

HOW TO ATTACK VANDALISM

by DOUGLAS LUTZ

Vandalism is making virtual prisons out of some golf courses—chain fences, burglar alarm systems, patrols, watchdogs—none of which seem to have helped reduce the incidents. Psychoanalysts say that to root out the problem requires an understanding of the motivations behind vandalism

The victims of vandalism, oddly enough, are frequently at the root causes of acts of destruction.

Symbolically, a city subway car represents authority that can be attacked by the simple application of a marking pen. Scrawling a nickname, with a numbered clue added, can be an "ego trip," an expression of contempt or an outright act of defiance against society and authority. It also can be, in a distorted, secretive way, a searching for recognition, even an appeal for love. Most assuredly anger and frustration are written into each quickly sketched name.

According to a leading psychoanalyst, whose primary concern is untwisting the hidden distortions leading to great unhappiness among teenagers, ghetto youth defacing subway cars are comparable to small town youth wantonly destroying the grounds at a private golf club. The parallels are easily drawn.

Country club life, the golf course scene, represents a frequently unattainable strata that causes frustration. Resentment is born in frustration. Striking out overcomes frustration.

The analyst explained that each case, although part of an over-all pattern of vandalism, must be honestly examined on its own evidence. Every act of vandalism stems from some hidden motivators. And they may be traced through many layers of conscious and unconscious thought, often to a single childhood incident that triggers destructive action in later life.

Impulsive vandalistic behavior, which may be expressed in moments of extreme frustration, is opportunistic in nature. Expedient action is generally coupled with an undetectable situation. Remote course areas, away from possible watchful eyes around the clubhouse, for instance, offer the best opportunities for impulsive attacks.

In discussing the motivations of vandalism the analyst was willing to generalize in terms of golf course destruction though holding to his own contention that each case was a separate issue. When specific instances were discussed, and we outlined reports from last year's article on vandalism (GOLF-

DOM, April, 1972, p. 54), he concurred with our findings that there were distinctive problems peculiar to golf courses. Having worked with young people from all financial levels and assorted family configurations, it was his feeling that course destruction might be anticipated at any location in the country.

He advanced some thoughts about the thrill of the chase, the excitement of the game. Sophisticated youth of today living close to jet travel, astronauts on the moon and almost daily doses of official corruption, are active thrill seekers. Living dangerously is not the exclusive province of adults these days. Fears of parental punishment can no longer be counted on the thwart acts of defiance. The days of "Life With Father" are long gone. The chase by a night patrol across the rolling hills of a golf course is the test of a young man's daring-do. His ultimate capture or detection, of being "busted," can lead to hero status from his peers, possibly to an awareness by adults of his presence and his need for attention from his parents. It is entirely possible that he may be seeking capture in the same sense that a runaway horse really wants someone to rein him in, to soothe his fears. Devices for getting attention are numerous.

Unfortunately, for the golfing community, vandalism leaves in its wake costly and sometimes irreparable damage. Facing continual financial losses makes it difficult for any club to have an understanding attitude toward the causes of vandalism.

We all recall the days when we were kids and vandalism, certainly on the scale evidenced today, was unheard of. More mischievous than malicious, acts of desecration on golf courses were prankster-oriented in years gone by. Instances of outright vandalism were rare. Private clubs, small town semi-private layouts and municipal facilities were wide open, inviting disaster. Patrol forces were hardly considered at all, yet there they stood in their magnificent greenery, unharmed, inviolate and in many instances, not even trespassed on.

Damage to courses hemmed in by large population centers occasionally consisted of ball hawks unaware of the tender turf of green surfaces running

across them while escaping pursuing park attendants. Tree climbing, a big pastime in the old days, accounted for occasional broken branches. Birch swinging, immortalized in Robert Frost's poem, "Birches," was the act of leaping into the top of a single birch from another tree and swinging to the ground in an arc and probably accounted for some snapped trunks. The damage to trees, mostly play oriented, could not be considered vandalism; not as we know it today. It never seemed willful.

There were, of course, isolated cases of planned destruction. Generally, though, the hallowed grounds of a city's courses escaped large-scale devastation. It was not uncommon to come upon groups of boys fishing in a course's lake or pond. Somehow they had learned to respond with a wary eye to a cry of "Fore" and still keep an eye on a bobbing float. Stern admonishments from annoyed golfers were listened to politely. The kids, however, always knew golfers had to keep moving, so the day's fishing could continue with only an occasional interruption to be endured from the more irate members of a club. The pastoral scenes of yesterday's golf are but distant memories now. By contrast the reality faced today by operators and superintendents is wanton, wholesale destruction.

In the past we have reported details from a cross section of the country on vandal attacks. Numerous stories have come to light since then, which have bolstered our contention that vandalism may be the number one problem superintendents face today. Certainly, this is true in many areas of the country.

Youthful frustrations leading to vandalism are matched by frustrations of coping with the problem. As we have noted, frustration on the part of youth often leads to action. It follows that action on the part of superintendents must be undertaken to overcome their own feelings of frustration. Specific actions to thwart vandalism or at least stem its tide can be found in programs undertaken at various locations.

"Lights are the answer," Larry Brandt said recently. Brandt is professional and manager at Reeves Memorial, one of Cincinnati's fine municipal courses. He was talking about controlling access to the course and extending daylight to 11 p.m. "We usually remain open until 11 p.m. and we open early each day, usually at 6 a.m., but it's the time between 11 and 6 we worry about. We are not fenced in, but we can and do lock the roadway gates. At least automobiles are excluded. To enter the course at night, you'd have to walk in. Lights are the answer."

Brandt felt that a night watchman could not cover the entire area. He reported that a few years ago a watchman was severely beaten by night time visitors. He said also recent rules had eliminated caddies, which he initially felt was a mistake.

Brandt grew up in caddie programs. "Golf made my life," as he put it. Coming from a poor family in Missouri, golf has had significant effects on his life, a lifetime appreciation of the game. Naturally, Brandt felt the demise of Cincinnati caddies was wrong, but he changed his mind when he realized it became a simple matter to identify un-

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authorized persons, potential vandals, roaming Reeves and to have them removed. Unfortunately, the rule excluding non-players had to include caddies from whose ranks come dedicated golfers and damn few vandals.

Reeves Memorial, named for Will R. Reeves, first director of recreation for Cincinnati, who served in that capacity when the agency was formed in 1926 until his death in 1931, is unique, because it stretches 6,395 yards over flat terrain at the end of Lunken Airport, which used to be Cincinnati's Municipal. The vast acreage encompassing the airport as well as Reeves Memorial precludes fencing.

Possibly Cincinnati's most effective weapon against vandalism is their beginners' school program. Each May, new crops of golfers are introduced to the beauties of the Queen City's courses. According to Robert "Red" Strauss, superintendent of golf for the Cincinnati Recreation Commission, "The school wraps up in a nutshell all the basic techniques and information needed for a good start in the game." Group instruction at each course, including one session with film, is offered under the watchful eye of the professional. A package of six lessons is being offered this year for fees as low as \$3. The hours are flexible, too. The involvement of Cincinnati's youth in sports like golf, which could evolve into an avocation or a career, may be the city's best deterrent against future vandalism.

George Cosgrove, professional at Heatherwood GC on Long Island, utilizes a systematic control of potential vandalism. Any youngster found on the course who doesn't belong there is brought in and "booked." First offense, a warning and a listing of his name and address in Cosgrove's special ledger. Second time, apprehension and retention until a parent comes by to claim his delinquent and again on the list. Third offense and the youngster has run out of chances. The police are summoned. It now becomes a formal matter with charges covering trespassing and whatever acts of vandalism have been committed.

While protecting his superb executive layout by the use of his "list," Cosgrove believes also in involving youth.

He has another list—a caddie list—to encourage teenagers into becoming part of the Heatherwood scene. The opportunity to make a few dollars can also lead to an appreciation of a splendid golf course. Heatherwood, superbly operated as a business, is also vulnerable to vandalism. Cosgrove's "book" and his attempts to involve his youthful contingent go hand in hand toward coping with potential invaders.

Many communities, of course, have junior programs giving preferential rates to youngsters. Sacramento may be unique in its handling of the younger generation. To assure the proper kind of involvement and incidentally to insure against vandalism, Tommy Lo Presti, professional and manager at Haggin Oaks municipal, runs a series of three etiquette classes prior to issuing junior cards.

Juniors, aware of golf's unwritten rules about identifying one's ball, raking traps, fixing ball marks and not driving into people, feel no resentment from their elders. Frustration at not being accepted has no room in which to build. Hopefully, the young golfers have an influence on other young people of the Sacramento area. Ultimately, perhaps, leading to the elimination of vandalism.

There are no ready solutions to the vandalism problem. The get-tough attitude is fine and often necessary. It may solve an immediate local problem. It may serve notice on potential vandals that stern action follows destructive behavior. But it will never end vandalism's devastation of our golf course facilities.

It may be necessary to endure sneak attacks, property damage and the humiliation of being unable to pursue and prosecute vandals until such time as enough potential vandals are won over through alternative, meaningful activities.

Understanding the reasons behind vandalism and offering alternatives, in the long run, may be the only solution to this costly and deeply frustrating problem. □



CMAA CONTINUING EXECUTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM, Club Law and Internal Control, Vancouver, B.C., June 4-6.

RUTGERS TURFGRASS RESEARCH DAY, Dudley and College Farm Roads, College of Agriculture and Environmental Science, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J., June 12.

INTERNATIONAL SHADE TREE CONFERENCE, Hotel Utah, Salt Lake City, June 17-20.

TEXAS TURFGRASS FIELD DAYS, Agronomy Field Lab, Texas A & M University, College Station, Tex., June 27.

FOURTH ANNUAL SOUTH CAROLINA TURFGRASS CONFERENCE, Clemson House, Clemson, S.C., July 10-11.

CMAA CONTINUING EXECUTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM, Advanced Management Techniques, Denver, July 16-18.

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY TURFGRASS FIELD DAY, Columbus, Ohio, August 7.

CMAA CONTINUING EXECUTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM, Personnel and Motivation Management, Haverford, Pa., August 13-15.

RHODE ISLAND TURFGRASS FIELD DAYS, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, R.I., August 22-23.

TURF AND LANDSCAPE DAY, Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, Wooster, Ohio, September 11.

TURFGRASS FIELD DAY, Ornamental Horticulture Research Center, Urbana, Ill., September 18.