

THE IMPORTANCE OF COURSE CONDITIONING

The playing experience is a club's most precious commodity.



The most precious commodity of any golf club is its playing facilities, as the main purpose of being a member is to play golf. Mark Wiltshire Golf have produced 27 site visit reports for various clubs over the past five years, and in almost 80 percent of the cases we found that course conditioning was surprisingly not a priority.

MWG's strategy has been tested at various clubs over the last 11 years and it has worked every time. When we manage a golf club one of our first and most important objectives is to improve the course to the best condition it can be. We appreciate that this can be difficult with limited financial resources, but improving a golf course is less about money and more about attitude, along with smart spending of whatever financial resources are available.

Golf course conditioning has a direct impact on revenue. If a course is allowed to deteriorate, members become disgruntled and some will leave the club, leading to less rounds, decreased food and beverage spend, and so forth.

Members are the best marketing tool for a club. Keep them happy and the word gets around. A point often overlooked

when a course improves is that it creates a platform to command higher green fees because the playing experience is so much better. The additional revenue can then be ploughed back into the course to further improve it, or provide necessary funds for capital replacement.

Obviously there are other factors such as clubhouse facilities, quality of food and service that play a part in the overall golfing experience, but the quality of a course remains the number one contributor.

There are several ways to measure whether members are happy at a club, mostly by surveys and questionnaires. One indicator we often use is the average number of rounds each member plays annually at his or her home course. The more they play the more content members are with their club. We have found a direct correlation between an increase in average rounds played and an improvement in course condition.

While it is imperative to find ways to grow golf, the reality is that the industry is undergoing tough times and clubs need to manage their revenue generating capabilities effectively. This means that clubs have to carefully manage their

MANY GOLF CLUBS ARE EXPERIENCING FINANCIAL DISTRESS DUE TO A DECLINE IN MEMBERSHIP, ROUNDS, REVENUE AND INCREASING COSTS.

Golf is competing with other sports and leisure activities in an environment where time and value for money are key considerations. This has led to debates about the future of golf and innovative ways to repack the game to younger audiences. There are, however, certain fundamentals that clubs should adhere to and Mark Wiltshire Golf, based in George, will be touching on a few of them.

average green fee rates. An extra R10 per round for a course doing 30 000 rounds a year makes a big difference to the bottom line. The alternative would be for an average R200 per round green fee course to sell an additional 1 500 rounds, something which could prove challenging in a declining golfing environment.

Finally, most golf clubs have at least one unique selling proposition which is an attribute that sets itself apart from other clubs. Whether your club is renowned for fast greens, well-manicured fairways, a mouth-watering halfway house, or beautiful views, you need to identify your uniqueness and sell it to the market. This will also help increase visitor rounds.

- Mark Wiltshire Golf provides specialised golf management services that includes club management, course maintenance, consulting, course design, and construction and project management.

