

## James R. Hengel, CGCS Golf Course Consultant

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Gentlemen,

Once again it was great to spend a day at Binghamton Country Club and see the progress of the restoration process. It was always my intent to return the course more closely to the design that A. W. Tillinghast proposed in 1920 for the "New" Country Club at Gray's Crossing. Rocco has taken several steps in the process that within the next few years will return the layout to the intent of the architect and at the same time provide a course that is both a pleasure and a challenge to play for the members and guests of BCC!



**Greens:** The green surfaces have definitely improved over the last 18 months. They have become much more firm and ball roll is much truer than twelve months ago. The overall color is very good and the rooting is exceptional for mid-summer especially through the drought that the area has endured recently. The judicious use of irrigation based on moisture readings and use of hose watering definitely has contributed to eliminating the sponginess under foot that plagued the surfaces when Rocco was hired. Green speed has also increased, and I feel the greens are now at the maximum speed they should be given the contours and undulations on most greens. Faster surfaces will only slow play and reduce already limited hole locations on most greens. The continued restoration of squared green boundaries both in the rear and front corners may provide additional hole locations. As evidenced in some old photographs and from the near original drawing of the course, most greens were much squarer in both front and rear of the green complex and this was typical of the design era. Once these areas are restored to the original boundaries, not only will more cupping space be attained, they will be unique to the area.



Rear corner of #15 Green, once restored will provide an additional area for a hole location in both the right rear and left rear areas of the green!



Much the same situation on #17 Green, both front and rear areas should be restored to include the squared boundaries that were original features of the greens.



#15 green cut should be restored to upper right boundary as designed.

The expansions of these areas should be slowly lowered in height of cut, aerified and topdressed often to allow the turf to acclimate to green surfaces. Currently number twelve green expansion areas need additional work as all previously restored areas have responded well to the slow conversion back to green height.



Areas of scalping on #12 where a “hump” at edge of restored green had developed. These areas may need additional aerification, and rolling to “lower” crown a bit. Some repair cupping may also be necessary.

As I stated earlier, rooting on greens is superior especially considering the hot and dry conditions the area has recently experienced.



The consistent frequent light topdressing program has diluted the organic matter adequately eliminating the layering effect that contributed to the impaired rooting in the past. Please note the area of clean topdressing sand that has built up over the past two seasons, no new layering present. The light topdressing program, hose watering and the incorporation of the latest fertility technologies have resulted in much healthier roots, an increased root mass and thus a better surface! It's what is happening below the surface that is reflected in the surface.

**Tees:** All Tees are in much better health, especially those where trees were removed allowing more sunlight and less competition for water and nutrients from tree roots. In the future, consideration should be given to leveling and re-sodding the tee boxes as over the years most have become very un-level. I suggest converting the tee surfaces to either bentgrass or a low mow bluegrass. The old sod may be used if necessary, however the cost of labor to strip, relocate, maintain and put back in place may cost more than new sod. And this process can be staged over several years and be organized in a way to preserve at least one teeing surface while another on that hole is leveled.



#17 Tee with trees removed! Turf quality has dramatically improved with more sunlight and less competition from tree roots for water and nutrients.

I also feel there is a potential to add a back tee to this great hole, which could add 20-30 yards to the hole making adding to perhaps the best four finishing holes in the area!

This may also help attract younger, low handicap players to the club as extending distance has always been an issue at Binghamton.

**Fairways:** All fairway surfaces are in exceptional condition given the recent weather conditions. The staff continues to judiciously use irrigation only to maintain conditions. Fast and firm conditions certainly exist. The only factor that limits the fairways from improving is a financial limitation which does not allow a fairway topdressing program. A fairway topdressing program with a verticutting program would further reduce the thatch that lends to the softness especially during the spring wet season. Reducing the thatch and mat on the fairways would allow the fairways to be drier during periods of rain by allowing water to easily pass through the upper inch below the surface which contains excessive organic material.

The other area that should be addressed, now that trees have been removed along fairway and rough areas, is to expand and re-contour fairways to include the many bunker features that have been obscured for many years. All holes on the course contain several bunkers (grass and sand) that have been “lost” over the years, especially during the years when the tree planting fad was so prevalent. The fairway mowing lines should be re-aligned to turn to showcase these classic features. Some holes such as number three should turn more to the left off the tee and then bend to the right through the cross bunker to the right side near the green. These mowing lines will cost nothing and will give a fresh look to the straight narrow corridors that are now in place due to the mis-planting of trees over the years. The removal and “widening” of most fairways by re-contouring them will benefit the higher handicap golfer more than the low handicap player as all holes by Tillinghast’s design tighten as a player approaches the green complex. I also feel most fairways should be brought back closer to the tee to further accommodate the higher handicap golfer’s ability and enjoyment. Great examples of this condition are on number 6, number 8, and number 17, where the fairway is significantly further from the tee than most other holes. Again, this mowing change will only enhance the experience for the higher handicap player without impacting the challenge for the low handicap player.



Very good rooting in fairways, reducing thatch by verticutting and topdressing especially on approaches would allow more run up shots to be played.

**Rough:** The rough shows the most signs of drought impact. This is actually quite expected as irrigation use is slight and cart traffic is most concentrated in areas of rough and on most holes competition from tree roots for water and nutrients. With the continued program of tree removal and eventual re-contouring of fairway lines the rough should improve significantly. One option, although may be initially costly would be to re-sod a 10-foot strip around the newly contoured fairway line with a low cut bluegrass to provide a distinct visual contrast between rough, intermediate rough and fairway. This would not only be aesthetically pleasing but improve playability with a more consistent surface directly off the fairway and could be used as a marketing tool attracting new members.

**Bunkers:** The bunkers are in fine condition. The recent project of lining and filling with new sand has certainly improved playability and aesthetics. There were many bunkers originally designed in the course layout. Some may never have had sand in them due primarily to financial limitations throughout the years. Tillinghast definitely designed them to be sand bunkers that were to be filled with sand at a date post construction. I am quite certain, fiscal issues initially precluded the installation of sand, followed by the Depression, WWII and by the mid-fifties the intended additional sand was long forgotten. The only issue I observed with the bunkers was that certain areas of liner have been pulled by normal raking, a very common occurrence with fabric liners and sand migration. There are newer methods of bunker construction, namely Better Billy Method, Capillary Concrete, Artificial Turf Liners that are not negative effected by normal raking. I would suggest any of these methods being considered in the future, nothing necessary currently though.

**Fescue Areas:** Finally, perhaps the most controversial restoration improvement, allowing fescue areas to fill areas that are for the most part out of play. These areas are very common on courses of this vintage and are part of most restoration projects. Change is always difficult and these areas, once established, can have irrigation adjusted to limit density and herbicides applied to eliminate the spare weeds currently in these areas. I remember playing Baltusrol Upper in the early 1990's and they have already allowed fescue to grow on rough bunkers and other out of play areas. Merion has fescue areas everywhere as does Somerset Hills in New Jersey. Actually as these areas become well establish, become non-irrigated, non-fertilized and non-mowed, labor and related expenses can be re-allocated to improving other areas on the course. The new "OLD" look is another marketing area to attract additional members to BCC as the look will be new and different from the other area courses. On the next page are a close-up of fescue far to the left of

number one and the mounded area on number fifteen, actually my favorite area that has currently been restored to fescue.



**Areas of newly seeded Fescue:** The area between number one green and number three rough has had the forest of trees remove creating a potentially dramatic area of fescue above and to the left of the cart path along number one green all the way to number three tee parking area. No one was ever able to retrieve or play from the area above number one green as it was densely treed and full of rocks. The fescue in this area will be naturally thin, as there are no other grasses present, allowing easy retrieving and playing from these areas. Unfortunately, the droughty conditions this summer have delayed the maturation of the fescue in this area. Also, fescues by nature are the slowest of all turfgrasses to establish via seed. I firmly believe, this fall these areas will fill and during the season of 2017 look very naturally and aesthetically pleasing.



**Maintenance Facility:** Although aging, the current maintenance facility is adequate. Some consideration should be given to paving the area between the equipment storage building and the sand storage building. This gravel lot only lends itself to contaminating the topdressing with small rocks and drainage is poor in this area, actually pitching to the topdressing sand which is supposed to be kept dry. The interior of the storage building needs some cleaning and

organization, but is otherwise workable for a facility built 50 years ago. The office and mechanics building, built in 1988, almost 30 years ago, needs painting as it is so visible from several holes on the course. The interior needs a fresh coat of paint as well and a thorough cleaning which can be accomplished when a rainy day or two arrive.

**Parting Shots:** Binghamton Country Club will always be special to me! I grew in my career so much due to my association with the club and the members. Please take my recommendations and thoughts as constructive ideas and I feel you have an exceptional individual guiding the maintenance of the course. Thank you for the opportunity to evaluate the course conditions and offer my expertise on the subject.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jim Hengel, CGCS