

Hope Is Not A Plan

by Chris Hartwiger, USGA Greens Section

Hope is not a plan. For example, Chris Hartwiger the golfer hopes to make it to the US Open. What am I doing about it? Playing a little golf, not practicing, and hoping! Sounds like I am setting myself up for a big disappointment.

In the turf world, many golf courses set themselves up for disappointment, too. Each season during Turfgrass Advisory Visits often we hear plans built on hopes and dreams. This is not a path to success! Good golfing conditions do not happen by accident. They happen when a team is put together that has the resources and infrastructure necessary to meet the desired objectives.

Does your golf course fall victim to hoping for better turf next year? We will review several examples of high hopes, but the lack of a plan in place to meet those dreams. Superintendents should use this article to sharpen your focus, review your plans, assemble your team, and make sure you are not making promises you can not deliver. All the examples below are real, but of course, names have been withheld.

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Example 1: Better Bentgrass Putting Greens

This is a big one we hear. The best putting greens we see have many of the following factors in common:

- Good construction and enough size for amount of play.
- Use of an improved variety.
- Commitment to a sound aeration and topdressing program.
- Little shade and good air movement through either open sites or fans.
- Excellent water quality
- Sensible mowing program
- Summer venting
- Skilled superintendent and experienced staff

As a golf course deviates from these “must haves”, the chances for better greens declines, too.

Example #2: Desiring more attention to detail or neater course appearance.

In this example, it was learned that within the last five years the golf course had three superintendents and there was a minimum of 100 percent turnover on the crew each year. The solution to a more neat and tidy golf course in this example involved creating a way to attract and retain employees.

Experienced employees familiar with the golf course and cross trained on many jobs may be more expensive, but they do have a tangible and economic value.

Example #3: Course Appearance Lacking Due to Lack of a Quality Cut

The quality of cut was not good on any aspect of the golf course. We have seen this issue many times. Typically, we learn that either the golf course does not have any reel grinding equipment or that the golf course mechanic does not have the training to use the reel grinding equipment properly.

Example #4: The Rough Is Too Rough

We have a good staff and new leased equipment, so why is the rough so inconsistent? In the southeast, shade and incomplete irrigation coverage doom rough

to inconsistency. Hoping for bermudagrass to thrive in the shade and outcompete tree roots for water from the outer edge of a double row system is an exercise in futility. Sunlight and irrigation coverage are the friends needed for the team.

Example #5: Closing the Book on Inconsistent Bunkers

This is the most often discussed hope at golf courses. Members express some variation of this hope, “We want bunkers where the ball will roll to the bottom of every bunker while not being perceived as too firm or yielding to any fried egg lies in the flashed faces.” Unfortunately, bunkers will never, ever be consistent. The solution to better bunkers involves better communications and the development of a support network that extends from the golf shop to the general manager’s office to the green committee to the turfgrass management team. The message must be consistent and it must be delivered out in front of the complaints.

Conclusion

If complaints, criticisms, or unrealistic hopes are a recurring theme at your golf course, focus your emphasis on building the team necessary to deliver the results desired. In many cases, it will be not be possible to have all the employees, the machines, the budget, and the infrastructure to satisfy every hope or dream. In this case, call in the USGA Green Section. We can be a key part of your team that can deliver the bad news and the good news. The bad news may be that the hopes are not realistic, but the good news is that we can help every golf course set reasonable expectations and encourage all golfers to have fun when they play. With the advice in this article, my plan now is to hire a swing guru, sports psychologist, strength and conditioning coach, and hit hundreds of full shots, sand shots, putts and chips all while traveling hundreds of nights each year visiting golf courses. On second thought, maybe a better plan is to get tickets and watch the US Open. After all hope is not a plan, but a good plan will give you hope.