

Staff Education in California Major Job of Local Greensmen

By ARTHUR LANGTON

AN ARTICLE, in an eastern golf publication, dealing with methods of handling labor on the golf course caught the eye of a California greenkeeper and immediately he gave voice to his objections. It seems that the offending article suggested that all greenkeepers give each of their men personal directions every morning as to the course of the day's work. This, according to the belligerent one, was utter nonsense and should not be countenanced by a self-respecting greenkeeper. Tactful enquiries elicited the information that a greensman who had to be told what to do every morning wasn't worth his salt.

All of which may be a trifle extreme, but the methods employed on various California golf courses would indicate that the writer of the article could not have meant his suggestions to apply to this state. Off-hand, perhaps, it would seem that the variety and change of conditions would make it imperative for the greenkeeper to direct personally every move to be made on his golf course. But experience has taught that the frequently extreme conditions in California are best combatted by specialists who are able to handle a particular set of kindred tasks to perfection. Thus there are greensmen, tractor-men, truckmen, irrigation men, and only two or three who might be termed "general practitioners" on every course.

The degree to which this specialization is employed varies on every course according to the size of the course, the number of men employed, and the economic situation of the club. The extreme, of course, is represented by the club which has one man equipped with a power mower to cut the greens, one or two men to cut the fairways, others to do nothing but care for traps, and so on down the list of tasks each one having a separate man to take care of it. This method is particularly effective on a course equipped with plenty of machinery and which has heavy daily play necessitating all work to be done as speedily as possible. On such a course, men

who continually had to be watched and told what to do would stick out like sore thumbs, and the greenkeeper who put such a practice into effect would be spelling his own doom.

Zone the Tasks.

Modifications of the extreme method seem to be most popular throughout courses of the Pacific Southwest. Many greenkeepers agree with the specialist system but apply it in a different manner; that is, they give their men various sections of the course for which the individual workers must be responsible. In this way the worker is able to acquaint himself with the many little traits peculiar to his section of the course and thus becomes an expert in his one locality. This may sound very elementary, but the practice of dividing the course among a group of workers has a new significance in California due to the fact that topographic and geologic conditions vary so much in any given locality that different sets of greens will require absolutely unrelated treatment. It is the exception rather than the rule that four or five greens on one course should require uniform treatment.

Another advantage of the section system becomes apparent when the greensmen become conscious of a certain competitive element entering into their work. Close upon the heels of this element comes another—pride, and many courses have shown the benefit of the greenkeeper allowing the two to be judiciously mixed. The fact that this state has long boasted some of the most polished courses in the country may be attributed to the men on the courses not waiting to be told what to do but obtaining a sickle or a hoe and putting a few finishing touches here and there around their assigned areas.

Mexicans Are Good Laborers.

In southern California work on the golf courses is done largely by Mexicans who have maintained their place over a long period of time in spite of efforts to dislodge them. It is the writer's humble opin-

ion that the Mexican is a very much maligned person and the common conception of him, based upon scenario writers' fertile imaginations, is absolutely unjust. He is pictured as being indolent but there are few men who can screen as much sand or cut as much grass under a blazing hot sun. Most of them have large families and are willing and even eager to work overtime under almost any conditions to earn extra pay. Further, left to his own devices, the Mexican golf course worker will transfer the ground in his care into a thing of beauty by the deft placement of a few plants and shrubs.

Greensmen Not Common Laborers.

It is unfortunate that the labor on a golf course is classified as unskilled, but nothing can be done about it until clubs see fit to pay a wage on a par with the amount of specialized knowledge necessary for efficient work. Western greenkeepers find that for about three months an inexperienced laborer on a golf course is more of a liability than an asset in spite of the fact that they are supposed to hire such a man on \$4.00 a day to turn out a first class brand of work. In the first place new men frequently know nothing about the essentials of the game and in such a state he is not safe to be allowed on the course.

It takes time to educate a man to the point where he does not question the sanity of a golfer who demands absolute silence while he is playing a stroke. It takes time for the laborer to learn how to be of use to his employers without being a nuisance as well. This must all come before he can learn the more technical matters concerned with the finer points of greenkeeping.

To teach a man to be a good greenkeeper requires patience, particularly in regard to the matter of weeding. In this most necessary practice, the human penchant for following the line of least resistance is very much in evidence. It is not the pleasantest kind of work to be down on hands and knees on soggy turf under a blazing sun hunting for Bermuda runners, crab grass, burr clover, or any other unwelcome invader, and many good greensmen have been known to rebel at this labor. One southern California greenkeeper relates the following experience in connection with weeding:

"Some years back I had the misfortune to suffer a yearly infestation of Bermuda grass in my greens. Although I kept up a regular weeding schedule I did not seem to be making any progress until I discovered that the men, when my back was



The setting of La Cumbre G. & C. C. at Santa Barbara, Calif., gives an idea of the geological conditions that make specialization of greens force advisable.

turned, merely were cutting off the runners and leaving the roots to multiply the runners one hundredfold. I put an end to this business by discharging the offenders and starting a system whereby I inspected the weeds pulled by each man every day. If there was not a large proportion of roots in the day's takings, there was the devil to pay. The greenkeeper who has a problem like that will do well to investigate his men's weed-pulling methods, as it is extremely hard to get men who have enough patience to do a proper job of weeding."

Firing the offenders may seem like a heroic measure, but the author of the system has one of the best kept courses in the state.

Hard-to-Learn Tasks.

Other tasks which course superintendents always find difficult to teach new men include absolute disposal of grass clippings, keeping grass sufficiently watered on the banks of traps, cutting the greens from a new angle on each occasion, and filling in gouges made by pitched balls. Something else which it is perennially difficult for greensmen to learn not to do is tampering with the cutting machinery, a task which should be under the sole jurisdiction of the club mechanic.

Good Mechanic Essential.

The belief is becoming more and more prevalent on the Pacific coast that a good golf course is dependent upon a good shop run by an efficient mechanic. Not so many years ago in California, every broken part meant a special trip to the factory distributor for a replacement, and expensive hours of delay while cumbersome machinery was taken apart by inadequate tools to effect the repair. At the present time although machinery is vastly better than it used to be, the mechanic and the shop occupy a more significant place in the scheme of things because there is more machinery run at high speed. Some of the courses in the vicinity of Los Angeles at the present time are so well equipped with lathes, forges, and other apparatus that they are able to make many parts for existing machinery and in addition they are able to make tools of their own especially adapted to their peculiar needs.

Local greenkeepers assert that there is nothing like well kept tools to keep their men satisfied and for this reason the last five years has seen a remarkable improvement in shops and their equipment and a

consequent rise in the status of the course mechanic. This was evidenced during the recent turf equipment demonstration sponsored by the southern California greenkeepers at which time a large number of the visitors was composed of club mechanics whose immediate superiors were striving to keep in close contact with the latest in mechanical developments. Such a procedure would have been unknown a few years ago.

Study Use of Course Workmen Displaced by Machinery

ONE subject discussed during the question-box confabs at the Massachusetts Agric. College's greenkeepers' winter school conference in March was whether a greenkeeper, having purchased new labor-saving machinery, was justified in laying off the labor saved, or whether he should utilize this labor to perform maintenance tasks previously left undone and thereby raise the standards of the course.

While it was conceded that the solution of this problem depended in large measure on the financial status of the club, the conclusion reached was that utilizing this saved labor for attending to the little things, unimportant in themselves but essential if a course is to appear well-groomed, was the smart procedure. In other words, purchase of labor-saving machinery should mean improvement of maintenance standards rather than reduction of maintenance costs.

Save Hose by Telling Late Players to Use Valves

LATE afternoon golfers often find sprinklers at work on the greens. It is common practice to send a caddie ahead to pinch the hose and thus shut off the flow of the water until the balls have been holed out.

This is extremely hard on the hose; it will repay clubs to post notices at the first tee or otherwise inform the members that water should be turned off at the water outlet and that under no circumstances should caddies be permitted to double up the hose to cut off the water flow.

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