

# 18 HOLES WITH HAWTREE

## No. 14 — Research in the Seventies

by F. W. HAWTREE

It is time to sound an alarm. The sixties showed what could be done to attract people to golf. For longer than that, the Golf Foundation has done noble work among the schools. Now the pressure is on. We are hurrying (slowly) to provide more golf courses but hardly more than ten new ones open annually. In the twenties, 50 were made each year. They were often made with rudimentary knowledge of soil science and never with the idea that they would have to stand up to pounding by thousands of feet and trollies in all weathers. Most inland courses are deteriorating. Greenkeepers never have a chance to put them right. Green committees are often keener to add length or alter bunkers than to get down to the basic need for drastic reform of the structure of courses which will soon resemble the goalmouths of the average football pitch.

Compaction by traffic over the grass had led to refined machines for spiking, slitting, and hollow tining. But they only act as palliatives. On poorly drained courses play in wet weather puddles the surface, the grass loses vigour and we rely on more fertiliser to get it back. A winter with no frost, a drought after a cold spring, any aberration from a normal weather pattern leaves the turf gasping.

Drainage is our problem. Drainage of greens, tees and fairways, drainage through the top-soil, drainage of the sub-soil. Winter play will be more agreeable, damage will be negligible, the turf will be stronger and its condition will not oscillate wildly from one month to the next.

But when we try to find out about drainage we soon realise that events have overtaken research. We can

borrow from the U.S.G.A. Green Section their specification for constructing greens with a porous layer below a special soil mixture. But the proportions of sand and peat to form the ideal mixture with our local soil are still hit and miss because little work has been done to determine the acceptable range of permeability and how it can be produced.

The Sports Council appointed a small committee to decide how best research into problems of this sort should be aided. Their report appears to have gone into mothballs. Grants totalling about £10,000 are made to the Sports Turf Research Institute and to Aberystwyth though the latter is more concerned with sports grounds where similar problems arise. The S.T.R.I. is otherwise supported entirely by voluntary contributions and with the whole range of golf course problems to be studied has to trim its research to a limited budget. £10,000 on research to sustain our investment in golf courses of perhaps £1500 million hardly makes sense. If we compare it with the total annual operating costs, the cost of new courses, what golfers are spending and tournament prize money, it makes less sense still.

Apart from research, we are not spending one penny on education. Five years ago, the British and Scottish Greenkeepers Associations, recognising the dangers, started an apprenticeship scheme with the help of the golf unions. This scheme supports itself on the fees it charges for issuing the apprenticeship deeds. At least it has produced 90 well trained young men and more are training now. But education beyond this level is totally absent except for lectures which the sections of the Greenkeepers

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Associations arrange for themselves. We should be sending men for advanced training at university level. The American Superintendents Association's scholarship and research fund in 1969 was 21,000 dollars. This year the U.S. National Golf Day will give 14,300 dollars to the fund. Over there, these figures are regarded as trifling compared with the need though in all some 80,000 dollars was allocated to golf educational funds in 1969.

It is fair to assume that the momentum of the present tide of new golfers will carry itself on without much assistance. We should consolidate our position before moving on. Knowledge from research is needed to provide the sub-structure which will produce good turf in all seasons. The money for making the changes will have to come from golf clubs themselves and would be better spent this way to guarantee the future than on new cocktail bars.

There are dozens of voluntary bodies supporting the playing side of the game. They should direct a little of their

income to encourage the knowledge and practice fundamental to every shot ever played. A National Golf Day in the British Isles would alone transform the scene. The Sports Council should consider whether part of the grants to assist golf development would not be better spent in the direction of research. Much of it would in any case assist other games. Golf was the first sport to look ahead when the four National Unions set up the Research Station at Bingley in 1929. That foresight, indirectly, has assisted Twickenham, Cardiff Arms Park and Wembley.

Tournament pros' managers could benefit their clients, even if only in the field of public relations, by directing them towards covenanted donations towards this aspect of the game. Professional tournaments rely on a host of club members spending their own time and money. After prize-money there could still be a margin to be ploughed back into the game itself. If the golf unions could see so far ahead in the twenties, it will be a sad reflection on all of us of we only look backwards in the seventies.

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