

Role of the Golf Course Consultant

By MAX A. BROWN, Ph.D.



This article presents to you what I feel to be the present and future role of the golf course consultant. These thoughts are based on my experience as a consulting agronomist in all parts of this country and around the world for the past fourteen years.

An effective "cop-out" for me would be to present one picture to you — a group of golf course superintendents and another picture to golf course owners, managers and greens committee members. I won't do that; what I say here is my objective appraisal that I would tell to golf course superintendents, owners, managers and greens committee members alike.

DEFINITIONS

Let's begin our discussion by defining a few terms so that we all are talking about the same things:

First of all:

1) Consultant: one who gives professional advice or services,

2) Consult: a) to ask advice or opinion, b) to deliberate together: confer. Therefore, a golf course consultant is one who is asked to give advice or opinion on golf course maintenance. Also, he must deliberate together or confer with a person. This person should be the golf course superintendent; too often it is with the golf course owner or manager, at the exclusion of the superintendent.

Many times I have been called upon by people other than the golf course superintendent to review a maintenance program. It is obvious that their purpose is to call in a hatchet-man to side against the superintendent. I don't do it. It works out better if management requests the superintendent to seek the help or guidance to solve the problem. If requested by the superintendent much more good can be done, simply through the cooperation which will result.

THE SUPERINTENDENT

What makes a good superintendent? How do you judge and say this guy is a better superintendent than the other guy? Simply by the *day-in, day-out condition and playability of his golf course, for the money spent*. He can only be judged by the quality of his product in view of the resources available to him. He may be stuck with a "dog" of a golf course and no amount of money or skill can make it look good — but he is still judged by it.

If we study this man that we judge to be a good superintendent, we invariably find him to have the three following qualities:

- 1) Well organized.
- 2) Technically, well founded in a) turf requirements, b) equipment, c) irrigation, etc.
- 3) Dedicated man, continually studying and learning. He is a man who openly admits he doesn't know all the answers. He remembers the old definition of an educated man as one who doesn't necessarily know all the answers but knows where to find them.

The better superintendents, in this game of musical chairs we see around us, seek to improve themselves professionally and financially by taking better jobs as they come along. We have seen in recent years that many of the highest paying jobs, with the highest maintenance budgets, are with golf complexes with two, three, four or more golf courses.

The man in charge of operations like this finds it necessary to hire people to work for him who are in actual fact the superintendents on the individual golf courses. He no longer has the time to study each blade of grass on a daily basis. He finds himself conferring with his superintendents, giving advice and opinion. He finds himself to be almost a (shudder) consultant.

CONSULTANTS

A good superintendent has many sources of information at his disposal. With a legal problem he can call his lawyer, a medical problem his doctor, a financial problem his banker or accountant. For technical information on his golf course he can consult text books, or periodicals. He can ask a respected superintendent, call the county agent, one of the state turf extension men, or a USGA Green Section agronomist. Irrigation equipment manufacturers strongly recommend using a qualified irrigation consultant for irrigation problems. A professional golf course consultant is simply another source of information. Used properly, all of these sources of information are good forms of *insurance against a small problem becoming a major calamity*.

All of the above listed sources of information are technically consultants. Some you pay for by tax funds, others you pay for by private funds.

The important factor is that you know your sources of information and use them to *your* best advantages.

The role of the private golf course consultant has varied over the years in this country. In Florida, with its tremendous number of golf courses, the need for technical information has been particularly acute. Florida has had one of the strongest turf research and extension programs of any of the states and it's had a wealth of the best superintendents and best conditioned golf courses in the country. But the demand for perfection has been greater in Florida than in any other region of the country.

Private golf course consultants have come and gone over the years in Florida. Often, they have created bad impressions with the industry. We could blame several things for this: personality reasons, spreading too thin, too little knowledge, and various and sundry poor approaches to the business. But we cannot deny that a tremendous demand for turf consultants has existed, and the demand in the industry is obviously increasing.

What does an individual need, or what should you expect in a turf consultant?

1) Must be independent with no binding ties or axes to grind.

2) Must keep constantly abreast of latest technical information (pest control), equipment, managements, irrigation, etc. a) read literature, b) attend meetings and conferences c) visit courses and superintendents over a wide area.

3) Must know golf, and the relationship of turf to the game. (Grain, moving heights, footing, body, etc.)

4) Must be aware of maintenance practices and requirements of all types of golf courses over as broad an

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area as possible. Although conditions are different we can sometimes benefit by procedures used in Maine or California. Innovations are made by individual superintendents all around the world and he must be aware of these.

5) Must be able to work recommendations into the maintenance program, not simply make the recommendations. Anyone can tell a man what chemicals to use to control weeds in a green, in a lake or around trees, but how can he work it into the program if the crew is short and equipment is old?

TRENDS OF GOLF TURF INDUSTRY

1) Greater demand for perfection. Very little tolerance of imperfection.

2) Better men are increasingly becoming responsible for multiple golf course complexes, and for more than one independent course.

3) Top superintendents are increasingly budgeting funds each year for obtaining emergency help when and if necessary, and for a periodic review of their total operation. The funds are considered an investment in better golf turf and insurance against major problems. The greatest problem is finding the man or organization who is qualified, whose judgment you can trust and respect. If a problem arises it is better for the superintendent to solve it himself than to have management go outside for help. When management goes outside for help it seldom works. Complete acceptance and cooperation is required between the superintendent and the consultant or the time and money is wasted.

Schmeisser Scholarship Awarded

At a recent meeting of the Florida Turf-Grass Association Scholarship and Research Foundation Board of Directors, action was taken to create a scholarship at the Lake City Community College in memory of the late Hans C. Schmeisser, the "Grand Dean" of golf course superintendents.

This scholarship, named The Hans Schmeisser Memorial Award, will be made annually to the Lake City Community College student, enrolled in the Golf Course Operations School, that most exemplifies the qualities that Mr. Schmeisser possessed during his long, and most honored, turf career. This award carries a \$1,000.00 cash compensation.

Mr. Schmeisser, who passed away in October, 1980, had been superintendent of Forest Hill Golf Course, West Palm Beach, for the past 15 years. He was a consultant, golf course designer and builder and superintendent for nearly all of his 88 years. He was made an honorary member of the FT-GA in 1976 and a posthumous confirmation of the Golf Course Superintendent's Association of America "Distinguished Service Award" was made at their 1981 Annual Convention.

One of his sons, Otto, is a member of the FT-GA and is superintendent of the Everglades Club in Palm Beach. His other son, John, is associated with Robert Trent Jones, the noted golf course architect. ■

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