd like to welcome the following new members:

- **Jason Anderson**, Class C, Old Oaks Country Club, Purchase, NY.
- **Scott Curry**, Class C, Lake Success Golf Course, Great Neck, NY.
- **Dennis DeSanctis Jr.**, Class AE, Syngenta Crop Protection, Greensboro, NC.
- **Jeff Gennarelli**, Class C, Metropolis Country Club, White Plains, NY.
- **Gregory Tudor**, Class C, Hudson National Golf Club, Croton-on-Hudson, NY.

Well Wishes

Wishing Lucille Grasso, wife of Metropolis Superintendent **Tony Grasso**, a speedy recovery.

Special Note

Aquatrols of Paulsboro, NJ, is pleased to announce its Third Annual Aquatrols Scholarship Essay Contest. The contest is open to children of turf management professionals who will be attending an accredited college or university during the 2006-07 academic year. Entrants will compete for a first-place scholarship of \$2,000 and a runner-up scholarship of \$1,000. Full instructions, rules, and eligibility requirements are posted on the Aquatrols website, www.aquatrols.com. For further information, call Marketing Manager Colleen Clifford at 800-257-7797.

Are We Outdistancing Ourselves?

The Powers That Be Work to Put the Brakes on Golf Equipment Advances

by Chip Lafferty

The game of golf has changed over the past 15 to 20 years—and some might say, not for the better. New, more rigorous standards of golf course maintenance, along with advances in today's equipment—both clubs and balls—have changed the way the game is played. It's become less a game of strategy and shot making and more a game of power with golfers able to take their high-tech clubs and drive their high-tech balls so far that many of the nation's best courses are becoming obsolete. Or they're played in a way that was not intended by their original architects.

In an attempt to temper manufacturers' quest to create the ultimate driver head and the longer golf ball—and ensure the game's integrity for years to come—the governing bodies of golf—the USGA and the Royal & Ancient (R&A)—have proposed new-and-improved testing procedures, equipment, and guidelines for golf balls and clubs.

Phase I, which governs golf clubs, has been approved and includes a state-of-the-art testing device. Phase II, which targets golf balls, is designed to take into account advances in both golf equipment and player ability.

Here's a look at how these proposals are shaping the future development of clubs and balls—and the game of golf, itself.

PHASE I GUIDELINES:

Keeping Drivers From Shifting Into Overdrive

In attempt to keep tabs on new golf club development, a new device has been approved for testing a driver's ability—or overability—to drive a golf ball. Called the Pendulum Tester, it's designed to measure the flexibility or springlike effect of a driver head.

Replacing the old Coefficient of Restitution (COR) test device, the Pendulum Tester has the advantage of being not only simple to use and easy to maintain, but also portable and nondestructive. In fact, a test can be performed at the location of a golf event—without destroying the club in the process. What's



more, the test takes far less time than the COR to complete, and it doesn't require the use of a golf ball.

Basically, this device uses a metal mass suspended on a pendulum to strike the club face at low-impact speeds. Then it measures the time of contact between the metal mass and the club face. It's this time of contact or Characteristic Time (CT), that determines the club head's flexibility—or ability to drive the ball. The longer the metal mass stays on the club face, the more flexible—and hard driving—it is.

Measured in microseconds, the CT limit has been set at 250 microseconds. This measure correlates with the old COR reading of .830, so any clubs that conformed under the old COR test will not have to be subjected to the Pendulum Tester. Clubs manufactured after the adoption of the Pendulum Tester, however, must conform to the limits set by this new testing device.

It's too bad Kenny Perry didn't have the Pendulum Tester on hand a couple of years ago when he was concerned about his driver passing the test on Wednesday of the Sony Open. Instead, he put his club away and subsequently missed the cut. To make matters worse, when his club was eventually passed through the Pendulum Tester, it was determined to be legal!

PHASE II GUIDELINES:

Battling Ball Distance

The other side of this distance struggle is the ball itself. Rules have been in place for years governing the weight, diameter, spherical symmetry, initial velocity, and overall travel distance of the golf ball. Unfortunately, the velocity and distance testing equipment have been outmoded by modern equipment technology and player ability—and they just plain don't work anymore.

Initial velocity standards, for instance, have been overcome by dimple patterns on golf balls which give them "wings" and make the balls stay in the air longer without exceeding initial velocity standards. Without a rule in place to measure aerodynamic qualities of a ball, the ball was able to travel farther and still conform to the tests that were in place.

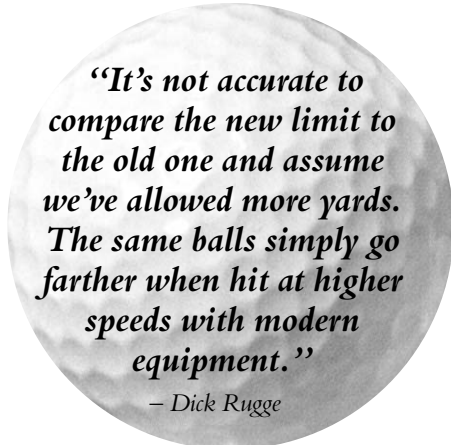
Yes, I know you're thinking that the overall distance standard should cover this, right? Well, it did to a certain extent; however the overall distance standard was measured with a mechanical fellow named Iron Byron. He happened to be using a club with a steel shaft and wooden head with a speed of 109 mph—not exactly what today's players are accustomed to. Therefore, it became clear that new testing procedures were necessary

to more closely monitor not only advances in equipment, but the modern players' club head speed.

After years of work and discussion with manufacturers, a new method for testing balls has been developed. It takes into account swing speed, equipment, and launch conditions used by today's longer hitting PGA Tour players.

"Through this new test," says USGA Senior Technical Director Dick Rugge in a recent press release, "we'll be able to establish a precise and relevant performance limit regarding golf ball distance. That means any additional distance gains will not be due to design or construction changes in the ball itself. We think this new test provides the right framework for us to utilize state-of-the-art technology to test golf balls in a manner that is relevant to today's game and not the one of a generation ago."

These changes don't mean you have to go running out to buy up all the Pro V1s; they



"It's not accurate to compare the new limit to the old one and assume we've allowed more yards. The same balls simply go farther when hit at higher speeds with modern equipment."

— Dick Rugge

will continue to conform under the new rules. According to Rugge, this new test procedure is not designed to take balls off the "conforming ball" list.

The New-and-Improved Standards

Here's a look at how the standards—particularly the overall distance standards (ODS)—have been changed:

- Swing speed has been increased to 120 mph from 109 mph.
- A nonbranded titanium club head with a COR of .820 has replaced the laminated wooden head that was in use.
- A modern, nonbranded setup ball has replaced the current setup ball that has been used. The new ball test maintains the current ball launch angle of 10 degrees, the current backspin at 42 revolutions per second, and a steel shaft in the test club.

By increasing the swing speed by 11 mph, the ball flies 22 yards longer. Add a titanium

club head with a COR of .820, and the springlike effect boosts distance another 8 yards. But instead of increasing the current ODS of 296.8 yards by a full 30 yards, the USGA proposed to set the limit using the new ball test procedure at 320 yards, or seven fewer yards than what was achieved.

Dick Rugge explains, "It's not accurate to compare the new limit to the old one and assume we've allowed more yards. The same balls simply go farther when hit at higher speeds with modern equipment. By updating the test and modernizing procedures, it is inevitable that the ODS limit would need to rise to reflect the changes in the test methods.

"For example," he continues, "if you modernized the test procedures but left the limit where it now stands, nearly every ball that now conforms would fail under the new procedure. With that in mind, we've proposed to set the limit at a place that provides meaningful restrictions on distance, tightens the ODS standard by seven yards, maintains the continuity of the current conforming list, and provides a framework through which we can monitor our test procedures and modify them as player swing speeds and other conditions change."

Upholding Equipment Standards

In 2002, the USGA and the R&A developed a Statement of Principles governing equipment rules. "We are concerned about increases in distance from any source," says Rugge, "and we'll continue to remain vigilant and monitor trends.

"If distance continues to increase from any source—balls, clubs, agronomy, or enhanced physical fitness—then we'll need to consider how to uphold the Statement of Principles."

With the club and ball technology growing so rapidly and the lack of sophisticated testing equipment to check performance, the USGA and the R&A have had to work very hard for many years to please all parties—from the manufacturers to the pro golfers and general golfing public. Too little too late for some of the true national treasures that we will never see host a U.S. Open championship again.

We can only hope that, with these new testing procedures and guidelines in effect, golfers will once again have fun—and enjoy golf as the game of strategy we all know and love.

Chip Lafferty, a Tee to Green committee member, is superintendent at Rye Golf Club in Rye, NY.