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USGA GREEN SECTION TURF ADVISORY SERVICE REPORT

WINTERS RUN GOLF CLUB Bel Air, Maryland

August 30, 2006

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INTRODUCTION

The following report is offered to summarize the major points of discussion during our half-day visit to Winters Run Golf Club on Wednesday, August 30, 2006. This report will include observations, suggestions and recommendations made during our tour of your facility.

First, we would like to apologize again for arriving late for our USGA Green Section visit. Even though circumstances were out of our control, we never like to leave people waiting, no matter what the reason. This did result in an abbreviated Green Section visit on Wednesday, August 30th. As promised we will endeavor to stop-by to complete the second part of our visit on Thursday afternoon, August 31st.

This report will be an attempt to combine all the discussions from both days of our visit into one concise report. Obviously, some important decisions need to be made within the relatively near future on those problems that do exist at Winters Run Golf Club.

Additionally, our opinion was asked about ways to make the golf course better, both in terms of the turfgrass and also in terms of the facility itself. In preparing and presenting this report, some items or details may have been missed. If so, please let us know. We will be delighted to answer any and all questions. After all, the USGA is a service organization dedicated to making the game of golf better both in terms of turfgrass as well as the courses on which the game is played.

As it developed, there were several purposes for our visit. First and foremost, everyone wanted to discuss ways to minimize or mitigate the effects of flood waters when this type of damage reoccurs on the golf course and no doubt, it will.

There are also ways to speed the recovery of the affected turfgrass. The goal is to have good fairways and roughs for the fall, spring and hopefully summer golfing season of 2007.

Finally, a long list of topics were discussed to make, again, the whole facility which is Winters Run Golf Club better and hopefully more appealing to the existing members, new members and their guests. While this may be a more difficult goal to achieve, we will try.

Again, if any questions arise at all about any aspect of our visit or this report, please know the agronomists of the USGA are just a phone call or an e-mail away.

This report will be a departure from the traditional format of USGA Green Section reports primarily due to the concern about the flooding that does occur on the lower golf holes of your course, the Third, Fourth, Sixth and Eleventh holes.

FLOODING – PREVENTION

1. **Water Removal Options.** In all candor, it has been our experience that due to a combination of factors, the first being the period of weather extremes our region of the country has been experiencing and with the development of new houses and businesses upstream of your golf course, there no doubt will be a reoccurrence of flooding. It is a fact.

Local and state governments realize the problem but to date, there has been more than a little reluctance to do very much about it. If there ever would be a desire to explore how work can be pursued through official channels, contact Mr. Bob Booker, President of the Country Club of Maryland and/or Mr. Bill Augustin, Superintendent, (410) 823-6725, Country Club of Maryland. This golf course is on the verge of completing a similar (but smaller) flood control project. It has taken them something like six years to gain the necessary permits. Nonetheless, if there is a desire to discuss how this club is working to achieve their goal of controlling flood waters (to the extent possible) this would be a parallel course with a similar problem.



Flood damage management is never easy to accomplish. Hopefully, contained in this report are a number of suggestions to help make a bad situation, better. See report.

If one would accept the fact that flooding will no doubt reoccur, the next question to be asked is, "If we cannot keep the lower holes from flooding, what can we do to speed the exit of the water once the flooding recedes?" There are a number of ways to accomplish this goal.

The first is to remove whatever snags that may exist in the stream. Such snags backup water which makes a bad situation, worse. The goal is to smooth the flow of the water through the property. Unfortunately, this could be easier said-than-done. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning.

The second aspect of speeding the removal of flood waters is surface drainage. There simply is no substitute for surface drainage swales to direct water out of the property once the stream drops. In the case of your Third fairway, work needs to be done to achieve better surface drainage. During our visit, several different techniques were discussed.

In many ways, the same recommendation holds for the Fourth fairway. The Sixth and Eleventh fairways have lesser degrees of problems but no doubt, all have pockets that hold water. Again, surface drainage is the most important drainage simply because it moves a lot of water, fast.

2. **Internal Soil Drainage.** This is a type of drainage that removes excess water from the ground. You are right, drain lines do need to be installed once surface contours have been established. There need to be openings to the surface both to speed the exit of the water and also to allow any silting to be cleaned out.

In summary, while there may not be any viable option to keep the lower holes from flooding, there are ways to speed the drainage of water out of the fairways first by surface drainage and then by internal soil drainage. It is a lot of work but obviously, it is needed.

3. **Flooding-Mitigation.** What does this mean? Basically, to try to establish the type of grass in the fairways of these lower holes that simply tolerates flood waters better, tolerates silt accumulations better and generally, survives better. Of the grass options, perennial ryegrass is the least submergence tolerant, bermudagrass is better. Bermudagrass is best in terms of surviving flood waters in general and summer flood waters in particular.

Mr. Hedrick is correct. The best of these new generation bermudagrasses is Patriot. Additionally, from seed, the Riviera variety is also available. FYI.

In any case, Patriot is a new generation winter hardy, fine-textured bermudagrass available either from sprigs or sod. Of all the bermudagrass options, it is the best.

In fact, while not specifically discussed during our visit, Belle Haven Country Club in Arlington, Virginia experienced a major flood about the same time as your flood. Water sat on their golf course for days. Practically all the grass was killed where water sat except for areas of bermudagrass that survived. It survived and is now thriving. Therefore, if anyone would be looking for an example of where bermudagrass survived a similar and even worse flood, it would be Belle Haven Country Club. Interestingly, they want to reestablish bentgrass but it is amazing how much bermudagrass survived. Their Superintendent is Mike Augustin, (703) 329-1336. We're sure he will be delighted to confirm this fact.

4. **Flooding – Short Term Recovery.** In the short term, the overseeding grass of choice is perennial ryegrass. With the cooler weather, the ryegrass germinates quickly, develops a nice thick turf and the seed is relatively inexpensive. Again, this is more of a short term improvement where bermudagrass may in fact be a better long term option.

Further, be sure to keep the ryegrass well fertilized and also control weeds in any areas to be reseeded. It is amazing how weed populations explode without the competition from grass.

In terms of weed control, larger patches of crabgrass can be controlled with a Full 1 lb. rate of Drive. The timing and rates are on the label.

For yellow nutsedge and green kyllinga control, your options are limited. Basically, the best recommendation we can make is to spray the new Dismiss herbicide. It is the only product we know of which is safe on cool-season grasses and also controls both of these members of the sedge family.

FAIRWAYS

1. **Fairway Conclusions.** The harsh reality is that, between the weather extremes now common in this part of the country and upstream development, the Club may not be able to do very much about the amount of water that enters the property. It can do something about how rapidly the water exits the property. You need good surface as well as subsurface drainage to accomplish this goal.

The next step would be to plant a type of grass that simply tolerates flooding better than the other traditional grass options used in this part of the country. Specifically, bermudagrass. In fact, this change to bermudagrass is in the process of being accomplished by Hobbits Glen Golf Club and its sister course, Fairway Hills. It may be a thought to take a field trip to see how this work is progressing. Especially, to know when the fairways were sprigged, the amount of sprigs and also the follow-up care. This includes pre-emerge herbicides. We believe Ronstar is the product of choice for any area to be sprigged.

Again, if any questions arise on any of these thoughts, please give our office a call. Some profound decisions need to be made and if our input is needed, just let us know.

2. **Bermudagrass-Shade.** Mr. Hendrick is correct. For all of its strengths, there are some inherent weaknesses to bermudagrass. The first is shade. Of all the warm-season golf course turfgrasses available to us, bermudagrass is the least shade tolerant. Therefore, tree lines need to be cut back to provide as much sunlight as possible for this type of grass to thrive. Thus, some tree work may be necessary along both sides of the Eleventh fairway.

While winter color and playability may not be a huge concern, there may be a few weeks when dormant bermudagrass, prior to the time it greens up, simply may not look or play well, especially, in wet areas that may have flooded over the winter. However, the few weeks of inconvenience may be a small price for growing better grass throughout the rest of the year.

Bermudagrass is also quite tolerant to a long list of herbicides including Monument for sedge and kyllinga control. Bermudagrass is also quite tolerant to other herbicides for crabgrass and goosegrass control. Also, winter weed control can be effected using products like Roundup or Revolver. Agronomically, bermudagrass fairways are easier to manage than other cool-season grasses, especially, in areas of flooding.

One final, final point. If there ever is a desire to overseed bermudagrass for winter color, such an overseeding could only be scheduled the second year after the bermudagrass has been completely established. You just need time for a true sod to be formed before any overseeding can be considered. Additionally, bermudagrass needs at least 100 days of good growth for its long term survival. Therefore, if there ever would be a desire for winter overseeding, that perennial ryegrass would have to be sprayed out using any number of herbicides sometime in early June. This should give the bermudagrass enough time to grow.

Perhaps these thoughts are premature but, we thought it appropriate to include them in this report.

GREENS

1. **Collars.** Overall, the greens seemed to have tolerated the season well. The only areas of concern were the collars around the greens. To make a long discussion short, of all the grass options available to you, perennial ryegrass makes the most sense for use on collars. Indeed, all one has to do is look at the weak collar around the Third green. The grass that is thriving is...perennial ryegrass. Perhaps Mother Nature is telling us something!

The fall would be a good time to interseed weak collars to perennial ryegrass.

2. **Crabgrass and Goosegrass Control.** In answer to a good question from Mr. Smith, no, we would not change the crabgrass control product applied on your greens; specifically, the Ronstar/Bensulide combination. The only suggestion may be to apply the material two weeks later. The goal would be to control the later germinating goosegrass. Give it a try.

As was discussed, two applications of any preemerge herbicide on greens is risky. The herbicide residual may simply last too long.

If there would be an exception to this rule, it would be for crabgrass control in fairways, roughs and green surrounds. One application of preemerge crabgrass control herbicides just does not last very long. It takes two applications regardless of the product used. In planning for the future, consider changing chemistries away from Balan to either Dimension (first choice) or Pendimethalin (second choice). Research from the University of Maryland has shown that one application just is not enough, you need two applications of most any product for better crabgrass and goosegrass control. Again, the one exception is the greens.

3. **Growth Regulator.** At the end of our visit, the growth regulator program was discussed. In a nutshell, keep at it. The TGR applications will, over time, gradually increase the amount of bentgrass in the greens especially at slightly higher mowing heights. Another suggestion, and it is only a suggestion, may be to slightly increase the rate of the Trimmit both through the fall and then into the spring of 2007. During the summer, you do have to be careful with this growth regulator on greens but, you do have the option of switching to Primo. This can all be discussed next spring. Suffice it to say growth regulators can be effective tools to maintain healthy bentgrass, to suppress *Poa annua* and also to maintain good green speed.



In addition to discussing your flooding problems, ways to make your golf course better in both the short and long terms were also discussed. This includes the integration of putting green rolling, growth regulators and mowing heights. See report.

One final thought. Always remember that biostimulants can offset the effect of growth regulators.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Trends. During our visit, a number of options were discussed to make your golf course better...better looking, better playing and perhaps better even to market as a good place to join. The next section of our report will deal with some of those thoughts. Please know these are only thoughts. They are offered in the spirit in which they are given. Basically, we see something over 130 golf courses each year. This does give us a glimpse into the industry. Specifically, into what is, “hot” and what is, “not.” It is not always good to be trendy but there are definite trends in our industry that are inescapable. These include:

A. *A Quality Practice Facility.* This includes a quality Practice Range and even potentially, a Short Game Area. If there is one advantage that Winters Run Golf Club does have, it is space. Potentially, you do have a good location for a Short Game Area and an equally good location for a big, wide and long Practice Range. Your tee size may be limited, more on this later.



The game of golf is becoming a game of practice. Your course has the opportunity to develop a world class Practice Facility that can help attract (and keep) members. See report.

The game of golf is becoming a game of practice. If the Club could develop a great practice facility, this in itself is an attraction for an increasing number of golfers who simply like to practice. It is a fact.

B. *Health and Fitness.* An increasing number of golf courses are offering their members the option of health and fitness centers. The goal, we think, is to provide more reasons why someone would want to be a member. Golf courses in more urban areas could well justify some type of health and fitness center for the members. It is a thought.

C. *Child Care.* That's right, child care! Obviously, not every golf course is developing such a system but, it is worth mentioning nonetheless. Child care obviously may be less of an option at a golf club vs. a country club.

In any case, these are the three areas of emphasis we see more and more golf courses considering as they look towards the future. Our opinion was asked and, this is it.

One final point. Your current Practice Range tee needs work. We could not agree more with the group that the tee should be made as big as possible, the front lowered for better visibility, a target range should be created, the range lengthened and a strip of all-weather mats on some type of concrete strip to make the whole practice experience, better.

CONCLUSION

Well, that's about it. Again, if any questions arise, give our office a call. Perhaps something good can come from all of your flood damage. It could be to redirect the golf course to develop the type of turf that simply, can be more successful, better looking, more playable (especially in the summer) and potentially, even better to maintain. These are all good reasons why bermudagrass may be an option for some or all of your fairways.

This concludes our summary of the major points of discussion during our visit and tour of your golf course. If any questions arise concerning this visit, our report or any other area, please feel free to call our office. We are here to help.

Sincerely,

Stanley J. Zontek/m

Stanley J. Zontek
Director

SJZ:ps

Walter Smith, Golf Course Superintendent
Bob Hendrick, Golf Professional/General Manager