

## NOTICE TO MEMBERS RE BUNKERS AND GREENS - JANUARY 2010

We have received some verbal complaints about the bunkers and greens over the last few months. The playing characteristic of our bunkers is the single most frequent complaint from members. The complaint of "too much sand" is probably the major complaint. It is alleged by members that the bunkers are being frequently filled with sand and balls are "plugging". The sand used in our bunkers adheres to Golf Queensland's standards for bunker sand. The structure of a bunker requires a gradient of moisture that increases as you go deeper into the bunker. Under the sand is a layer of basement material that allows drainage. As the sand dries out the surface layers become fluffier and allow the ball to settle into the sand more. This is made worse by a ball with a high flight trajectory and causes "plugging". The closest analogy is beach sand. Close to the water the sand is over hydrated and mushy because the water table is at ground level. As you move further from the water the sand dries and becomes compacted. Well away from the water's edge the sand is dry, soft and fluffy. It is this variation in the water table and the gradient of moisture in the sand, as well as other factors such as grain size, that determines the texture of the sand. With the current dry weather our bunkers have very little moisture and most of the sand is dry and fluffy. As the water table recedes this drying effect worsens and the complaints increase. Sand is only added to areas of the bunkers where the face has begun to disintegrate to try to achieve a slope that allows the ball to run back into the base of the bunker. The only time sand is added to the base of the bunker is when the underlying material is becoming uncovered.

Because of our climatic tendency to intermittent heavy downpours most of our bunkers have grass faces. It is impossible to have Melbourne sand course style bunkers in this area as the faces would be repeatedly washed away and would be a significant financial burden to repair. Hard packed bunker faces require an organic component (clay) in the soil. This will washout with heavy rain and cause blockage of the drainage system in the bunker. Bunkers are raked 1-2 times per week with a motorized bunker rake and some by hand. This is usually done on Saturdays for green side bunkers and Friday for fairway bunkers. Bunker maintenance is time consuming labour intensive work and has to be coordinated with fairway and green mowing which is a higher priority. The number of times the bunkers are raked has reduced due to reduction in staff numbers. The length of the tines on the motorized rake also affects the sand. The depth of the sand in the bunkers is also affected by the raking technique of the members. Most members rake the sand back towards the front of the bunker as they leave thus creating a slope from front to back in the bunkers. Members also use the blade side of the rake to distribute sand which leaves the sand aerated and fluffier. This also leaves tine marks from the rake teeth. Most complaints of plugging come from members who hit the ball with a high trajectory. Members with lower ball flights tend to run into bunkers and complain their ball is always under the lip or on a down slope (often created by members raking technique.)

I understand member's frustration when faced with a plugged lie in the bunkers but they are an integral part of the course and are designed as hazards to punish a wayward shot or to alter the way a player approaches the hole. They are less penal than other hazards such as waterways and out of bounds. I can assure you that the ground staff are aware of this problem and do everything they

can to minimize this problem but a large part of this is beyond human control. In winter this problem is usually not as severe because the water table is higher and the moisture gradient in the bunkers is maintained. Remember there is nothing in the Rules of Golf that guarantee you a good lie in a hazard.

As for the criticism that the greens are being renovated too often and they were scarified immediately after the PGA qualifying round. Heavy growth in summer requires regular use of the "grooming heads" on the mowers. This reduces the amount of "thatch" or "grain" in the greens without disturbing the putting surface to the degree that scarifying does (done twice a year in March/October). The greens had the grooming heads applied every Monday for a period of 4 weeks during November/December including after the PGA round. There were no complaints about any other Monday except the PGA day. I believe this occurred because members were present at the course on this day and not other days and were unaware that anything had been done to the greens. Grooming heads improve the smoothness of the surface but can make the green look less than perfect. In general they do not significantly affect the way the greens putt. The complaint that members didn't get a chance to play the course in its PGA prepared state is also erroneous because members had all week before the PGA when the course was in exactly the same state of preparation. Minor treatments to the greens of this nature are an integral part of maintaining the course during the growing season and if not done will result in greens that are too slow and have too much "grain" – something else to complain about!

The golf course is a living breathing ecosystem and cannot be kept in perfect condition all the time. Timing of renovations and maintenance programs have to fit in with major events such as championships, pro-am's, pennants and major days booked for groups such as the Vets and Ladies. This requires an experienced Course Superintendent, hard working staff, some help from the weather and a degree of acceptance from members that everything can't be perfect all of the time. The course is presented in the best possible condition for as much of the year as is physically possible. I am aware that there is only one Course Superintendent and 1100 experts looking over his shoulder. If you have any comments or criticisms please direct them to me and I will be happy to answer them or endeavour to find an answer. Please try to make your criticisms or questions about things that are being done poorly or incorrectly and not about your perceived injustices of the game of golf. "Play the ball as it lies, play the course as you find it."

Rod Smith