

Fall Work Calls for Planning to Prevent Costly Meddling

By B. R. LEACH

MANY GREEN-CHAIRMEN, especially those of short tenure in office, have one disconcerting habit of which they seem sublimely and entirely unaware. I might best define this annoying habit by describing a visit made to a wealthy club in the New York area a couple of years ago during the month of June.

Walking over the course, I came to a spot on the edge of the woods where four men, dump truck, etc., were building a new tee. Talking with the greenkeeper later on in the day, I casually inquired as to why they were building new tees at that time of the year when routine course-maintenance work was at its height, and listened quietly for the next twenty minutes while the old boy got a load of deep-rooted bitterness off his chest.

"Until last January," said he, "I had the same chairman for seven straight years. He was a fine old party, and, aside from raising a fuss if the greens got a little bit too fast, he let me run the course. We got along O.K., no friction, and everything was jake. Last November he got double pneumonia and checked out.

"This new chairman they handed me," he continued, "isn't a bad sort of a scout when you take into consideration all the jack his old man left him and also the fact that the man has never done a day's work in all his spoon-fed life. The butler has the oatmeal and three-minute eggs all ready for his lordship every morning on schedule and I seriously doubt if he is capable of giving a single thought to the fact that greenkeepers, writers and other members of the so-called lower classes have plenty of troubles to worry about.

"As you can readily imagine," he went on, "my new boss has a damned hazy idea of golf course maintenance routine, or if he does realize that a seasoned greenkeeper works pretty much on a schedule it certainly doesn't mean anything in his life. Three weeks ago he brought up the question of number 3 tee. Said it was too small and to build a new one. I told him I'd get at it as soon as possible. A week ago he

jumped all over me because the work on the tee had not been started. I tried to explain that we were up to our necks in routine work, but I might just as well have saved my breath. This lad is used to having folks jump when he gives orders and he expects me to jump along with the rest of the mob.

"Here it is Friday morning. I have just so many men and they won't give me any extra help. I've got tennis courts to fix up for the week end, the rhododendrons around the clubhouse are lousy with lacewing fly and ought to be sprayed, nine of the greens should have been topdressed this week, number 3, 6 and 9 greens will have a bad dose of big brown patch if I don't get some mercury spray on them before night because it is getting hot and muggy and they're surrounded by trees, to say nothing of a dozen other jobs all pressing me.

"Do It Now" Is the Bunk

"Do all these things mean anything to the chairman? Apparently not. He insists I build that damned tee *right now*, so there are four of my men working on it and a lot of this pressing work isn't going to get done when it should be done.

"I have earned the reputation around this section and among our membership of being a pretty sound greenkeeper with a course as well-kept as the best, but a little more of this chairman and his ignorance of golf course maintenance procedure and my reputation won't be worth carrying around the block. Those rhododendrons will go yellow and not set flower buds for next year due to that lacewing fly, and when they don't bloom next spring some of the women members of this club will tell me plenty. If those greens down in the woods go scabby every dub player in the club will hunt for my scalp. The membership will begin to intimate that I'm going gradually haywire, that John used to be a darned good greenkeeper, but he must be losing his grip. All because a chairman with a washtub full of money and a thimblefull of brains is in a position to stampede me."

All of which indicates that the above chairman was making a sap of himself, and a mess of the course and a wreck of the greenkeeper by acting the part of an old-time Roman emperor. It isn't an isolated instance by any means. I go lots of places and see lots of things in a year's time and there's plenty of this sort of thing going on all over the country all of the time. Many chairmen need an elementary course in the art and science of cooperation—with the greenkeeper.

At periodic intervals throughout the year the sound chairman will walk over the course with the greenkeeper carefully casting the eye over each tee, fairway, rough, approach, trap and green with the object of ascertaining just what needs to be done to each component part in order that the course as a whole may be kept up to its best possible form. I, personally, make it a point to have the club professional along on these inspection tours at least twice a year, preferably early spring and late summer.

Many greenkeepers will no doubt disagree with my practice of having the club professional along on these tours but I have found that it pays me as a golf course manager to take him along and get his viewpoint.

In support of this statement it is enough to say that the pro is playing the course daily and from the playing angle he knows it better than you or I will ever know it. Secondly, never forget that the pro is the little brother of the members. They talk to him about the course and he talks to them. He knows what the members are kicking about long before the chairman or greenkeeper ever gets wind of it. In fact, a large portion of the members' kicks come to the greenkeeper second-hand through the pro or the chairman. Consequently, in managing a course I want my relations with the pro to be such that he will tip me off automatically as to how the membership is feeling as regards the course with the knowledge that abuses will be corrected wherever possible. My relations with the pro are predicated on the supposition that as a manager it is better to have him telling me than paning me. In those rare instances where the personality of the pro inhibits the above close cooperation then these semi-annual inspection tours with the pro automatically pull his teeth as far as mischief-making with the members is concerned because if a showdown comes you have

given him ample opportunity to have his say. Some people may call this system as a now-fangled sort of diplomacy, but in my opinion it is just plain horse-sense.

Sandwich Work into Schedule

Having therefore made these inspection tours and determined the various repairs, improvements and alterations that are desirable throughout the course, it remains only for the green committee to consider the financial condition of the club and determine the exact amount and nature of the work to be done. Don't ram this sort of work down the greenkeeper's throat when he is up to his neck in routine maintenance work, but rather leave it to his judgment to sandwich repairs, improvements and alterations into those periods of the year when routine maintenance is at its lowest volume. If left to the discretion of the greenkeeper the bulk of this special work will be done in the fall when routine work is steadily declining. At this period of the year he can accomplish this sort of work without taking on extra help and with the least possible strain on his efficiency, temper or that of his staff, all accomplished with the minimum of expense and the minimum of interruption to play.

Prepare for Membership Drive

Aside from all the above pertinent factors it is also well to remember that nowadays the welfare of the club is vitally dependent upon getting this work done in the fall so that the course may present a first class finished condition in the spring when the great push behind the membership solicitation activities begins. It is well to remember that nowadays prospective members can pick and choose pretty much as to which club to join. If your club doesn't give the course a good going-over in the fall there isn't a thing to stop the new cash customers from going along over the hill to some other and better conditioned club. Remember, it's a buyers' market nowadays, and that renovation work on a golf course, when left until spring rarely gets done due to the sudden opening of the growing season.

Full fertilization of fairways has come to be more and more a routine practice in this country as contrasted with the former system of applying fertilizer only in the early spring. The present system of fertilizing fairways in late summer and early spring is in general decidedly preferable

to the old system of one large fertilizer application in the spring.

Fertilization Practice

Heavy applications of fertilizer in the spring are very apt to result in lost fertility as compared with two lighter but equal in total poundage to the one application. This is especially true of applications of nitrogen either in the organic or inorganic form. The turf will use up so much, regardless of the amount applied, within a given period following the application, and if present in excess the balance of the nitrogen changes into nitrates and has a tendency to leach out through the subsoil. In other words, if the fairway fertilization program calls for the application of, say 600 pounds, of high grade balanced fertilizer per annum, I personally would prefer to apply 250 pounds in late summer and 350 pounds in early spring rather than the entire 600 pounds in the spring. There is also another decidedly pertinent reason for the two-application method of fertilization of fairways which is wrapped around the crab-grass question.

In this regard it is well to remember that the fine grasses with which fairways are commonly planted make their strongest and sturdiest growth during the relatively cool months of spring and fall. During the hot summer months these fine grasses have a tendency to slow up in their growth somewhat, in all probability due to the excessive heat and the insufficiency of rainfall.

Crab-grass, on the other hand, acts in exactly the opposite way. It does not germinate until the soil warms up in late spring, it makes its heavy rank growth during the hottest summer weather and is ripening its seed and practically ceasing growth when the first cool nights of late summer or very early fall roll around.

Since crab-grass, next to prolonged droughts, is in all probability the worst possible enemy of the fine grasses, crowding them out and resulting in thin stands of the desired fine grass, it is obvious that plain commonsense dictates that we feed it as little as possible, and that we feed the fine grasses as much as possible during their *period of heaviest natural growth*. In other words, fertilizer application as to time and quantity should be made so that the fine grass gets as much of the fertilizer as possible and the crab-grass as little as possible. Herein lies the most pertinent argument for early spring and late

summer applications of fertilizer to fairways.

Thwarting Crab-Grass

A reasonable application of fertilizer to the fairways in the early spring starts the fine grasses off into growth with a bang with the least competition from weeds and rank growth and feeds the fine grass until the time when the crab-grass begins to sprout. By this time the fine grasses have made a sturdy root growth, the stools have thickened out over the surface of the soil and the nitrogen of the fertilizer application is just about exhausted.

The crab-grass then appears upon the scene but makes a less rank growth due to the absence of undue amounts of available nitrogen. In the late summer the crab has made its growth and is seeding, while the fine grasses are ready to take advantage of the cooler temperatures and again make a strong, lusty growth.

Now is the time to put on another reasonable application of balanced fertilizer so that available nitrogen may be on hand in sufficient amount to enable the fine grass to make its strongest growth before the advent of freezing weather by which time the available nitrogen will again be practically exhausted and the grass will harden up before the ground freezes.

Such a fertilization program is bound to result in thickened *fine* turf if practiced over a period of years, with the amount of crab-grass decreasing from year to year.

The question of whether to apply the nitrogen in the organic or inorganic form is not to my notion so important as generally supposed. Generally speaking, they run neck and neck as regards desirability. In my own work I use a mixture of both if for no other reason than such a mixture is nice and bulky and goes on easily through a lime spreader when set at the first or second notch.

We hear a good deal of argument about organic nitrogen being slower in availability than inorganic nitrogen. It may be a bit slower but darned little. I have put chicken manure and sewage sludge on rye when the ground was frozen a foot deep and as soon as the ground thawed the rye jumped as though all hell was after it. Of course, it may have been the moonlight that made the rye grow and then again maybe not.

On the other hand we hear a great deal about loss of nitrogen in the inorganic form due to leaching into the subsoil, and again, in my opinion, this is the bunk.