

**"You've  
got to  
keep them  
happy!"**

by

John Stobbs

One of the more entertaining things about American golf magazines is the way in which they sometimes give us a glimpse of what things are likely to become over here—if we give them a chance.

A lot of the characteristics of American golf though could well be adopted over here, one of them being the apparent dedication and accepted status in the club of the Course Superintendent or Head Greenkeeper.

Surprisingly, this shows mainly in the continual harping on the theme that it is up to him to improve his status and authority even further. He is already expected to be able to take time off to make speeches to local groups of people

on more or less any aspect of his job. He also seems to have the right to post his own notices and bulletins on the club notice board, and to play a vital part in planning his course's upkeep for several years ahead, as well as working out the financial budget to cover it.

For many Head Greenkeepers over here, this involves more time than they can reasonably spare from their practical duties, but the American is being continually badgered from all sides to become ambitious altogether: to take courses in salesmanship, for instance, so that he can "sell" himself and his ideas to the professional, the members, and, not least, to the new Chairman of the Greens Committee, who has made a fortune out of manufacturing garbage cans and now addresses himself with a dangerous self-confidence to the task of interfering with the course and making a darned nuisance of himself—if he's not quickly made an ally.

### **Freedom to Work**

Again and again in American Golf literature—and not least in the magazine of the American Association of Greenkeepers—the Greenkeeper is reminded that his freedom to get on with his job and do what only he knows needs doing, without infuriating interference and batteries of unreasonable complaints, depends entirely upon how he handles the golfers themselves and their elected representatives.

Often it sounds as if he's being advised sympathetically on the psychology of coping with a shower of unruly, spoilt and altogether difficult children.

It could be that not a few Head Greenkeepers over here have much the same feeling about their own members! It could be too—and perhaps the more so in their case—that the rules of tactics continually put forward in America might apply here too.

Allowing for the usual American self-consciousness about this sort of thing, and the peculiar ethic they seem to have of over-dissimulated good fellowship (which somehow appears to grow more genuine with continual usage) here is what the usual "Advice to the Greenkeeper on the proper handling of members" seems to amount to:

1. It's not enough to know your job and the quirks and oddities of your own turf and soil. You must also make sure that everyone knows how well you know it. Always be ready to talk clearly about it, and explain things to members. For instance, you are bound to have a darned good reason for doing something to the course which some members don't like—even if it is only instinct of long experience. If you're always ready to explain it (or, as they'd put it over there, "sell" it), you can damp down a lot of complaints at source.

2. Show how satisfied you are with the life itself, and proud of your course, and inspire your staff with that feeling. That sounds all too American-earnest doesn't it? But it's certainly true as far as your standing with the members goes. You can get away with even the most outrageous personal dictatorship about the course if the members, somehow, feel proud of you for it. So they seem to think over there, anyway!

3. Use two weapons, psychology and curiosity, against the man who wants to interfere—whether its the new Chairman of the Greens Committee, or just one of the club's back markers beefing about the greens as usual.

### New Chairman!

With the new Chairman of the Greens Committee, rule 1, say the Americans, is—Get in first! Make your own plans for exactly what you want to do during his first year of office, then go and explain them to him in vast detail and ask him if he's got any suggestions. Don't wait for him to get after you with his own ideas. How this might work over here, I'm not qualified to say! But

it's certainly true that most new Chairmen of Greens Committees have no real idea of the sheer amount and complexity of work you're already doing every year.

The other rule for coping with him, and with the low handicap man on the rampage, is to *pick his brains*. Neither of them would be where they are, either in the club or in the game, if they hadn't got some kind of ability of character and intelligence. Just as you sometimes get a good original suggestion from a member of your staff, so you may even be able to dig one out of the pate of the Chairman of the Greens Committee! And if one of the back markers is beefing, you can sort out the trouble more quickly, and with the least fuss, by trying to see things from his point of view. Often, in fact, you can make him happy easily enough by merely suggesting how you could do something about it and when might be the best time.

### Looking Ahead

This will normally be several months ahead, at the earliest! If it proves to be something unessential, he'll forget about it just about as soon as you will. If there is something in what he's on about, though, you'll have it under control long before there's any danger of the Greens Committee trying to foist on you some remedy you don't like.

Simpler to preserve a splendid isolation and a traditional secretiveness about your own intentions, say, "perhaps" to everything—and then do just what you intended to anyway!

Maybe now. But, judging from America, it doesn't look as if that's the way the wind's blowing.

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