

All Is Not Bent That Creeps

By ELMER J. MICHAEL

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MY experience in greenkeeping dates back to the time when I was two years old. At that time my father accepted the position of greenkeeper at the Country Club of Buffalo, the only club in the Buffalo district at that time, and he is without a doubt the pioneer greenkeeper of this section. Since then he has made a name for himself that is second to none in the country. His advice has been sought by many clubs and I myself have benefited very much by it.

When I was still a small boy and caddying, we used to build golf courses in the back lots. It was there possibly that my interest was aroused. We would change these around from time to time and have different layouts, building greens and bunkers and then playing on them in every spare moment.

Starts as Foreman at Eighteen

In 1914 I accepted my first position on a course. I was 13 years old at that time and my father was in charge. In the first three years during my school vacations, I did all the different kinds of work that are done on a golf course. The following two years I received my first experience at construction work at Orchard Park, the Park Club country course. It was there that I learned how the obstacles in construction and upbuilding

of new courses are met and overcome. At the end of that time when in my 18th year, I was asked to take the foreman's job at the city course of the Park Club. My first year in that capacity was really a failure due to the fact that I was left alone a good deal of the time and laid out the work to suit myself. My way of doing the work did not meet with my father's approval just because it was not his way. The result was that I was in hot water most of the time. The following year we agreed that I should run the course my own way for two months and if at the end of that time it was not satisfactory, I would resign to my father's orders. This put me on my own and the result was that I was successful and we had some real competition between us.

Prefers Poa Annu for Greens

In 1922 I had my first experience in charge of construction work. We built three new holes in the old Pan American Exposition grounds. This land was really a dump. We spent many months of hard labor on it. Today it is a beauty spot. During the next three years we raised some greens on that property that are second to none in the country. It was during these three years that I began to study bent, learning many things about it. My observations showed me that all is not bent



Elmer J. Michael, Greenkeeper (center back row), with his "gang" on the Transit Valley Club Course, East Amherst, Buffalo District, New York

that creeps. Therefore we must be very careful in making use of this grass. There is only one true bent according to my estimation but there are many imitations. Personally I prefer *Poa-Annua* greens to those made of bent. The greens made of this grass are not subject to brown patch and make as good if not a better putting surface than bent.

On August 1st, 1925, when I was still 24 years old, I accepted the position of greenkeeper at the Transit Valley Club. I must say that I have not had an easy time of it. The course, when I took charge, was very much run down and the greens were in terrible shape. We had just three weeks in which to get ready for the Western New York Championship. In that short time we were successful in making a big improvement. But even at this time it is far from perfect. We have done considerable remodeling. The course is very low and have had to do a great deal of tiling. During the last season, the players seemed very much pleased and intimated that our course ranked second in the district.

All Greens Differ—Study Them

At the time I took over the position, we had very little good compost. It was all very green. The result was we raised a good crop of weeds and have had to keep at them continually. It is here that I would like to say that sulphate of ammonia cannot be used during the summer months on our course, except in such small quantities that it is not beneficial. I find that bonemeal gives me the best results. I do not use any set time for top dressing nor any set amount per square yard because of the varying nature of the greens. I feel that a greenkeeper must study his greens and give them what they need when they need it. If the greens are not all built of the same material they will not always take the same treatment. After working here and trying to use the

same methods as I did at the Park Club, I find they are not practical. What will work on one course will not always work on another.

A few of the things that I think are essential to a golf course are:

1. That it should be kept scrupulously clean at all times from debris, paper, small piles of dirt, etc.
2. That the trees and shrubbery, especially on the line of play, be kept trimmed and free from dead wood.
3. That everything should have a place and be kept in that place, that the tools whether they are the best or not should be kept looking neat and in good working order.
4. That the men must be thoroughly instructed so that they may be able to discharge their duties properly.
5. That the greens should be kept free from weeds and other obnoxious grasses and also well watered. The watering preferably done at night.

No Other Position Where Demands Are So Varied

My belief is that a better name for a greenkeeper would be a golf course engineer. He has to have a knowledge of many things to work efficiently and keep expense down to a minimum. He must be a carpenter, machinist, mason, plumber, electrician, farmer and greenkeeper. There is not another position in the world that requires all this from one man. So far since I have been at Transit Valley Country Club, I have not hired a mechanic of any description outside of our general run of labor. I have studied these various jobs from many angles and can instruct the men I have to handle in any of the work I have mentioned. Therefore the position of a greenkeeper is full of interest at all times. It keeps one thinking, working, busy and happy with a desire to do still bigger things in life.

**All Questions
On Problems of Greenkeeping
Which Have Been Received From Members
Will Be Answered in the
May Number**

**Send In Your Questions and Watch
The "Clearing House" Grow!**