

THE GREATEST SHOW ON TURF

by F. W. HAWTREE

THE "Greatest Show on Turf" filled the Hilton Hotel in San Francisco for more than a week in February. This alone is no mean achievement when I recall that I had 105 yards to walk to the lift from room 1139 if taking the direct route or 295 yards if I went the other way. This made each side of the square about 75 yards. The first fourteen floors enclosed multi-storey garages so that one could drive up to the appropriate floor, park, and walk straight into the passage opposite one's bedroom. On the fifteenth floor the garage became a swimming pool and the next seven floors had a double circuit of bedrooms with those on the inside looking down on to the pool and those at pool level being "Cabana" rooms. All this was quite a change from the Star and Garter at Chipping Sodbury.

I felt immediately at home in the lobby when booking in. American superintendents evidently looked no different from British head-greenkeepers. They had the same tanned complexions and clear eyes haunted by the thought of what might be happening to their courses in their absence — the same obvious enjoyment of these infrequent reunions.

This was the Thirty-ninth Annual Turf Conference of the G.C.S.A.A. (Golf Course Superintendents' Association of America) and the organisation had obviously been perfected over the years.

Apart from members, there were representatives of every kind of firm concerned with turf maintenance, lecturers, guests, wives and families making up the balance of an attendance which certainly exceeded 3,000.

A special booth set up in the lobby for the registration of the attendance contained 11 young ladies in green uniforms bearing the G.C.S.A.A. emblem. They issued black brief cases containing a full programme, maps, invitations and brochures.

For recognition there was a card with name, club and state in a transparent cover.

The lower part slipped into the breast pocket and contained a summary of events. By turning over a page each day one always knew what came next. The word "England" on my card led to frequent greetings and conversations with friendly strangers. But the system as a whole led to the impression that anyone to whom you were introduced was finding out about you by shaking hands with your card and not with you. But you were inspecting his particulars at the same time and the real difficulty was to ensure that your hand met his.

There had been golf tournaments and committee meetings during the previous week but the conference proper started on Monday, 19th February. Some five hundred superintendents gathered in the Continental Ballroom at 9.00 a.m. to listen to the first educational assembly "What's new and how do we use it?" As Hon. Editor of the *British Golf Greenkeeper* I was invited to the Press and Speakers reception (Toyon Room) at 11.45 a.m. and to the Press and Speakers Convention (Walnut Room) at 12.30 p.m. (We never ran out of rooms.)

I met Walter Boysen, G.C.S.A.A. President at the first and sat next to Richard Sincerbeau, a golf course architect, at the second. Descriptions of work and of green committees reinforced my previous day's impression of being very much at home.

The second assembly at 1.30 p.m. dealt with golf course beautification. Warren Bidwell, Superintendent of the Philadelphia Country Club, spoke of the important first impressions of a golf course in his talk "The Front Door". Six other interesting papers were read, though, because his research had been into a novel area, Carl Whitcomb's discussion of "Root Competition between Trees and Turf" was outstanding. He is a Research Associate of the Department of Ornamental Horticulture at Florida University. He demonstrated how shallow rooting trees suffered if planted in existing grass, and how grass could be grown under deeper rooting

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trees. David Gourlay from the Thornhill Country Club in Ontario (there is a Canadian branch of the G.C.S.A.A.) described how his members fill in the winter time with curling when the course is under snow. Naturally the superintendent looks after the rink.

There was a Get Acquainted Party at 6.30 p.m. to round off the day though judging by the way things were going seven hours later, this was for many the start of the day — not the end of it.

The exhibition opened on the following morning. The new Jacobsen ride-on triple green mower caught the eye — all cutting and lifting mechanisms are hydraulic. When turning off the green cutting cylinders are raised and lowered with a time lag automatically provided between the lifting or dropping of the two forward machines and of the rear machine so that close cutting ends and starts at the green-edge.

Ransomes had a good display on the Warren Turf Nursery stand with Motor Triple and Autocertes bearing comparison or better with any other machines on display. They stood out all the better over there for being painted green. The Jacobsen house colour is yellow and Toro, red. Yet over here Ransomes, Atco, Lloyds, Greens, Webbs and even Qualcast all play on the basic theme of greenness as a standard finish. This certainly limits the factors likely to influence choice to those most significant. Whether it is better for trade is another matter.

Toro was naturally there in force with mowers and a good deal of space devoted to automatic watering systems. The latest irrigation layout has one controller controlling other controllers out on the course, obviating the need for long multiple runs of cable back to the central control point and giving a wider flexibility in setting a programme. The firm's representative obviously had all the facts at his fingertips.

I was not so sure about another one. I asked if one of the types of *Agrostis* he was offering was "*stolonifera*". He was not sure about that but it was

selling very well. Elsewhere I was given a bottle of hormone rooting fluid enough to make 1,000 gallons at the dilution recommended. Try this next time you sow or turf. It works in the greenhouse: so far.

This little gift made the morning and the afternoon was made by a talk by Stan Frederiksen, Mallinckrodt's Turf Products Manager, and Dr John Weiing, Professor of Plant Pathology at the University of Nebraska. Descriptions of fungal diseases and their treatment are not calculated to stimulate much excitement in those familiar with them. But the excellence of the material and of its presentation held the audience enthralled. The lecture was as much a work of art as the knowledge of the subject was profound.

On Wednesday, there was a "Public Course Operators Clinic" in one hall and a "Small Engine Clinic" in another. On Thursday members of the U.S.G.A. Green Section dealt with putting green design, construction, planning and maintenance. Stolons are more often used than seed, both from Bent and Bermuda grasses, as the strains developed do not always breed true from seed.

Good drainage was constantly emphasised by speaker after speaker. Dr Marvin H. Ferguson is already well known over here from his articles and reputation. Another pleasing talk was by James Holmes, mid-western agronomist. A slide of a heap of derelict golf carts with the comment "That's where I would like to see all golf carts" brought a sympathetic response from the audience. He also described a telephone conversation with a man who rang up to ask what was needed to make a golf course.

Answer: "Drainage and common sense. And if you're a little short on common sense, put in more drainage."

These talks had been preceded by one from a professional, Paul Runyon. I was glad to hear that he thought the greens at Portmarnock were amongst the best in the world.

The exhibition closed that evening,
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MISCELLANEOUS

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the Annual Banquet followed. One further assembly took place on Friday followed by a tour of golf courses in the San Francisco area. But by then I was on my way home, grateful for the kindest possible hospitality and an absorbing five days. This is the way to run an association.

Has anyone any ideas about what we ought to do at Skegness?

Next month some of the practical pointers from this conference will be covered. I shall not be covering (and who would want to) the "topless" bars which offer comfort to the man about town in San Francisco from breakfast (and I mean BREAKFAST) until 2.00 a.m. or later (makes quite a long day). But then the day was so long that the Late Night Show on television, round about midnight was the *Early Late Night Show*. You could also ring up at 1.30 a.m. to borrow \$1,000 and would only pay back about \$36 a month for three years to service both the loan and its interest. If I had been able to dial the number and had no worries about the April *Greenkeeper* I might still have been there living on \$964 a month for ever. Not that it would have gone very far.

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