

Course Consulting Service
ON-SITE VISIT REPORT



**Stoneybrook Golf Club
Bonita Springs, Florida**

Visit Date: July 10, 2014

Present:

Mr. Matt Nieder, Golf Course Superintendent
Mr. Todd Lowe, Senior Agronomist, USGA Green Section

United States Golf Association

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USGA Green Section Mission: The USGA Green Section are leaders in developing and disseminating agronomically, environmentally, and economically sustainable management practices. We help golf facilities maintain better playing conditions for better golf through science-based and practical solutions.

The purpose of the USGA Green Section is to assist subscribing golf courses in matters of agronomic management. All recommendations are offered free of bias, since the USGA has no connections or obligations to any manufacturer, supplier or contractor. Additionally, since quick fixes seldom result in permanent improvement, some of the recommendations in this report may not be easy to implement and could take more than a single season to produce the desired results.

It was a pleasure visiting Stoneybrook Golf Club on behalf of the USGA Green Section. Several topics were discussed during the visit and the most important of these included recent concerns from several golfers over the number of weeds throughout fairways and roughs and the perceived reduction in attention to detail throughout the entire golf course. There are several important factors that must be considered with all of these issues, including the fact that there are over 100 acres of turf at Stoneybrook, nearly 50,000 rounds played annually and 7:00 am tee times, with limited staff and budget. This report is a summary of the observations and recommendations that were made during the visit and attempts to shed some greater light on maintenance standards and budget constraints. Reprints are also electronically attached with this report and serve as additional resources concerning the topics that were discussed.

TEES, FAIRWAYS AND ROUGHS

Putting greens were recently core aerated and topdressed with sand and it was mentioned that there were no issues concerning turf health and playability on the greens. Therefore, the priority of the consultation visit was on the overall quality throughout the remainder of the golf course. For the most part, teeing grounds and fairways were in overall good condition at the time of my visit. Adequate weed control programs were in place, so that only a small percentage of weed contamination was observed down the center of each golf hole. However, weed infestations increase dramatically from the center of each fairway out towards the outer roughs. It was mentioned that a group of golfers are unsatisfied with this level of conditioning and have recently aggressively voiced their concerns.

Weeds: Turfgrass weeds exist on all golf courses, but are particularly problematic in South Florida. Increased heat, humidity and high rainfall encourages the rapid growth of a number of plants and our sub-tropical environment supports their growth throughout the year. In fact, my most recent Regional Update focused on weed management programs and the trials that golf course superintendents face in our region (see [June Regional Update](#)).

Ideally, golf courses in our region apply a minimum of four pre-emergence herbicide treatments, followed by timely post-emergence herbicide treatments and this requires a full-time spray technician whose sole responsibility is to spray chemicals on a regular basis. At Stoneybrook, there are only two pre-emergence herbicide applications and the spray technician also performs other menial golf course tasks each day. As a result, Mr. Nieder has chosen to keep good conditions down the middle of each golf hole and to treat weeds in peripheral areas as time and funds allow.

Many of the high-traffic areas and rough areas are quite contaminated with a host of turfgrass weeds. Difficult weeds like goosegrass and tropical signalgrass require effective preemergence herbicide programs as well as two to three treatments of postemergence herbicides each year to provide acceptable control. These are applied to select areas (see below) but current resources do not allow all turf areas to be treated. Also, bermudagrass turf must be fertilized appropriately to encourage a dense bermudagrass turf and dissuade weed infestation. I feel that a good rate for nitrogen fertilization in our region is between 6 to 8 lbs. N/ 1000 ft² each year. While the tees and middle of fairways seemed healthy, I feel that the outer roughs would improve from some additional supplemental fertilization.



Figure 1. The middle of each hole was in good condition (right), whereas primary and outer roughs were weedy (left). The light green patches are on the edge at which herbicides are applied on this hole to manage the weed invasion.

Maintenance Standards: Quality of golf course conditioning and presentation are directly proportional to staff size and available resources. Golf course detail work improves as frequency of maintenance practices like mowing, trimming, raking, pruning, etc. increase. This requires a higher staff size and a larger budget. Also, increased weed control through the primary and outer rough areas increase with increased funds as well. It is important that the expectations and available budget are properly matched so that frustrations are kept to a minimum.

A topic discussed at many visits is taking the course to the “next level”. The facility must first decide what this level is and whether it is worth the added expenditures in maintenance. A process that can be quite useful in these situations is to develop maintenance standards, with input from representatives from the Board, and to utilize time studies to show how much time is needed to accomplish these standards. Once these are developed, it can be easily seen where the increase in resources are required to improve conditioning. Two reprints (see [When in Doubt-Spec it Out, Required Maintenance Versus Available Labor-Are You Adequately Staffed?](#)) has been included to help with this decision-making process.

Successful country clubs do not happen by accident. USGA Agronomists each visit over 100 golf courses each year of all sizes, shapes and budgets. The most successful clubs, regardless of budget, all share one common characteristic. These clubs have a clear vision of what they want to be and are characterized by excellent working relationships between the club management, membership, and the golf course superintendent. To help realize their vision, these clubs develop long range plans and maintenance standards.

To maximize the dollars spent, it is recommended that a set of formal maintenance standards be developed for the golf course. Outlined below are steps to get you started in this process. Enclosed is an example set of maintenance standards and related articles (see [Pacific Standard Time](#), [Setting Standards](#)). The following steps are helpful in the development of maintenance standards for the golf course:

1. **Define expectations for the golf course.** This requires an open dialog between management, the board, and the superintendent. It is important to establish a priority ranking of the playing areas. There will be differences in opinion, but compromises can be offered until all parties arrive at a consensus. The golf course is going to be managed in some fashion, so it is possible and beneficial to work through any differences in opinion.
2. **Develop an agronomic program to meet these objectives.** The superintendent and USGA Green Section are excellent sources of information for this plan. Additional information is available at your request.
3. **Make sure funding and staff can meet these objectives.** Reallocate resources from lower priority areas, change the budget of staff size, or reduce the level of expectations to meet these objectives.

- 4. Implement the plan.** Implementing maintenance objectives and a long-range plan will benefit your course in several ways. First, the budget will be spent as efficiently as possible. Priorities will be well defined and inefficient use of resources will drop dramatically. The membership played a role in creating the maintenance objectives and the superintendent is carrying out their program. Finally, this document will provide continuity over time and will be an excellent means to show the progress being made on the golf course.

Naturalization: The topic of naturalization was discussed during the visit and I feel there are many areas that can be converted from bermudagrass turf to some other lower maintenance cover. Naturalization reduces the need for daily maintenance, but it must be understood that these areas still require upkeep to maintain good aesthetics. Another benefit of naturalization is that plants like bahiagrass, cordgrass and even wildflowers do not require supplemental irrigation once established and this can save on the yearly maintenance budget as well, as it was mentioned that over \$100,000 is spent on water each year.

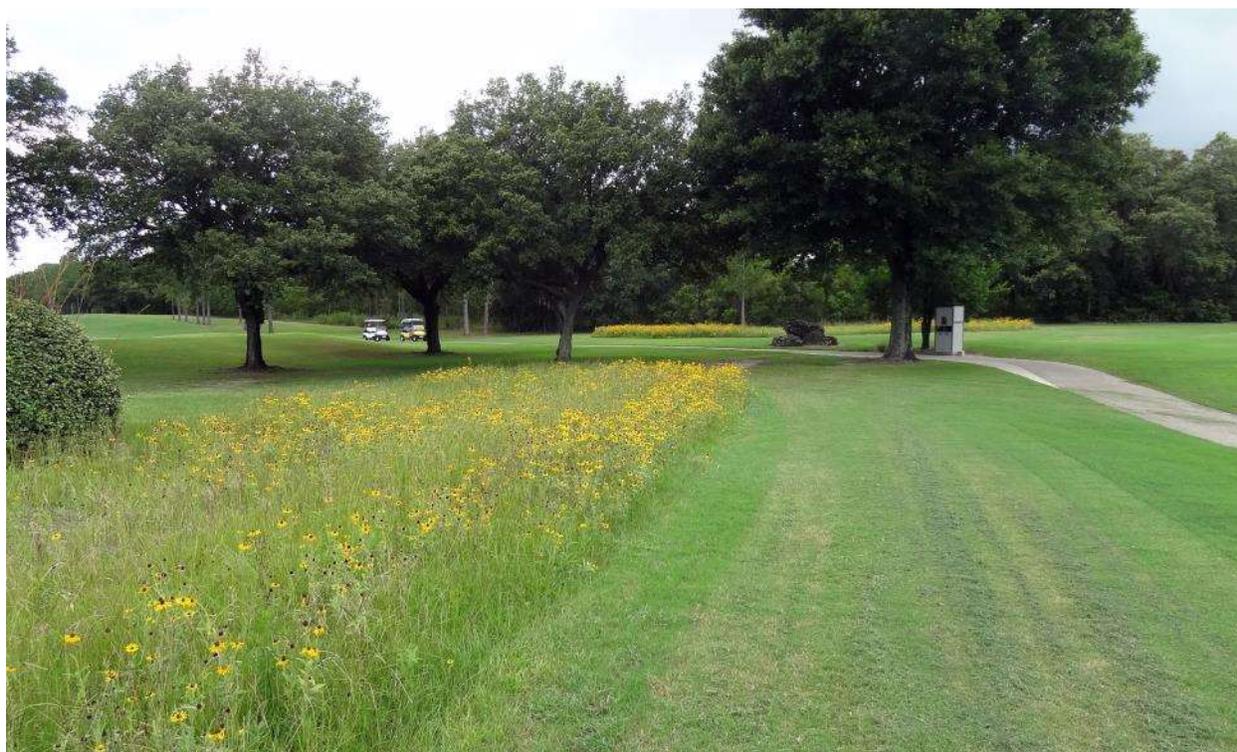


Figure 2. This outer bahiagrass rough was naturalized recently with wildflowers by simply tilling the bahiagrass and sowing wildflower seeds.

Tree Root Pruning: Some trees, especially mature live oaks, produce a copious amount of roots within the upper few inches of soil that compete with turfgrass for water and nutrients. As a result, the turf surrounding live oaks remains thin and off-color. While limb pruning is a practice that is implemented occasionally on golf courses throughout the region, root pruning is seldom implemented. Tree roots should be occasionally pruned to reduce competition and improve turf quality. Roots quickly recover and

pruning every other year at a depth of 16 to 18-inches is recommended. Implements like trenchers (Ditch Witch) can be used but generally create large, unsightly furrows. Reciprocal plows or stump grinders (Bed Edgers) are more desirable as their blades are generally less than 4-inches wide.

Cart Path Curbing: Cart paths are necessary on American golf courses. Without them, golf carts would travel indiscriminately throughout the course and create wear patterns in high use areas. In addition to fairway entry and exit areas, wear patterns are common along the edges of cart paths, around teeing grounds and putting greens, as golfers tend to pull slightly off of the cart path onto the adjacent turf. Curbs placed along these areas keep carts on paths and protect the turf's integrity. Turf thinning is quite extensive in areas where carts pull off adjacent to tees and I recommend that if curbs cannot be installed that rocks be laid along some of the edges. Some rough areas are quite weak and bare and they should also be sodded to improve quality as well.



CLOSING STATEMENTS

Thank you for the opportunity to visit and discuss your golf course maintenance operation as part of the USGA Green Section Course Consulting Service. In addition to this visit and report, please do not hesitate to contact our office at any time during the year with further questions to take full advantage of our service. Please visit [Florida Regional Updates](#) to review regional updates from our region. We look forward to being of service to you on a yearly basis for the betterment of your golf course.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd Lowe".

Todd Lowe
Senior Agronomist, Florida Region
USGA Green Section