Larry Tomaszewski *AXA Advisors, LLC*

The Rock –n– Roll Fifties

Golf Becomes Everyman's Game

Editor's Note: One article couldn't possibly do justice to 75 years of history. So, in honor of the Midwest's 75th anniversary, On Course *presents a special decade-by-decade retrospective. This fourth installment looks at golf's growing popularity with the masses during a decade of prosperity and optimism. Coming in August: the 1960s.*

The 1950s truly marked a "new beginning" to the second half of the 20th century. The Great War was long over and millions of Americans who had put their lives on hold were beginning to catch up on lost opportunities. Raising children (the earliest Baby Boomers), careers, discretionary cash and better usage of recreational time became of utmost importance.

Rocker Elvis Presley and actress Marilyn Monroe were two cultural icons who gained fame in the 1950s.

In the '50s, people strove to free up time to allow for more choice, more freedom. Time to read the hottest magazines, from *Playboy* to *MAD*. Time to watch movies on the big screen at drive-in theaters. Time to watch the era's favorite entertainers: Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Bob Hope, Gene Kelly, Gary Cooper, Grace Kelly and Katharine Hepburn. Time—and money—for toys, and trips, and hobbies. Small wonder that the sport of golf grew at a dramatic pace during this decade.

Pack your bags, we are moving to the suburbs. Large lots of land outside major city limits provided the impetus for suburban growth. By the end of the decade, the mass exodus into suburbia generated huge demand to support the activities of suburbia.

The game of golf flourished as it became the recreational activity of choice for many. Interest grew such that players numbered more than 3 million and golf courses, 15,000. While courses under development could not keep pace with demand, the decade saw the birth of places like Maplecrest G.C., U of I/Orange G.C., Arrowhead G.C. and Inverness G.C. The general public's burgeoning interest in golf laid the groundwork for a dramatic surge in new construction in the 1960s.

Television, discretionary time and money became the "lightning rod" to further interest in golf. The black-and-white tube created interest in a sport for the masses . . .

"Aspects of Suburban Life: Golf" by Paul Cadmus.

a sport all suburbia could join in. The 1950s saw golf move from the sealed-off private clubs that were customized for the elite to the daily fee, open-gate courses that recruited the "blue collar" worker. The everyday golfer could better identify the clubs with the new number naming convention. Greenkeepers influenced friends, family and neighbors to take up the game.

The Strength of a Group

The needs of the public translated into more opportunities for the members of the Midwest

(continued on page 18)

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Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS).

What began with an elite group of 60 greenkeepers, grew exponentially as interest in greenkeeping as a profession blossomed. The Midwest Regional Turf Conference at Purdue University in 1950 convened more than 300 Midwest greenkeepers to discuss their profession. Discussion, seminars and clinics provided information on issues such as turf, chemicals, equipment, irrigation, weeds and the business approach to turf management. The goal was to advance the greenkeeper's stature from the fellow relegated to a maintenance building on the back acreage of the course to an integral player in the golf course's upkeep and operation. Even 50+ years ago, greenkeepers truly saw the value in exchange of ideas.

The year 1951 was strategically important. Not only did the national organization undergo a name change to the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, but the MAGCS marked its silver anniversary. For 25 years, the Midwest had successfully provided its members a forum for sharing information and camaraderie. As with all associations, money and support were pressing issues. The membership committee attached importance to attracting the 70 or so locals who were not members. Strong leadership carried the day, laying the groundwork for the future of the regional chapter and the national group. Indeed, several presidents of the MAGCS went on to lead the national association: Ray Gerber of Glen Oak C.C. in 1950, Norm Johnson of Butterfield C.C. in 1954 and Bob Williams of Beverly and Bob O' Link in 1958.

MIDWEST REGIONAL TURF CONFERENCE, PURDUE UNIVERSITY, 1950

The '50s were a pivotal decade for the development of new and innovative tools that allowed greenkeepers to master their domain (the golf course).

Tricks of the Trade

The '50s were a pivotal decade for the development of new and innovative tools that allowed greenkeepers to master their domain (the golf course). Key innovations in herbicides, insecticides, fertilizers, turfgrass and equipment made golf courses aesthetically pleasing to both hardcore and recreational players.

Herbicides came of age in the '50s. Most of the preemergence materials (Doctal, Balan, Betasan) were developed and commercialized in the '50s. Weeds that truly affected summertime play (e.g., dandelions) and in some instances, shut down play, became controllable. Golfers could feel confident in locating their golf balls in early summer. The inventory of herbicides included the dreaded arsenicals (lead arsenate, sodium arsenate and organic arsenicals). Years later, better alternatives to these chemicals became available.

Insecticides included the highly chlorinated hydrocarbons (Chlordane, Bandane) and DDT. These were used to control the infiltration of various insect types and populations.

Fertilizers in use were mainly soluble materials. Turf showed a

The '50s saw the birth of McDonald's and a new all-American meal: burger, fries and milkshake.

dramatic improvement in appearance, stability and ability to withstand the effects of a variety of weather and golf conditions. Usage of natural organics, such as Milorganite, provided other options.

Turfgrass species available in the '50s mirror what is out there now, but without dramatically improved cultivators that today are taken for granted. Greens were either South German, one of the vegatively varieties or Penncross (introduced in 1954) along with varying percentages of bluegrass. Complete turf types of ryegrass, bluegrass and fescues were not available in the '50s.

As the cost of labor increased 200 to 400% (to $1.30/hour), the need to reduce labor costs through automated equipment became even more compelling. The advent of power equipment made the task of cutting greens, fairways and roughs a conceivable daily job. With the end of the war, steel went into products other than war machinery and raw materials were once more available to the private sector. Manufacturers could concentrate on new and different product lines: Ford tractors, Jacobson mowers, Toro mowers, Case tractors, etc. Greens and tee boxes were mowed with walk-behind mowers. Fairway mowing equipment pulled by tractors allowed for an even cut. Rough mowing had become a simple operation due to innovations that permitted frequent and economical cutting.

Irrigation of fairways, greens and tees was done mostly with quick-coupler sprinklers arranged in single-row fairway designs, by movable sprinklers or by hand. Top-dressing was normally done in conjunction with coring in spring or fall. Pure sand was rarely used.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower's passion for golf led him to install a practice green and bunker on the White House grounds.

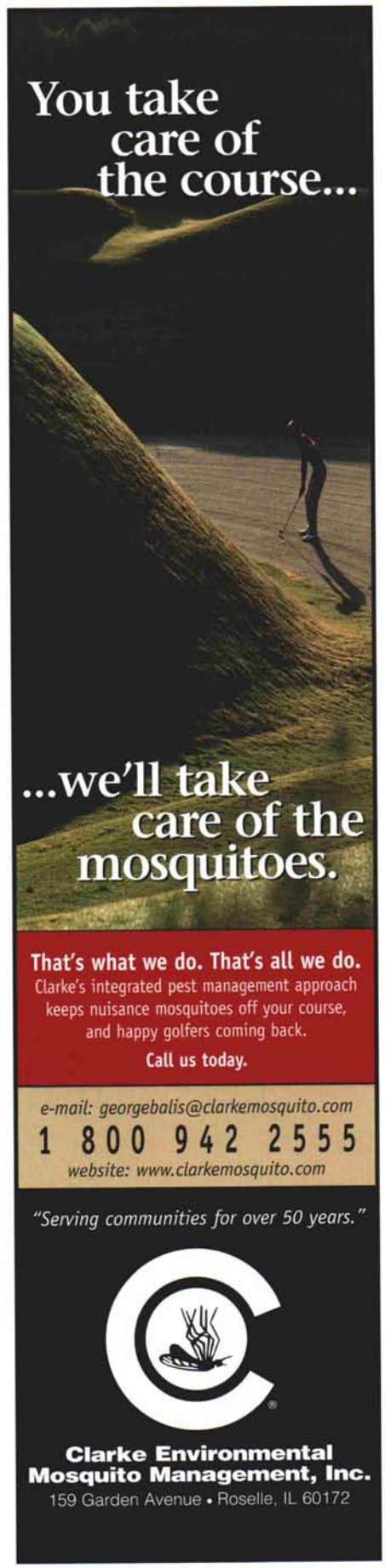
This Is No "Bull" Sheet

Monthly meetings and regular publication of *the Bull Sheet* kept local superintendents abreast of industry changes. *The Bull Sheet* was also a vehicle for cultivating relationships with other regional chapters; for example, the Wisconsin association provided a monthly article to the Midwest's venerable newsletter. Vendors played a key role in supplying information on product innovations. "Remember to support your vendors!" admonished *the Bull Sheet.*

The Chicago Golf Scene

Chicagoland golf provided numerous opportunities for the entrepreneur. The most notable was George S. May, who created the model for today's golf tourna-

(continued on page 20)



ments. May shocked the sports world when he offered $50,000 to the winner of his "Tam" tournament (in Niles). At that time, the U.S. Open offered only $6,000 to the winner. More important, May reached out to the general public and introduced millions to the game of golf through television. Indeed, he dipped into his own pocket to televise golf. And lucky for George, ABC-TV televised probably the most remarkable moment in early golf history: Lew Worsham sinking a 104-yard wedge shot on no. 18 that catapulted him to victory in the '53 world championship. Jimmy DeMaret coined the phrase "the shot heard 'round the world."

May's revolution extended beyond purse money and television exposure. He was a master promoter. What Bill Veeck was to baseball, May was to golf. Some of May's innovative ideas were 50 years ahead of his time, including up-to-the-minute scoreboards around the course, bleacher seating on key holes, air-conditioned press rooms for the reporters, green dye to make the course look perfect to casual observers, picking up expenses to attract foreign players and running parallel tournaments for men and women. No doubt about it, George worked hard to make his "Tam" tournaments a success.

Another legend of Chicagoland golf throughout the 1900s was Chick Evans. His program "caddies to college" is his enduring legacy. In 1950, a donation program called the "Bag Tag" fundraiser provided automatic billing for contributors and would later be known as the Par Club, one of the key fundraisers for the Evans Scholarships. The dedication of the Western Golf Association's offices in 1955 highlighted the post-war boom of the Chick Evans college program. By the end of the '50s, Evans Scholarships were used to fund tuition and housing at six Midwestern colleges.

Thanks for the Exposure

While celebrities like Bob Hope and Bing Crosby frequently promoted and played in golf events, few popularized golf during the '50s as much as President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1952-1960). "Ike" had a practice bunker and green built on the White House grounds. He also maintained a year-round cottage on Augusta National, where his

George S. May, Slammin' Sammy Snead and the Brown Bomber, Joe Louis, at one of May's "Tam" tourneys.

displeasure with a tree on no. 17 led to its rechristening as "the Eisenhower Tree." Apparently, President Eisenhower disliked the location of this tree as he frequently hit into it; the story goes that Ike demanded it be cut down. The tree still stands today in honor of the President's trials and tribulations on Augusta's 17th hole.

The 1950s had its share of great golfers. Stalwart competitors Ben Hogan (Bantam Ben) and Sam Snead dueled each other throughout the decade. Rivals with personalities as different as day and night, Hogan and Snead both symbolized and fueled the post-war golf boom: Hogan, winner of seven Majors, and Snead, winner of 81 Tour events and six Majors (but never the U.S. Open). Australia's greatest golfer, Peter Thomson, triumphed in four British Opens in the '50s.

In 1954, one Arnold Palmer—arguably the greatest and most recognizable golf professional ever—began his career. Television brought the look, power and drama of his game and presence into the living rooms of golf enthusiasts worldwide.

The box office appeal of Babe Didrickson Zaharias, one of the greatest all-around female athletes ever, laid the groundwork for the establishment of the LPGA in the '50s. Babe's flair drew huge crowds. She won 31 out of 128 tournaments during her short eight-year career. Tragically, she died in 1956 at the young age of 42.

During this decade, the U.S. dominated the international team matches, winning all five Walker Cups and four of five Ryder Cups, losing only the 1957 Ryder Cup in England. Ted Kroll was the PGA's top money winner of the decade, earning a whopping $72,835.

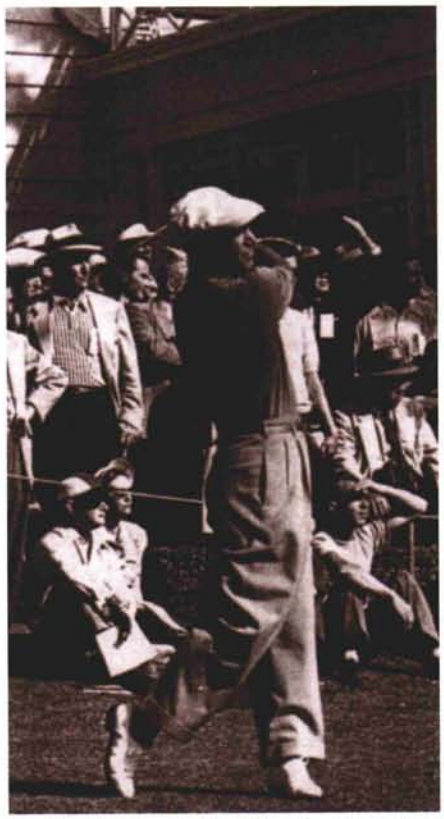
In January 1951, the USGA opened its national headquarters, the "Golf House" in New York City. Also, the USGA and the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland engaged in negotiations leading to the adoption of a uniform code of rules, which became effective worldwide in 1952.

Heading Toward the '60s

The '50s were a mix of good times and bad. The peace and tranquility of the years immediately following World War II ended on June 25, 1950 with the beginning of the Korean War. U.S. troops went to another foreign land. This war ended in the middle of the decade, but another confrontation was already brew-

ing down the street in a land called Vietnam. The '50s was the decade of Marilyn Monroe and Senator McCarthy's "witch hunts;" it saw the start of the Cold War, the end of segregation *(Brown v. Board of Education)*, the introduction of two new states (Alaska and Hawaii), the death of a genius (Einstein), the death of a renegade (James Dean) and the New York Yankees' string of victories—WIN, WIN, WIN, WIN, WIN, WIN.

How would the 1960s change our world and our industy? Stay tuned for the next installment in our series.



Ben Hogan, "the Wee Ice Man," dazzled galleries and put his stamp on the record books.

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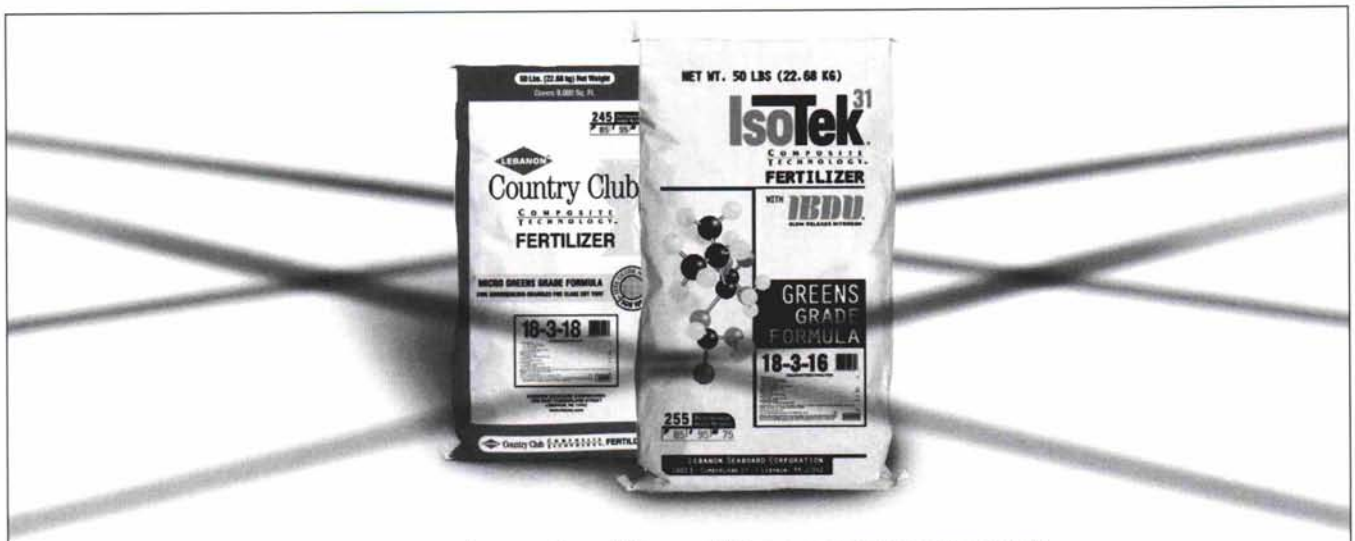

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