

Your Season is Over, But the Greenkeeper's Job is Never Done

by Charles Bartlett
Golf Editor, Chicago Tribune

(Editor's note: I found this article in the "Chicagoland Golf", November 1952 and thought it would be interesting for us today)

So you are a member of a golf club, eh?

Did it ever occur to you that there is a hard working lodge of men who already have started thinking about the condition of the courses you will play over in the 1953's spring and summer and early autumn?

Sure, you are leaving Chicagoland golf, most of you, for vacations in Florida, Arizona, and Southern California, sooner or later. But what about the northern lots that must be kept up thru the rigorous winters that strike them, the places you play on in the good weathers?

A tonic visit by this reporter to Chicago's Glen Oak Country Club is your answer. There you find Ray Gerber, past president of the National Greenkeeping Superintendent's Association. He and his crew are already up and going about the problems that face him and such of his colleagues as Bill Stuppel of Exmoor; Ray Didier of Tam O'Shanter, Bob Williams of Beverly; Dave Cairns of Elmhurst; Frank Dinelli of Northmoor and Bert Ross of Park Ridge.

If the above has new lines in their faces, charge those furrows up to one of the roughest summers ever to strike a golf course since 1949. That last summer was a bad one, in many cases calling for erection of temporary greens, and reports to committees suggesting installation of new equipment and purchase of chemicals that will nurture greens thru the grief that might come with a tough winter.

What does a greenkeeping superintendent do when only the diehards will come out to test a course?

We'll take Gerber's prescription, one that has gone into effect in its early stages. Yes, early, because there's a lot of work to do around a golf course that earns no blue ribbons once the so-called season is over.

We selected Gerber as a true practitioner of this autumnal laboratory, not because he survived and helped many of his brothers in the greenkeeping fraternity survive this whacky summer of 1952, worst in these parts since 1949, but because he has the background, the experience, and the overall savvy that comes from treating greens and fairways in sick beds everywhere.

Ray didn't brag about the well-tailored and healthy condition of his own Glen Oak as recently as the Chicago District Golf association's interleague matches in late September. He just figured that the fine health of the course was due to the job he and his crew are paid to do.

What's more, Gerber thinks his job is only half done. Sure, there'll be a company of diehards out playing golf in these nice days, and a few of the rough ones, too. But the majority of regulars will have hung up their sticks for the year. Many of these, sad to say, are the sort who will come out next spring and holler about the shape of the course. Mind you, we are not quoting Gerber. We're talking from our own experience with the gripes of members, and yes, daily fee and park players, who

(cont'd. page 14)

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(Greenkeeper's Job Never Done cont'd.)

moan each year about the lack of texture on the greens, snow mold on the fairways, and rough up to your knees. Generally, these complaints derive from the player's failure to sink a three-footer, hit a fairway wood from a genuine lie, or an iron shot askew into the spinach.

Why don't you folks appreciate the work that greenkeeping superintendents do, not only in the season proper, but out of it, too? What doth a smart golf course superintendent do these days? Let Gerber take the stand:

"You've got to do a lot of forward thinking about keeping up a golf course", Ray says. "Especially in the fall and yes, even during the winter. Some folks think you just go out and mow the fairways, touch up the greens, and your job is done. A real greenkeeping superintendent can't be had cheap, if he's going to do the job right.

"I got my own start as a kid, driving a team of horses up at the old Woodhill club in Minneapolis. I was 15 then. Nobody had even thought up some of the mechanical contrivances we have today. If they mowed the fairways once in a week those days, it was good. The rough grew so high that it was seldom cut until the haying season, and the stuff was fed to the horses. It got so steep that a lot of the old timers who hooked or sliced a shot would actually roll into the high grass to find the ball by hitting it with their backs or chests. Ask Chick Evans or Jock Hutchison, Sr. They did it. And the greens were hand mowed, with an old job just like your pop used to wheel around on the front lawn. Man, how lucky golfers are now!

Our first job at this time of year is to spray the whole place with a special solution designed to eliminate clover and broad leaves. Our toughest job, and I guess it's one of the real tricks

in sports, is to anticipate the first snow fall. If you can guess that one, you'll have the name of the game. Idea then is to treat your greens and fairway fronts to beat winter kill and snow mold. Winter kill comes from thawing, freezing, and standing water in low spots. Snow mold is a fungus condition originating in the soil.

This goes on all thru the months when most folks don't play golf in these parts. I can't say enough about last winter, when the January snow fell on unfrozen ground. As soon as that thawed, we went back to work again and treated the fairways and greens with a hand spreader, using dry material instead of the liquid solution we would use to spray during better weather.

"This sounds simple, but other off-season jobs include tree-trimming, leaf-gathering, painting birdhouses and fences, draining the swimming pool, catch basins; plumbing of all sorts, screening the compost for next spring's top dressing. Shucks, I could go on and on. But I've been doing it at Glen Oak for 17 years, for a grand bunch of people, and I love it!"

Credit: "Chicagoland Golf" 11/52

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