

MANAGING COURSE BUDGETS

Proper maintenance of irrigation systems and machinery is a top priority.

We have previously stressed the importance of course conditioning, since playing golf is the main purpose of being a club member. We have also touched on the cost of maintenance with limited financial resources. Clubs have to apply available funds wisely in this area.

Two ingredients which play a pivotal role in course maintenance are irrigation and equipment. Both require a significant capital outlay, specialised skills to maintain and, once acquired, consume a chunk of the budget. When clubs invite Mark Wiltshire Golf (MWG) for a site audit, we first evaluate the irrigation set-up, workshop and course equipment.

Our audits have revealed that 90% of the time irrigation systems are not fully functional, having not been properly maintained. Reasons range from inexperience or lack of knowledge on how they operate – the course superintendent when it was installed may have moved on – to not spending enough to maintain the system. Why would a club budget for monthly maintenance if it has invested millions in its installation?

An irrigation system can struggle due to faulty sprayers, turf valves or communications integral to an automated system. This always leads to overwatering. A sprayer nozzle will wear out. Instead of consuming 100 litres of water per hour, it requires 120 to do its job. The purpose of an automated system is to water in pre-programmed cycles. If not working a course has to be watered manually; turf valves have to be switched on and off by hand. This is ineffective and leads to 30–50% water waste.

The knock-on effect of not having a fully functional irrigation system is profound. It leads to poor turf quality and ineffective water management. And it is costly. Overwatering promotes fungal activity and remedial chemicals are expensive. So is electricity wastage due to



Nkana golf course, host of the Zambia Open, has been upgraded and is managed by MWG.

running pumps for longer cycles and the cost of extra water usage.

The capital investment for an irrigation system is substantial (a basic block system will cost R6–7 million) so it makes sense that once installed clubs should ensure it is maintained properly and be fully functional.

Course equipment has over the past decade become an expensive commodity. The replacement value of a basic fleet is about R7 million. It is important for clubs to get the maximum value and life out of their machinery. The average lifespan of a mower is 5 000 hours or five years, but with proper care it can be stretched to nine years. Our site audits have shown that preventative maintenance, particularly hydraulic services, are not done as per the manufacturer's requirements which leads to premature failure of components. Spares are expensive.

The longevity of equipment is not only dependent on preventative maintenance but reliant on a holistic approach. Workshops need to be tidy. Machinery requires designated parking areas so that mechanical leaks can be identified. Proper maintenance record keeping is vital. Continuing to repair a problematic machine reaches a point where good money is wasted. Operators need to take ownership of their equipment – signing

CONTACT MWG FOR FREE SITE VISIT

The first 3 golf clubs to contact MWG at 044 804 0258/9 will receive a free irrigation and course equipment site audit visit and report.

machines in and out is a good starting point – and continual training is essential. Some operators do drive mowers carelessly.

Course equipment plays a crucial role in conditioning and presentation. The quality of cut is determined by back lapping programmes, grinding and setting of reels; failing in this is primarily cost-related and a lack of mechanical skills. We believe there is direct correlation between back-of-house organisation (workshop and office) and on-course housekeeping. The consequence of an untidy maintenance facility is sloppy housekeeping on the course.

Many clubs do not have a course equipment capital replacement programme. This is more complex than replacing one machine with another when required, as the cost of replacing equipment has necessitated a fresh approach. Any golf club is welcome to request MWG to evaluate the current status of their irrigation system and course equipment. This will begin with a site visit and comprehensive audit report with recommendations.