

Annual Turnover of Chairmen Adds Plenty to Greens Costs

By B. R. LEACH

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

Chicago, Ill., December 1, 1931.

Dear Leach:

Make your article for January GOLFDOM 2,500 words on the trials and tribulations of the green-committee chairman. There are altogether too many of these chairmen resigning at the end of their first year in office; that is, there are too many resignations if one considers smooth management of golf courses as a paramount issue.

Why the constant annual turnover in greens chairmen? What is the answer to this problem?

You bring tears to my eyes when you tell about the greenkeepers' woe and grief. Do some sobbing for the chairmen.

In writing this sketch take it cool and easy. Put some pep into it but try to be reasonably refined in thought and action.

Best regards,

HERB GRAFFIS.

Letter from B. R. Leach to
Herb Graffis

Riverton, N. J., Dec. 23, 1931.

Dear Herb:

Fix it up with Santa Claus. The necktie I now have is all shot.

As you say, the annual turnover in green-committee chairmen is altogether too heavy for the best interests of all concerned in the turf business. The amount of money in round dollars and cents which this turnover costs the golf clubs of this country is appreciable.

You take a green-chairman who has spent three continuous years in office: I conservatively estimate that the experience he gains during these three years will cost the club from \$3,000 to \$8,000. These sums represent the direct and indirect cost to the club of the errors and training of the chairman during his initial years in office.

Furthermore, if we apply the law of common sense governing human conduct in encountering a new environment, we find

that a newly elected green-chairman will make 60% of his mistakes during the first year in office, 30% during his second year in office and 10% during his third year. After these initial two years in office, the chairman, providing he has any gumption at all will tend to run along on an average of 10% error and 90% efficiency, which is all that anyone has a right to expect from the human animal, individually or collectively.

Now, if you study the above paragraph for a few minutes it isn't very difficult to arrive at another sound conclusion, namely that the services of a chairman after two years in office is worth from \$1,000 to \$2,000 a year to the club. If the club paid the chairman this amount of money for his services beginning with his third year in office it would be decidedly less expensive than allowing him to resign and replacing him with another inexperienced chairman who must naturally in turn be trained at the expense of the club.

Consequently the only way a club can average up on the cost of amateur golf course management under the present green-chairman system is to keep a man in office *just as long as possible*, always assuming of course that the incumbent has an average amount of gumption and common sense. During his first two years in office he costs the club money, after the second year he *saves* the club money, since the chairman serves without compensation.

First Year Is Hardest

Based on my own observations and the experiences of others you can accept the following as a reasonable working hypothesis: the average newly elected chairman takes on the job with a minimum of enthusiasm and a maximum of apprehension. At the end of the first year in office you have to talk to him like a Dutch uncle to induce him to accept the job for another year. At the end of his second and third years in office he accepts re-election with a few half-hearted and conventional protests. If the club doesn't re-elect him at the end

of his fourth year his pride receives a death blow and it's a 5 to 3 bet that he resigns from the club. All this is of course predicated on the supposition that the incumbent is real chairmanship calibre.

Why Green-Chairmen Resign

The newly elected chairman finds himself immediately between two millstones and they grind away at his naked hide until it's sore in spots. The upper millstone is the membership, the lower millstone is the greenkeeper.

A membership in a golf club carries with it the seemingly divine prerogative of criticizing anything, anytime, anywhere. It is always the open season for this form of indoor and outdoor sport. Along about the first of July, a dozen of the young bloods in the club will set up a chronic howl about the greens being too slow, although the balance of the membership isn't saying a word. This sort of thing worries the newly-elected chairman. He goes to the greenkeeper with his troubles. The greenkeeper balks like an underfed mule as regards shaving the greens down closer. Naturally the chairman gets sorry for himself.

Two years later the same chairman, with appropriate gestures, would complacently tell the group of young bloods to go to that portion of hell where the apples bake brownest, and make them like it. He wouldn't even take the trouble to go near the greenkeeper.

Before the season opens the greenkeeper hands the newly elected chairman a list of the supplies and equipment. The chairman has arrived at the place where he must make decisions. This worries him. Why? Because he usually has very little basis of knowledge or experience upon which to make intelligent decisions.

Do I hear you saying that the chairman should be guided by the advice of the greenkeeper? Why so? What means has the chairman of knowing whether the greenkeeper's advice is worth following? How much does the average newly-elected chairman actually know about his greenkeeper? Very little, because mutual confidence and a smooth working partnership between chairman and greenkeeper can come only as a result of their being thrown together in the management of the course over a period of time.

You recall my telling you earlier in this letter that a chairman was a liability to a club during his first two years in office and

an asset to the club thereafter. In the same way a newly elected chairman is a chronic source of worry to the greenkeeper for the first two years. After that the chairman, as far as the greenkeeper is concerned, is a valuable means of getting things done.

"Experts" Close-Up of Seamy Side

Some wise old coot once made the remark that doctors and lawyers see and know more about the seamy, sordid side of the human animal than all other professions put together. Pretty hard to fool a doctor or a lawyer. In the same way a golf-course consultant or "expert" as our friend, Professor Dickinson calls them, has ample opportunity to note and study the seamy side of golf course politics and management.

I remember several years ago getting a letter from a green-chairman of a club up in the coal region of Pennsylvania, asking me to come to the club just as soon as possible. I hopped a train and got there the next day. The chairman took me to his office and gave me the dirt.

"We're in a bad mess," said he, "through no particular fault of our own. Our club president, name of Jones, is a guy who never owned more than one suit of underwear at a time until he went to work at 12. Now he has a million bucks for each month in the year. He is a two-fisted Tarzan, wears number eleven shoes and is white to the core. He financed this club and takes great pride in it. I have been green-chairman here for two years and Jones has always been for me. He never bothered much about the management of the course.

"Planty" Bone Meal

"Last year he took one of these de-luxe trips around the world and the boat stopped in Sweden for a couple of days. While there, Jones and his wife grabbed a yellow cab and undertook to inspect the town, finally winding up at the castle where the King hangs out. There in front of the castle was a peach of a lawn, a knockout. Jones was tremendously impressed and hunted up the King's gardener and asked him what they put on the lawn to make it so nice. The gardener said 'We yust put on planty bone meal.'

"Well, Jones has come home with a bone meal complex! He wants to know why we don't put bone meal on the fairways, so we can have grass like that on the King of Sweden's lawn. Our greenkeeper says that bone meal isn't so hot for turf, being slow

and relatively expensive; in fact, we have always applied a mixture of organic and inorganic fertilizer. Nevertheless Jones won't back down. He is demanding bone meal. Every member in this club that has a note in Jones' bank, or sells him insurance, or fills his teeth, is going around saying that Jones has the right dope.

"Now the point is just this—we don't want to use bone meal, it's too slow. We prefer to continue using our complete fertilizer. It's up to you to make Jones change his mind on this bone meal question. That's what I got you here for so you'd better do some quick thinking. There will be a conference at two o'clock with Jones, the greenkeeper, you and me."

"Well," said I, as I wiped the beads of perspiration from my brow with a lace-embroidered handkerchief and tucked it back in place at my wrist, "I've had worse jobs than that handed to me. Let me ask you a question: 'How much does this man Jones know about fertilizers?'"

"Jones doesn't know any more about fertilizers than I know about the fantailed humming birds of Siam," replied the chairman, "but he does know that you can put bone meal on grass because the King of Sweden's gardener put him hep."

"O. K.," said I. "Now listen carefully. When we have this conference with Jones let me do the talking. You just take it easy and sit tight. If the greenkeeper starts to say anything kick him in the shins."

At two o'clock they introduced me to Mr. Jones and he looked me over with a cold, glassy, appraising eye.

"So-o-o," said he, "you're the expert this club hired to come here and make a jack-ass out of me on this bone meal proposition. Let me tell you, young man, I know good grass when I see it and the King of Sweden has good grass. Bone meal is the answer."

Top-dress With Hooie

"Now listen, Mr. Jones," said I, "you've got me all wrong on this bone meal proposition. I agree with you absolutely on this bone meal question. I plan to advise your chairman and greenkeeper to use some bone meal on the course from now on."

"You don't mean it!" said Jones. "Well, well! I take it all back. You are a scholar, a gentleman, and the expert of experts. Well! I'm glad that's settled. What do you say we all have a drink. We'll all have a drink to good old bone meal."

While we were gargling the Scotch and

keeping Jones in a good humor I edged the old stiletto out of my bootleg and prepared to sink it to the hilt in Jones' ribs.

"By the way," said I, in a very, very casual manner, "as you know, this bone meal is very light and fluffy and blows all over creation when you try to apply it to the grass. Don't you think we had better add a little ammonium sulphate, activated sewage sludge, chicken manure, tankage, etc., to the bone meal so as to weight it down a little and not lose so much by blowing?"

"Sure," replied Jones. "Go ahead and put it on whichever way you think is best. Well, boys, I've got to move along. Good bye, young man. I just want to tell you that in my opinion you and the King of Sweden's gardener are the only two bozos I've met as yet who seem to have the real dope on this grass proposition."

It wasn't necessary to say very much to the chairman after the conference broke up. He saw the point all right and wrote me out a check.

While the greenkeeper drove me to the depot I gave him a lecture on the theory and practice of diplomacy as it applied to the greenkeeping business.

"Listen, young fellow," said I, "I know what ails you. You've been listening to a lecture about fertilizers given by one of those serious-minded professors and no doubt he told you that bone meal wasn't so hot as compared with horse manure and other fertilizers. Maybe the professor was right. I won't argue with you.

"But while we are sitting here you just listen to me while I give you a high class, 'expert' lecture on fertilizers and a few other incidentals. If you do what I tell you you'll wind up by being a big shot in the greenkeeping business. If you don't take my advice, you'll soon be driving a truck for a living.

"In the 'experting' and greenkeeping business when a college professor says that bone meal is N. G. while the president of the club says that bone meal is the king of them all, then, as far as you and I are concerned, the college professor is *all wrong*. Twenty years of dealing with them has taught me that you can't *argue* with the rich. Sometimes you can reason with them but the best way is to feed them the good old perfumed oil. That's the type of food they're accustomed to.

"If Jones tells you to put coal dust on the fairways go ahead and put *some* on. Keep him happy, he's paying the bills. At

the same time apply whatever fertilizer you know the turf needs. Then Jones will be your friend. But above all, don't start another argument. Let the professors do the arguing. If you ever get into another jam, just give me the high sign and I'll come straighten you out, for my customary fee plus travel expense."

All of which indicates that there are times when an "expert" can ease the rocky path for a greenkeeper or a chairman as the case may be. It is barely possible that when the golf clubs wake up to this fact there may not be quite so heavy a turnover in green-committee chairmen.

At any rate, Herb, if you can only make the chairman accept a second term the odds are that you can hold him indefinitely.

Wishing you the best,

B. R. LEACH.

Insurance Plans Aid Clubs in Finance and Member Drives

SUCCESSFUL USE has been made of the Lincoln "subscription refunding" plan by several clubs in their membership campaigns and financing. Under this plan insurance is taken on the life of each donor to guarantee repayment of the amount given the club. Annual premiums over a 35-year endowment period are paid by the club. The amount is said to be about half of that which would have to be paid as interest on bonds or mortgages and with no principal sum to amortize. Payment of the full policy amount is made to any beneficiary the donor may designate, either at death or at the end of the endowment period.

A local trust company acts as trustee to apply for insurance, make premium payments and to pay out premiums as they come due under the policies. The trust company also administers the funds originally given in the campaign.

The recent experience of the Myers Park club of Charlotte, N. C., in solving its financial problems indicates how the proper plan and concerted effort can bring desired results even in the less certain times of the present. Club members over-subscribed a fund of \$200,000 to make payment for a land purchase. The activity was brought to success through the employment of the Lincoln subscription refunding plan after a number of other methods had been considered. In addition to its existing total of 282 full memberships, 57 associate members were brought to the status of full

membership, and around 250 new full members were added, a decidedly remarkable increase, accomplished in a period of only six weeks.

Officers Approve.

"We feel very good about the whole matter," said H. D. Horton, president of the club, in a letter confirming the success of the campaign, the practicability of the plan, and the service of the institutional finance firm of Ketchum, Inc., of Pittsburgh, Pa., which organized and directed the fund activity.

"No compulsion was used and the campaign had built up a splendid fellowship among our members, which will be worth more to our club than we can estimate," says R. W. Dulin, secretary-manager of the club.

Clubs in other sections of the nation attest to the successful employment of the plan in meeting their financial problems.

The Alcoma C. C., Pittsburgh, raised \$96,000 for indebtedness. The Morgantown C. C., Morgantown, W. Va., obtained nearly \$45,000 in spite of the fact that at the time banks in their own and neighboring communities were closing their doors.

The Green Hill C. C., of Salisbury, Md., is the most recent to adopt the refunding plan to obtain funds from its membership and to increase the number on its rolls. The club is now engaged in an activity for \$33,000 to refinance its organization.

Nearly \$200,000 was obtained to take care of pressing indebtedness of the North Hills C. C., St. Louis, Mo., when it used the refunding plan in a campaign last summer.

Thanks! Same to You, and Then Some

GOLFDOM'S Gang acknowledges with high hearts the Christmas cards from the playmates. The mailman lugged them in from the province of Larry Striley on Maine's rock bound coast to the domain of Joe Novak on California's sunkist strand. It gives us all considerable childish delight to have the boys think of the galaxy of talent (mex.) in the Wacker drive padded cell, when the holiday spirit is strong.

Being young, dashing and practically single, having only one wife per husband on the GOLFDOM staff, the home-town boys especially appreciate the holiday greetings from the N. A. G. A. Women's Auxilliary which was the pleasant thought