



COURSE CONSULTING SERVICE

Onsite Visit Report

Wildwood Golf Club

Allison Park, Pennsylvania

Visit Date: July 9, 2021

Present:

Paul J. Busang, Green Committee Member

Adam Maloney, Green Committee Member

Tim Mooney, Head Golf Professional

Tom Fisher, Golf Course Superintendent

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The USGA Green Section develops and disseminates sustainable management practices that produce better playing conditions for better golf.

Executive Summary

It was great to return to Wildwood Golf Club on July 9, 2021. This was the first time that a couple committee members accompanied the course tour. There was no set agenda for the visit, but it was nice to have different perspectives and get a feel for what members are saying about the golf course, rather than Tom and I discussing agronomics that will help grass health and playability, but without much more context than that.

This tour was like many of the others where we casually made our way through the golf course stopping whenever a question came up or we saw something that needed further discussion. We reviewed a wide range of topics from how excessive heat can affect *Poa annua* and *Poa trivialis* in the rough, the size of the practice tee, and Number 5 fairway.

The rough and putting green conversations and more specifically how heat affects plant health was prevalent on this visit because your area had just come through a stretch of excessively hot weather. It was clear that there are areas of weaker grasses in the rough that cannot handle hot and/or dry weather for very long.

The conversation on the 5th fairway, we have had in the past. However, because of the microburst storm that passed through the golf course earlier this year and the subsequent tree damage, we used the opportunity to look at the tree population on the left side of Number 5 and discuss the trees that will be removed resulting from storm damage, and which trees should be added to that list to improve turf health and hopefully slow the velocity of golf balls before they bounce into the adjacent stream.

Lastly, we looked at the size of the practice tee and discussed any way possible to increase hitting space. Mr. Fisher and I have discussed the practice facility in the past, but it has been several years since we actually stood on the tee and looked at how small the three individual teeing surfaces are. The practice tee was undersized years ago but the small size of the tee is highlighted by the increase in rounds and traffic after the Coronavirus pandemic. Simply put, the three tiers are too small to handle the increased rounds and should be enlarged if members expect to have usable grass later in the summer.

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Putting Greens

Observations

1. **Our only agronomic conversation on the putting greens was the appearance of stressed *Poa annua* following several consecutive days of extremely hot temperature stress in conjunction with dry weather.**
 - *Poa annua* is a winter annual that performs much better when the weather is cool and damp. During the heat of the summer or when weather is hot and dry, managing plant health is tricky. The difference between healthy *Poa* and discolored and borderline dead *Poa* during the heat of the summer can be the difference in syringing greens to cool them down or missing that window by an hour. It really is that close.
 - Fortunately, Mr. Fisher said that the putting greens looked much better during our visit than they did the day before. His team was able to get a nice irrigation cycle on them overnight and the weather was fairly cloudy with some intermittent showers during our visit. Moreover, the putting greens got a little bit of nitrogen fertility in conjunction with the overnight watering to help them grow through stress.

Recommendations

1. **This really isn't a recommendation as much as a reconfirmation of what Mr. Fisher and his team do to manage high quality putting surfaces. I know stressed *Poa annua* has happened at Wildwood and will happen again sometime in the future. This is not an indication of a mistake or a miscalculation of the weather as much as it shows the difficulty of walking a very fine line managing *Poa annua* putting surfaces.**

Rough

Observations

1. **Weaker grasses in the primary rough went dormant after several consecutive days of high-temperature stress. It appears as though most of the dormant grass was either *Poa annua* or *Poa trivialis*.**
 - *Poa annua* is a winter annual and consequently, does not perform work very well under high-temperature stress or in dry environments for extended periods. In fact, *Poa annua* is one of the weakest grass varieties, especially in the rough. It will very quickly go dormant, and if either the weather does not change or sufficient irrigation cannot be applied, it could go from dormant to dead in just a few days.
 - *Poa trivialis* has one of the most, if not the most efficient dormancy mechanism of any cool season grass. It will go dormant almost as quickly as *Poa annua* will, but it stays dormant for a long time before it dies.
 - Dealing with *Poa trivialis* on the golf course is generally a good news/bad news situation in the summer. The bad news is it looks terrible when it goes dormant. The good news is it will come back with the onset of cooler weather, or more frequent rain. Depending on how much *Poa trivialis* you have, the good news could also be bad news if you are trying to get rid of it.

- Some of the dormant grass was found in close proximity to the putting greens. I only mention this because if you ever thought you were going to renovate areas of rough, I would start in high play or high traffic areas like fairway landing zones or putting green surrounds. Since we found a few examples around the putting greens, I would consider sodding large areas to a better suited grass like turf-type tall fescue or low mow Kentucky bluegrass if resources are available.

Recommendations

- 1. I already mentioned sodding large areas if resources are available. Stripping weaker grass from a large area and replacing with a better suited grass will remove a problem and reestablish healthy grass and a better playing surface quicker than relying on seed.**
- 2. For other areas of the golf course that are less in-play, or if resources are prohibitive, relying on selective herbicides and seed is okay. For the rough I would apply Tenacity® (mesotrione) over any area with a high population of *Poa annua*, *Poa trivialis* or creeping bentgrass. Tenacity will bleach plants white, not allowing them to produce sugars and carbohydrates because of a complete lack of chlorophyll production.**
 - Apply Tenacity at a rate of 4 to 5 fluid ounces of product per acre every two weeks. If creeping bentgrass is the target weed in areas, 5 ounces will need to be applied. There is a label restriction of no more than 16 ounces of product applied per acre per year, but I would plan on at least two if not three consecutive applications to control creeping bentgrass.



Picture 1: This area is right off the 1st green, and it isn't the only area like this. Given how much *Poa annua* and *Poa Triv* there is in the rough it would be worthwhile to consider selective herbicides and seed or sod to establish a more uniform rough.

- Tenacity can be applied with preemergence herbicides like Barricade® if you plan to apply a preemergence to the rough in either the spring or fall to control *Poa annua* germination.

Number 5 Fairway

Observations

1. What to do with Number 5 fairway has been a topic every year since I started visiting Wildwood Golf Club. The fairway is so severely sloped from right to left that it is virtually impossible to keep a golf ball on the fairway, regardless of where it lands.
2. We did not discuss the pitch of the fairway during this visit as much as we did the condition of the rough before the left side fairway bunker. Because of coinciding shade and root competition, in conjunction with a traffic funnel created by the positioning of

one tree and the bunker, the rough in that area was thin, if not totally bare in patches. As it was explained to me, balls that land in this area when the golf course is dry tend to hit hardpan and deflect left either into the adjacent stream or bounce off other trees and make it very difficult to find your golf ball.

Recommendations

1. Remove the tree inside the cart path closest to the bunker.

- This one tree is the cause of many of the issues on the left side of Number 5. Whether shade, traffic funnel or exposed tree roots, this tree is the principal cause of all of those.
- In fact, I'd like to make a general blanket statement for the golf course that every tree inside the cart paths should be removed. These trees are often the cause of turf health concerns and create traffic funnels. To date, I have not seen a good golf course tree inside of a cart path that was worth saving.

2. There are already several trees marked for removal next to the stream on the left side from the microburst the came through the golf course. Remove those trees as planned and see how much more sunlight reaches the ground in that area, but my guess is that you will need to remove several more trees to adequately improve the growing environment.



Picture 2: The tree inside the cart path (left photo) is the principal culprit to thin turf and why so many golf balls are deflected left. Remove that tree, and the trees marked for removal from storm damage to allow for better sunlight in that area. Another idea is to use the surface contour and add a little more soil to create a berm (blue line) where trees used to be to slow the velocity of balls going left.

- Since thin or bare turf is the primary concern and the reason why grass does not grow well in this area and, consequently, golf balls hit and bounce into the stream, reducing the overall tree population in this area will give Mr. Fisher and his team a much better chance of growing a healthy dense stand of grass.
- ### 3. The last idea that I think would work is not a substitute for tree removal but an additional feature to be added in conjunction with tree removal is a small berm over where many of the trees are to be removed from. You could even bury roots and stumps with the berm if

it is constructed deep enough so that roots or remaining stumps are not hit by a club. This berm would help deflect water away from the playing surface and more to the point of this conversation, would slow the velocity of golf balls rolling through the rough so that they are less likely to roll into the stream.

Practice Tee

Observations

1. **The practice tee consists of three individual surfaces that are undersized individually and collectively still do not provide sufficient hitting space for the number of rounds that Wildwood sees annually.**
 - What's more, the three tiers themselves are not large enough, but there is a lot of unused space between the tiers and on either side of the individual surfaces.

Recommendations

1. **Golf has always been and will likely always be a game of practice. Even during the 2008 and 2009 recession when golf courses saw a dramatic decrease in play, national surveys indicated that golfers found it difficult to find four or more hours to play a round of golf, but cited they still tried to find at least an hour or two several times per week to go to the practice area and hone their game. This mentality has not changed, in fact it is increased as more players take up the game. Wildwood Golf Club needs to plan for an increase in rounds and that starts by increasing the size and usable space on your practice tee.**
 - The three tiers need a complete overhaul. There are different options here, and I'm not sure we came up with a conclusion during our visit, but we discussed expanding the individual pads as much as possible in their current footprint to increase space. Depending on where the tee is to be expanded to and the grasses growing in that area, Mr. Fisher felt that some of the areas had enough creeping bentgrass or *Poa annua* that the height of cut could be gradually lowered until it matched tee height. In conjunction with lowering the height of cut, there will be some grasses that do not survive and you will



Picture 3: Capturing as much space as possible is the only way to keep grass on any of the three very undersized tees.

need to interseed creeping bentgrass in the process.

- Another option is to increase the size of the individual pads, but rather than lowering the height of cut, strip the existing grass and replacing with creeping bentgrass. This project will take less time to achieve the finished product but will cost more money up front.
- The last option, and one that I think you should ultimately consider and do when the resources are made available is to completely re-contour the three tiers. It would likely be a combination of lowering portions and raising others to meet somewhere in the middle but creating one large surface or no more than two tiers would be more efficient and effective use of the space.
- So, to recap the options, I think you have the short-term improvement option of increasing the size of the individual surfaces as much as possible, whether by seed and lowering the height of cut, or stripping the grass and replacing with another grass. From a longer-term perspective it would be in the best interest of Wildwood to plan for a complete practice tee renovation to improve such an important infrastructure component of the golf facility.

Summary

Thank you again for inviting me to Wildwood Golf Club to help consult with your agronomic preparations. I always look forward to enjoy my time with Mr. Fisher, but it is nice when committee members, or members at large, find time and take an interest in what Mr. Fisher and his team do on a daily basis to produce such a high level of conditioning.

I'm sorry that the microburst came through the golf course and added additional maintenance during the summer when maintenance staffs are already stretched so thin. But when all the trees are removed and cleaned up my sense is that there will be more vistas and better growing environments throughout the golf course which will ultimately help produce an even better product and playing experience.

The one item that I really urge you to plan for and address whenever possible is the practice tee. It is so woefully undersized that if Wildwood continues to see an increase in rounds this year and the next couple I think you are going to have a difficult time maintaining any form of a healthy grass surface.

Good luck the rest of the season and please keep in touch. I'll let you know when I'm returning to Pittsburgh later in the year. Hopefully, Mr. Fisher can find time to come out to Oakmont Country Club for the 2021 U.S. Amateur, but if not, I'm sure I will see you again later this season.

Respectfully submitted,



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Additional Considerations

The USGA appreciates your support of the Course Consulting Service. Please visit the [Green Section Record](#) to access regional updates that detail agronomist observations across the region. Also, please visit the [Water Resource Center](#) to learn about golf's use of water and how your facility can help conserve and protect our most important natural resource.

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As a not-for-profit agency that is free from commercial connections, the USGA Course Consulting Service is dedicated to providing impartial, expert guidance on decisions that can affect the playing quality, operational efficiency and sustainability of your course.

First started in 1953, the USGA Course Consulting Service permits individual facilities to reap the benefits of on-site visits by highly skilled USGA agronomists located in Green Section offices throughout the country.



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