

Doc's Dugout - An Inning from our Past & Present

by Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAWN MOWER FOR SPORTS TURF (PART II)

The United States was a partner in the development of the lawn mower after the 1870's with our friends and competition from the United Kingdom. In 1918, A. J. Dremel of Racine, Wisconsin, met with Knud Jacobsen to discuss the idea of using an engine to drive lawn mowers. Working as a team, Dremel and Jacobsen introduced to the public an internal combustion, engine-driven lawn mower in 1921. The mower was named the "4-acre" since the operator could mow four acres of grass in one day. The "4-acre" was a mower specifically designed for use in parks, cemeteries, large estates, golf courses, playgrounds, and athletic fields. In 1924 Jacobsen introduced a power greens mower to cut bentgrass on golf and lawn bowling greens. At first, greenskeepers (superintendents of today) were leery of the power mower as they feared it would scalp the turf, compact the soil, damage the turf with gasoline and oil spills. Most importantly, they feared it would result in the loss of employees. Jacobsen continued to add innovations, improvements and amenities to their line of mowing equipment, such as ride-on sulkies to reduce walking, pneumatic tires to replace metal wheels and an automatic recoil starter. Even with these features there was a reluctance by many grounds

managers to purchase power lawn mowers. Oscar Jacobsen once demonstrated a power mower to a park superintendent in Chicago who was very impressed with everything about the mower. When asked by Jacobsen if he would purchase the mower, the superintendent said, "Well, I've got one hundred men here mowing the lawns with hand mowers, and they all vote for me. If I have to reduce my staff by using power mowers, I won't get many votes." Eventually the power mower won its place as a common necessity on grounds throughout the United States

During the 1920's there were other companies engaged in the manufacturing of lawn mowers, specifically MotoMower (Detroit), Ideal (Lansing, MI), Coldwell (Newbury, N.Y.), Toro (Minneapolis, MN) and Worthington (Shawnee, Pa.). The Shawnee Mower Company was founded around 1910, by Charles C. Worthington and the name was changed later to the Worthington Mower Company. Originally the company developed a 30" horse-drawn reel mower and by 1914, began producing 30" mowers that could be attached together in order to cut a larger swath. This was the first commercially produced gang mower. The mowing units were available in combinations of 3, 5, 7 or 9. In 1919, Worthington began manufacturing a small tractor to pull the gang mower units. Finally, in 1945, Jacobsen purchased the Worthington line of mowers and the Worthington Mower Company located in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, to increase their commercial line of mowers and equipment. Ironically, the Worthington family initially was in the business of manufacturing and selling pumps, then sold that business and began manufacturing steam automobiles before getting involved with lawn mowers.

Similarly, the Toro Company was founded in Minnesota in 1914 as the Toro Motor Company. Initially, Toro build engines for a farm tractor manufacturer. In 1922, a local greenskeeper from a Minneapolis golf course suggested to Toro that they should design and sell a tractor-towed gang mower unit for fairway maintenance. Soon after, Toro turned away from their agricultural orientation and by 1925, Toro turf maintenance machines were in service on major golf courses in the United States and also in many parks throughout the country.

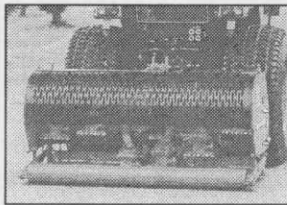
Rotary lawn mowers had been used by the 1930's, but their popularity increased during the 1940's because these mowers could cut through weeds and tall grass. The other advantage was due to their simplified design, rotary mowers could be manufactured at a reduced cost compared to reel mowers. By 1947, there were 66 companies manufacturing rotary mowers. A pioneer in rotary mower production was the

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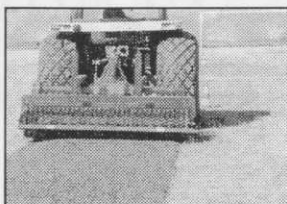
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Standard Mower Company in Lebanon, Indiana. They were purchased by Jacobsen in 1948. Likewise, Toro purchased Whirlwind, Inc. in 1948, and was the first to introduce a bagging attachment to use with rotary mowers.

John Deere brought years of agricultural and industrial experience to the lawn mower market in 1963 with their lawn and garden rotary tractor mower. In 1986, the Golf & Turf Division of John Deere began selling reel mowers for sports turf and golf courses.

The flail mower was brought to the turf market and has been used on athletic field turf since the 1950's. It was originally sold for use on very low maintenance turf and playgrounds because it was safe to operate where children were present. These are quite versatile mowers because verticut blades can also be installed. In the 1980's, out-front flail mowers were introduced to the turf market with a quality of cut greatly enhanced over the original versions.

Today many new companies have entered into the turf market with mowers for use on sports turf. The lawn mower continues to be the most important tool for the care and maintenance of sports turf facilities throughout the world.

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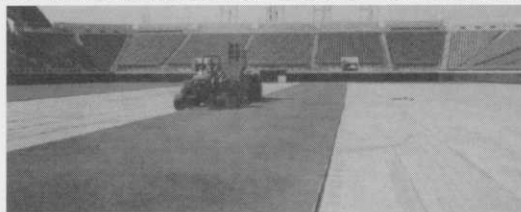
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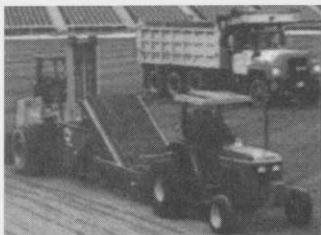
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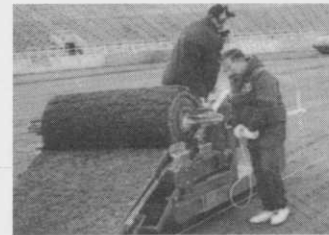
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