

Machine Savings Absorbed by Golf's New Demands

By B. R. LEACH

Letter from Herb Graffis, Esq., Editor of GOLFDOM, to B. R. Leach

Chicago, Ill.,
April 29, 1931.

Dear Leach:

With regard to your article for the July issue of GOLFDOM: make it 2,500 words on the revision in golf course maintenance methods as a result of the more extensive use of mechanical equipment instead of manual labor. In the comparatively short time I have been in the business I have seen a number of 18-hole golf course pay-rolls cut from 16 men to 8 and 11 men. The mechanized work is done quicker, cheaper, better and more thoroughly.

There may be some complaint under the present labor situation that it is poor national policy to throw more men out of jobs, but the complaint is founded on faulty knowledge of human nature and economics. Regardless of any current labor situation, there is always going to be an advance in the application of mechanical means due to the probably selfish but nevertheless all-powerful dictates of the individual or individuals who spend the dough.

Also when golf course construction and maintenance costs are reduced by mechanical means, the construction of more golf courses is encouraged, and this in the long run means more jobs.

At any rate let us have your slant on this machinery proposition with a few ideas that aren't all covered with dusty cobwebs. Check enclosed for your May article.

Sincerely yours,

HERB GRAFFIS.

P. S.—*Lay off the wise-cracking* in this machinery article. Put real serious stuff on this subject as it concerns the very sacred topic of dough. It strikes me this is the most important subject to be handled this season.

H. G.

P. P. S.—Remember, we go to press here on the 20th. Get your stuff in here *by the 15th*, so I can use the blue pencil. My God! If I allowed some of the stuff you send us to be published the Anti-Saloon League and the Postoffice Department would shove Joe and me in the jug for sending scurrilous matter through the mails.

H. G.

Letter from B. R. Leach to Herb Graffis, Esq., Editor of GOLFDOM

Riverton, N. J.,
June 17, 1931.

Dear Herb:

Yours of April 29th received with check. I endorsed the check and turned it over to the sheriff, who has been camping on my doorstep for some time past.

I note by your letter that you are all steamed up on this question of golf course machinery and all the money the clubs are going to save by using more gasoline and less labor. The answer is yes and no. It looks to me as though the machinery will do the work more rapidly and cheaply, but the machinery will have more work to do than was formerly done, so it will probably all wind up even in the end.

Take fairway maintenance for instance. There was a time when they used mowers drawn by horses and they mowed the fairways as often as the horses and the spirit moved. Then they began to use power fairway mowers and pretty soon they had tractors with three cutting units and cut the fairways once a week. Then the golf course machinery people put out tractors and five mowing units and all the clubs began to mow the fairways twice a week. Now we see fairway mowers with seven cutting units and the fairways are mowed three times a week. Sooner or later we will have fairway mowers with ten cutting units and the fairways will be mowed every day.

Players Demand Best

The exacting demands of the present-day golfing public know no bounds. Five years ago if the grass on the fairway was a little long and the ball half buried, the player put a little more beef on his iron shot, grunted and took it all as part of the game—but not today. Nowadays, the player insists on a perfect lie on every inch of the fairway and in rainy weather if you let the fairways go three days without cutting they raise merry hell. The men are bad enough but—oh, the women! They'll kick if the mowers slide a little and leave patches uncut.

Consider rough maintenance. Four-inch length of grass in the rough is the limit nowadays on high-class courses, whereas a few years ago they used to mow the rough a couple of times a year with a hay mower. The day has gone by when a player will wade through daisies up to his knees looking for a lost golf ball. When a ball slices over into the rough the player wants to find it and find it quick.

More Grass and More Mowing

Then, again, all this fertilizing of fairways makes the grass grow so doggedly fast and thick that you have to be cutting oftener anyway. So that, all in all, I agree with you that the machinery is the stuff, but I don't altogether agree that the clubs are spending less money. They're probably spending pretty nearly as much money as ever, but doing much more work for the same money and securing a much better conditioned course.

Until recently, practically all the work on greens was hand work, but now this end of the maintenance game threatens to be revolutionized by the invasion of power machinery of one sort and another. A lot of wise guys think that this will enable them to cut the labor force and save money, but I have my doubts. I think it's going to work out just like it did on the fairways. More greens machinery but more work to be done, due to kicks of players with consequent proposed saving wiped out by additional service demands.

Not long ago I attended a demonstration of a gang power greens mower. This baby looked like the answer to the maiden's prayer and cut a green in about twelve minutes. A bunch of metropolitan greenkeepers were also watching this baby and thinking their individual thoughts. It may not be long before power greens mowers will be in universal use and the hand power mower will go on the long

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journey to that dell where the woodbine twineth and the whippoorwill calls to his mate.

Several thoughts went chasing through my brain-pan as I watched this latest development in greens mowing. As you know the greens are more or less the center of the golf course. If they go bad or are in poor playing condition you can hear the kicks clear over in Paris. The members *growl* at poorly conditioned fairways, but poor-play greens mean that the greenkeeper's hide will be nailed to a door.

Now, suppose I buy a power greens mower for that wealthy golf course I manage up on Long Island. Right away we'll say it displaces the six men who mow three greens apiece each morning. On this basis, according to your ideas, I could cut the payroll one and one-half men and save at least one grand per annum. O.K. Suppose I do just that very thing. Everything goes along jake until some Fourth of July morning at 7:10 a. m., whereupon a one-lung gas engine on a greens mower develops a temperamental streak and quits cold, with a vital part on the fritz, the

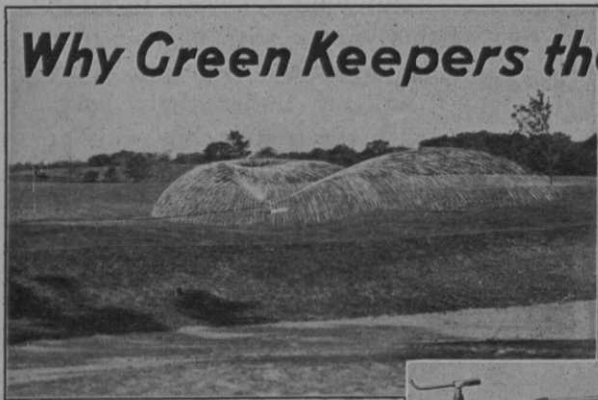
service station closed, the greens with a 24-hour beard standing up on end and 250 members in white pants due at 9 o'clock.

Prays for Perfect Motors

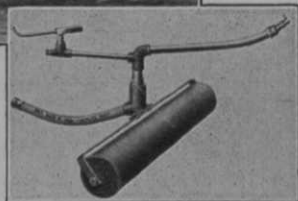
Now, don't tell me that such an occurrence is decidedly improbable. I've been monkeying with one-lung gas engines for the last 20 years and I'm telling you the damned things always select the worst possible moment to go bad. When I take my final mortal breath and take the express elevator down to hell to join up with the vast multitude of good scouts *en residence* I expect to find two commodities in abundance. I refer to mother-in-laws and one-lung gas engines. It couldn't possibly be hell without 'em. However, I must say that the way they have been improving these motors gives us considerable hope for a cheerful hereafter.

Well, after scratching the old bean for a moment I suppose you'll tell me to push the motor into the shed and drag out the six hand mowers and get the greens mowed that way. O. K., but don't forget I'm one and a half men short and there's

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a hell of a lot of other work to be done; that the hand mowers may not be in the best of shape and some of the men may not know how to push a hand greens mower any more than I know how to knit stockings; to say nothing of the money we have tied up in those hand mowers that are idle 98 per cent of the time and using up storage space. No, sir, it won't work out that way.

Once you change from hand labor to machine you can't go back to hand labor in an emergency. You're a slave to the machine. The machine has you!

Then the Saving Is Spent

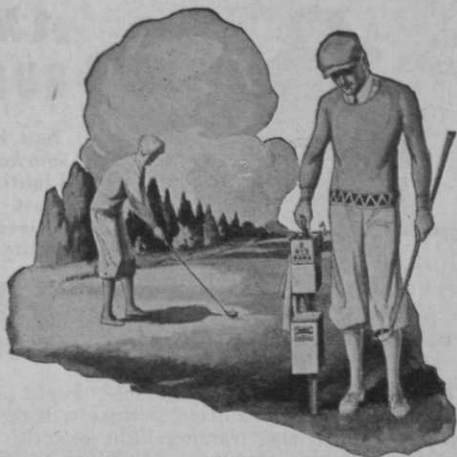
It simply means that when I get ready to substitute a gang type, power greens mower equipment for our present hand mowers I can't buy just *one* power mower. No, sir. In self-defense I've got to buy *two* gang power mowers so that if one goes bad I have the other to fall back on. That means more investment in greens mower equipment, more depreciation and interest, etc., etc. Furthermore, the lad that runs that power mower must be better than a common laborer and he'll have more jack in his pay envelope on Friday night than the rest of the common help, and of course all these extra items of expense are going to sort of eat into that thousand dollars you said I would save, so that when all is said and done maybe I'll only save \$500 after all, which of course ain't to be sneezed at. That \$500 is your ample reason, anyway, for using the machines.

However, just about the time I think I have that \$500 on ice some of our members will play a round at Piping Rock or Pine Valley and right then and there the fat is in the fire and the lamb chops are all over the kitchen floor.

The Same Old Story

They'll come to me and say, "Oh, Mr. Leach, you should have seen those greens. They were wonderful. Do you know that they cut those greens *twice* a day, first thing in the morning and again right after luncheon? The greens were simply wonderful and smooth at 3:30. Why can't we have our greens like that at 3:30? Why don't you mow our greens twice a day," and so on, *ad nauseum*.

Right then and there the 500 I thought I had safe in the old sock is all shot to hell. We will be doing twice as much mowing with power as we formerly did with hand mowers and the cost will be the



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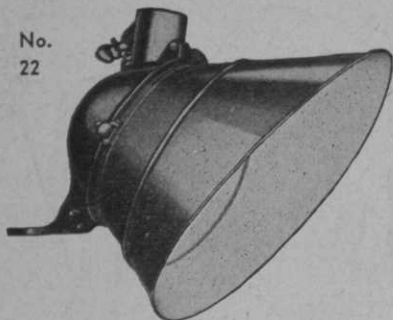
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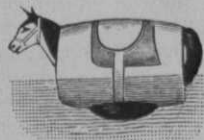
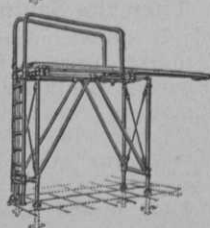
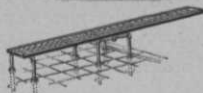
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same in toto. The playing conditions of the greens will be nearer perfection, but we won't be cutting total maintenance enough to write home about. By 1940 we'll be lucky if we aren't cutting the greens every 40 minutes and spending more money for mowing than we ever did before.

We are going to have more machinery on golf courses than the wisest lad ever dreamed of. There will be no end to it, and if 1931 course maintenance could be arbitrarily set up as the standard beyond which it would be illegal to go, then the golf clubs would have a fine show of saving a lot of dough. But you and I know that the world does move and the standard of course maintenance will increase as markedly and rapidly as the machine is capable of taking up the slack. It simply means better courses for the same money. Any cut in maintenance costs will in all probability be of a very transient nature.

Sincerely yours,

B. R. LEACH.

P. S.—I note by June GOLFDOM that the Green Section has finally admitted greenkeepers into the sacred portals of their advisory board. Of course a thing

like this makes it pretty tough for us writing bozos. For years when I couldn't think of anything else to write or talk about I could always get a big hand by panning the Green Section for freezing out the greenkeeper. Now the Green Section turns around and steals my thunder. This writing game is getting to be a horrible nightmare. What with all the factions in the golf racket compromising and cooperating and kissing each other on both cheeks it's getting so there ain't hardly a single issue to raise hell about. When you and Joe have a little spare time on your hands give me a line on something else in the golf racket that needs readjusting so I can keep in practice and not lose my pep.

B. R. L.

Write GOLFDOM whenever your club does "something different." Especially if the stunt makes money for the club or increases member enthusiasm. We want to pass it on to other clubs and pass their ideas back to you.