

HIDDEN COSTS

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COSTS I shall refer to as hidden are very much in evidence to anyone who is acquainted with the business of producing fine turf for such purposes as golf tees, fairways, and greens. I call them hidden because if the most obvious thing or fact is obscured from our vision or mind, it is, to us, hidden and we are losing the pleasure or profit gained by those who do see.

The object of the green-committee of a golf club is to produce desirable conditions for playing the game of golf. The committee and its personnel must be considered as a manufacturing business having a definite marketable product, and it must be understood that if the product is not satisfactory that club loyalty vanishes and the player seeks another factory for his golf.

In order to get patrons there must be good turf and the raising of good turf requires the immediate management by a single responsible person.

I have studied golf course and fine turf management for many years and have had the pleasure of seeing many of my predictions come true and have experienced the disappointment in the failure of my hopes to materialize. I now venture a bold statement.

More Care; Less Science

For the next five years the fine turf areas of privately owned golf clubs will need better management and less science. Scientific facts and principles, to be sure,

must be used in the management of golf courses but the present wild uses and interpretations of science must be curtailed.

On golf courses the cost of production is too often considered only in terms of the immediate cash outlay, as the fact of a cash balance or deficit is easily seen, felt and understood. Why it comes about may present somewhat of a problem and much discussion, but it is tangible and therefore comprehended. To the cash cost of production there must be added or credited the effect of any operation on the future cultural condition of the golfing plant. The cash cost may be carefully watched but few clubs pay much attention to the hidden cost of cultural condition, and still fewer clubs realize that these latter costs (or credits) are cumulative and very rapidly so. These costs may be called cultural costs, and it is a sad fact that these cultural costs always change to cash costs if the condition of the golf course is to remain as is.

From my studies and observations I believe that from 35% to 60% of the cash costs of golf course maintenance are from accumulated cultural costs. Better management would have reduced these costs to a normal 10% or 15%.

The hidden costs of production are numerous and each item could be discussed

in detail. I shall merely list those that seem to me as most important and leave the reader to ponder over them.

Here Are Hidden Costs

1. Present trend of club officials to consider the men in charge of golf courses as mere foremen requiring little other ability than to be able to work and keep their few men at work. This backward trend is a fact though it will be stoutly denied by club officials.

2. Frequent changing of chairmen of green-committees.

3. Annual confiscation of department credit balances to defray deficits by other departments or to pay for some little-needed "improvement."

4. Lack of a definite long-term course maintenance policy and purpose.

5. Belief by club officials (and others) that there is a formula that will produce a panacea for each turf ailment, and insistence that the panacea be used regardless of local factors.

6. Failure to close the course or a part of the course, when play by even a few will cause much injury to the cultural condition of the course.

7. Use of fertilizers regardless of their adaptability to the requirements of the turf or the mechanics of spreading.

8. Failure to consider the source of contamination when trying to control weeds, insects, or disease.

9. Failure to realize that there must be an annual maintenance cost for each new trap, tee, or added "improvement."

10. Casual purchase of materials and equipment, and failure to charge and carry over a depreciation fund for replacements.

11. Habit of following routine in course maintenance, regardless of immediate circumstances.

12. Failure to purchase equipment or materials needed for the economical operation of the course.

13. Misuse and misinterpretation of established scientific facts.

14. Unreasonable demands by influential players and club officials that the course always be in the best condition suited for their particular style of play.

15. Continual making of temporary repairs or corrections and avoidance of a

major operation that would effect a permanent cure.

As these hidden costs are called to the attention of the reader he will say "They are nothing new." That is true and the reason that I am writing this article. These costs were present on the first golf course and will continue to be present on all golf courses. Nothing, or very little has been done by clubs to study these costs and reduce them to a normal amount. Even the depression has not taught clubs any real lesson.

The game of golf in private clubs is no longer a strictly pleasure game; it is a business. A highly competitive business that has to offer better sales arguments than the seasonal sport, fad sport, and the present exploiting of all types of sport from marbles to Alpine climbing. It is a business that must show profit in the form of enjoyable playing conditions and increased cultural value of the golfing plant, and at the same time operate at a reasonable cost.

Trained and experienced men must be in control of golf course operations and the whole conducted as a business.

My experience with golf clubs and the example set by successful courses prompts the writing of this article in place of one on brown-patch, weed control, or crab grass. I am convinced that if business is brought into golf course maintenance that there will be less trouble from pests—animal, vegetable, fungus, insect and man.

Remember that the grass will grow if it can, that no variety of the basic grasses used on golf courses has ever committed suicide.

"The Haig" Is a Busy Man; Has 120 Matches Signed

IT WILL be a busy year for Uncle Walter Hagen. His present schedule calls for playing about 120 exhibition matches between tournaments up to mid-summer.

Walter has been drawing very well in exhibitions at which each of the gallery gets a new Hagen ball when the admission money is laid on the line. The deal is worked out so the pro at the exhibition club does well on the show. For example, at the El Paso muny course, A. S. Valdespino, manager, conducted contests on the hole-by-hole, total, and longest run of consecutive hole guesses.