

# Consistency in Bunkers . . . What Does It Mean?

“The risk of going into a bunker is self-imposed, so there is no reason why a player should condemn a bunker as unfair.”

— C. B. Macdonald

BY BUD WHITE



**C**onsistency is a terrible word! That comment may pose a real question in your mind at first, because we all know putting surface consistency is *the* most important measurement for putting greens, superior even to putting speed. The term *consistency*, when applied to bunkers, may be the most impossible and contradictory measurement in golf today. In fact, over the last four to five years, the travels of the USGA Green Section staff have focused more and more on the search for the holy grail of bunker maintenance.

On many occasions our USGA Turf Advisory Service visits have devoted a disproportionate amount of time directed toward bunker consistency. It is important for golfers to understand why this term is inapplicable to bunkers, except in three key areas:

1. All bunkers should be raked with the same consistency.
2. Sand depth on the bottoms and on the slopes should be consistent.
3. The sand composition should be as close to the same consistency as possible.

The first two points are a given in terms of proper maintenance of bunkers. However, the third can vary, based usually on the amount of washing that occurs in a bunker from rain or irrigation. When sand washes down a bunker slope, underlying soil is exposed and contaminates the sand, making it poorly drained and much firmer. In such a situation, the drain is dug up and exposed; it is often completely clean and actually dry because the contaminated sand prevents water from getting to the drainpipe.

Bunkers are exposed to differing amounts of moisture, with greenside bunkers usually having greater moisture than fairway bunkers because of the additional exposure to irrigation around greens versus fairways. It is impossible to balance the amount of irrigation exposure to bunkers from this difference alone. Yet, the amount of moisture content in a bunker is usually the greatest single measure golfers use to compare bunker consistency, and consequently its firmness or softness. Stop and think how impossible it would be to balance the

irrigation exposure of every bunker on a golf course.

I encourage golf courses to have a town hall meeting and allow the superintendent to discuss how the bunkers are maintained and what his budget and labor force allow him to do. Consistency should be emphasized in the areas of sand depth and raking techniques throughout the course. Today, many golf courses are spending more man-hours on bunkers than they are on putting greens. This is totally crazy because bunkers are *hazards*. The degree of bunker perfection many golfers seek today is impossible to obtain. Hopefully, after considering these factors, the word *consistency* as it relates to bunker maintenance will become less of an issue. If it doesn't, then you are not looking at maintenance in a realistic way and you probably need a few more lessons from a golf professional so you can make the bunker shot instead of complaining about *consistency*!

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