

Dubs' Howl for Soft Greens Haunts the Greenkeepers

By ARTHUR LANGTON

EARLY this year GOLFDOM picked a sentence out of an interview with Bob Jones on the new Augusta National course. Bob said those greens wouldn't be watered so that any kind of an indifferently played approach shot would stick. We commented that Bob had given the answer to a serious problem of greenkeeping, but an answer that most greenkeepers wouldn't be permitted to give. The duffers want soft greens that hold shots regardless of the turf maintenance difficulties involved.

Far-reaching was the effect of this comment. The Green Section prevailed on Bob to follow-up with an article on green texture with respect to shot making and maintenance. Golf papers in other countries have quoted freely.

It begins to look like greenkeepers may not be compelled to water excessively with risk of greens loss simply because of faulty construction or the players' inability to make the required shot.—Editor.

BOBBY JONES' recent article in a USGA bulletin noting that soft greens are conducive to neither good golf nor good turf, met with loud acclaim among members of the California greenkeeping clan. Keeping greens soaked with water so that they will hold any kind of a shot that hits them whether driven by the blade, heel, or shaft of a club has long been one of the greensman's more objectionable duties. He knows that he is doing his turf no good by keeping it in a soggy state, yet if a retired butcher lands a mid-iron shot on a green from a distance of 150 yards and the ball keeps right on going, the course superintendent will hear all about it.

There is not much, of course, which can be said in defense of hard greens, and yet of the two extremes soft greens are probably the most objectionable when every-

thing is taken into consideration. Hard greens are truer, being free from ball pits; the grass on them is sturdier and more resistant to disease; and they are a less expensive care. And there should be just as much acclaim due a player for executing a perfect pitch and run shot as for making a half-topped pitch shot which stops dead to the pin by the grace of a soggy green.

To most players there is only one reason why their so-called approach shots will not stick on a green, and that is that the green is hard. They fail to take into consideration the fact that their judgment of the level of the green may be at fault. For example, the sixth green of a famous Southern California course is the only one of the 18 which is built on an almost level plane. The remainder slope towards the fairway, materially aiding the holding quality of the approach shots. The result is that this green, which receives exactly the same treatment as all the rest, is eternally damned as being too hard to delay the progress of a pitched ball.

Want Synthetic Greens.

The words of the great Bobby will cut none of California's cracked ice. The sun-kist players have had artificial golf courses for so long that they are beginning to want their game to be synthetic. Under natural conditions California courses would have little growth on them besides a few patches of Bermuda grass and chaparral. Grass is an expensive effort, consequently thick tangled hazards which characterize other courses are somewhat of a rarity in the Pacific Southwest. With this beginning the local golfers began to seek other methods of making their courses places upon which to score rather than places to test their golf. This may be the reason why the state which produces internationally famous athletes in other fields of sport, has turned out only a few really good international golfers.

The story is told of a California golfer who belonged to a course which had artificial embankments to prevent golf balls

rolling down steep canyons. This pampered sportsman visited a century-old Scottish course in his travels. Taking one look at the acres of gorse and bracken which abounded on every side, he made the statement that "they would have a pretty good course here some day when they got all this undergrowth cleared off the fairways."

Golfers, being basically human, are satisfied with none but the easiest path once they have fallen into its rut. He does not want to be educated; he wants soft greens. So, the greenkeeper has to provide them. Experience has demonstrated conclusively that the time to start preparing a green to hold an alleged pitch-shot is before a sod is turned in construction work, which is a policy rarely followed. This, in spite of the golf engineers who have long contended that once grass is grown on any kind of soil, the quality of the turf can be regulated from that time on by topdressing and irrigation. Possibly this can be done, but it savors too much of letting a youth run as he pleases among unwholesome companions for 20 years and then trying to make a gentleman out of him.

Prevent Packing.

If the soil upon which a green is to be built contains plenty of fibrous material to prevent it packing under pressure, then there is little likelihood of trouble developing in the way of hard surfaces. But such soils, particularly in California, are rare. Instead there seems to be a plethora of soils to grow greens which, though soaked in the morning, by afternoon will set to such a hardness that Jones himself could not keep a ball on one, except by the aid of a movie camera. This being true, it is obvious that the thing to do is to add loosening or fibrous material in proportion to the potential packedness of the soil. The cost of incorporating peat, sand, straw, charcoal, manure, lime, or any organic roughage within the bed of a prospective green is small compared with cost of injecting this same material after the turf has developed.

Another method of construction which has been found efficacious in holding poorly played shots somewhere in the vicinity of the pin is to place the 3 to 6 inches of topsoil on a four-inch layer of cinders or coarse sand. This practice, in addition to enabling the green to hold almost any kind of a pitch, provides excellent drainage and promotes the capillary action of

the soil. The chief drawback is that this method is expensive if done properly, because all the finishing work must be done by hand, horses and tractors being too heavy.

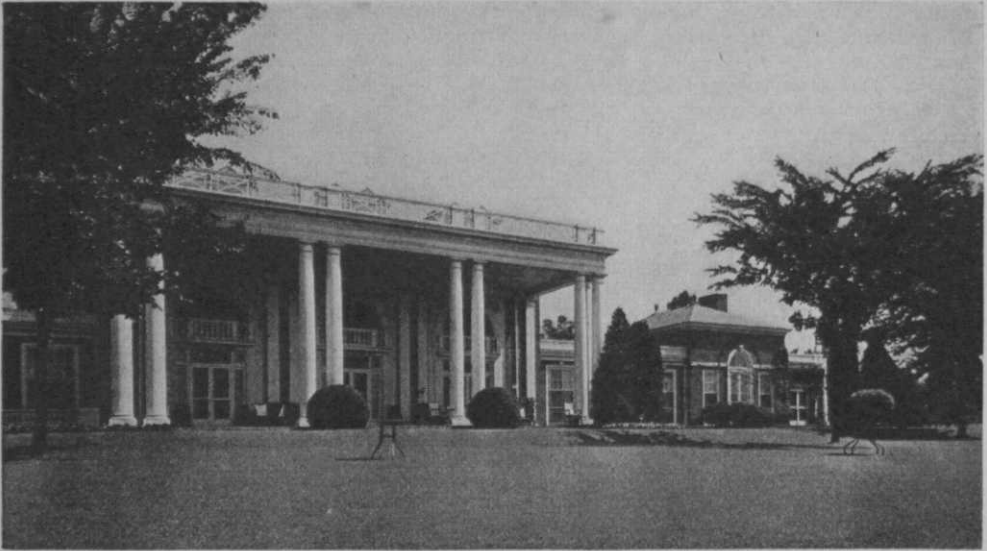
The advantages of incorporating pitch-holding qualities into a green during its construction are so manifest as to need no further exposition. Nevertheless, in the year before the millennium arrives greenkeepers still will be called upon by construction engineers to use their arts to stop all shots lucky enough to hit the green.

Greenkeepers Have Burden.

This leaves two alternatives: either golfers must be taught to play backspin shots correctly, or present greens must be treated to hold pitches regardless of how they are played. This being an article devoted to greenkeeping and not to the work of the professional, the latter course will be followed. In colder climes Mother Nature is of material assistance in this regard because her extremes of temperature serve to flocculate the soil by expanding and contracting the grains. But in the Pacific Southwest, where even rain is scarce, there is practically no physical change noticeable due to variations in temperature. In this region the soil gets packed and stays that way unless artificial aid is brought to the rescue.

Chemical means of softening the playing surface are in common usage and refer to the application of topdressings, usually containing lime in heavy quantities, to make the soil grains more granular. This disadvantage of the lime treatment is that this substance soon leaches away, and while it is available it promotes the growth of undesirable plants. In addition, bents do not seem to thrive on it as a constant diet.

A dressing of 60 per cent sand, 20 per cent loam, and 20 per cent organic matter, when used in conjunction with spiking is fairly effective in keeping the turf soft. Peat seems to be good if it can be applied properly; that is, if the green can be taken out of play for a period of time. Owing to the peculiarities of this earthy substance a great variety of opinion in regard to its use has sprung up on the Pacific Coast. If it is put on the green in too fine a form it defeats its own ends by packing. If it is applied coarsely, the individual lumps soak up water and swell at an alarming rate so that balls are deflected in their course. In addition, most



Country Club of Virginia's rich looking clubhouse where verdant acreage of bent from Murphy nurseries provides greens turf

of the dressing is picked up and thrown into the catcher the first time the treated green is moved. If the green could be closed to play to allow the peat to become incorporated in the soil, all would be well, but sadly enough the millennium is not yet. Many western greenkeepers dispense with this form of humus rather than take a chance on striking the hairbreadth happy medium.

By the practice of diligent topdressing a new growing surface can be applied to any green, but not such a one as popular fancy would conceive. An examination of greens in Southern California revealed the fact that though they are topdressed regularly throughout 12 months of the year, the average depth of material applied after the grass was grown did not exceed three inches. This may give some idea of the cost in time and money of deliberately trying to supply a new surface to an old green. To get an inch of topdressing applied in one year would mean that the putting surface would be in a perpetual state of repair, a condition which even the most rabid advocate of new and softer turf would not condone for long.

Like the stories in confession magazines, this is written only to serve as a warning and to present a great moral lesson: If players must have soft greens to rectify their playing faults, then let this pitch-holding quality be incorporated during construction and not as an afterthought.

Green Section Announces Summer Meeting Schedule

EVIDENCE OF how highly the work of the Green Section is rated by course superintendents and clubs shines out in the schedule of summer meeting dates recently announced by the Section. This year, due to shortage in the Green Section budget, it has been necessary for local groups to arrange financing of summer meetings instead of having the expenses of Green Section officials paid from Washington out of the USGA funds as was former practice.

Prolonged hot weather and the insect pest trouble following a couple of open winters has given the courses plenty of trouble to discuss and attempt to solve this season. Consequently the summer meetings have a definite cash value for clubs at this time particularly.

Summer meetings now booked:

Aug. 1, 1 p. m.—Philadelphia (Pa.) C. C.

Aug. 1, 4 p. m.—Pine Valley G. C., Clementon, N. J.

Aug. 8, 2 p. m.—Allegheny C. C., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Aug. 9, 4 p. m.—Municipal G. C., Niagara Falls, N. Y.

Aug. 12—Royal York G. C., Toronto. (Meeting sponsored by Royal Canadian G. A.)

Aug. 15, 4 p. m.—Century C. C., New York City.