

# THOSE WERE THE DAYS!

**LEO J. FESER, Greenkeeper at Woodhill CC, Wayzata, Minn., Harks Back to 1922, Before Research Brought Relief**

**"D**URING the year we had our usual trouble with crab grass and chickweed in our greens. Dandelions became troublesome in early June, and it was necessary to carry on a constant weeding program. During August the crab grass was so bad in several of the greens that we discontinued weeding, lifted new sod and reseeded those areas. The cost of weeding, seeding and sodding was slightly over \$1,500. . . . Extra seeding on tees and fairways ran slightly under \$500, and favorable rainfall during the latter part of the season insured a good stand of grass for spring on these areas. . . ." (Excerpt from report to Green Committee Chairman, Dec. 1, 1922).

A mere \$2,000. But did we have greens that year! For the first time in several years the committee decided to do some real work on our greens. Our golfers couldn't miss the fact that we were bringing those greens around to tip-top condition. With the exception of Saturday afternoons and Sundays you didn't play a round of golf after June 1st without having to shout "Fore!" on some approach shot, and then rest on your club while the weeding gang got off their haunches, picked up pails and weeding lines and lined up on the border of the green to watch your putt go bouncing merrily along over a miniature no-man's land well blasted with little craters and shell holes.

We purchased some real seed that year. \$2.00 a pound. Bent seed. Some of it grew, and a little of that was left the next year after the weeding operations were complete. The weeders had to be very careful not to take out much of that expensive grass. The putts continued to bounce over the craters but that didn't make so much difference. We were saving the bent. Lots of years were devoted to this type of monkey work at lots of golf courses. Golf was truly a rich man's game, and if he belonged to several clubs he couldn't expect to stay rich very long.

They got some long drives that year. During the summer dry spell the first

bounce went half as far as the drive. The rest of the bounces were like extra dividends. But somehow I don't recall any agitation for a slower ball. Par was par, and anyone playing an approach to par in a national tournament was one hot golfer. Of course the top-notch golfer of those days must have been inferior to our present-day top-notchers who butcher par at every big-time contest. They couldn't putt. Once in a blue moon some lucky stiff would get a one-putt-green but that was a break. The book allowed him two, and four putts were not the unspeakable disgrace that they are nowadays. If the old-time top-notcher were not inferior, why couldn't he putt the ball over a few miniature shell-holes, curve it around a dandelion or two, skid into a valley between two well-crowned crab grass plants and then have clear sailing over a bare space before getting to the little island of fine turf where the cup was so thoughtfully placed?

## Those Dear Days of \$30,000 Budgets

Our chairmen were liberal with us in those sweet bygone days. Anywhere from \$15,000 to \$30,000 was a reasonable figure to "maintain" an 18-hole layout. Of course that figure included the greenkeeper's "salary" which went as high as \$150 a month if a fellow could land a job that good. Here and there someone who really knew all about the technicalities of greenkeeping might rate a little more, because chances were that he knew that brown-patch and snowmold injuries could be remedied by very careful resodding. The chairmen were the boys who knew how to get results. Banking and law surely did a nice job training men to understand the dark and holy secrets of turf production.

The end of the nightmare was in sight when some of the truly great chairmen of

that day began to realize that we had to determine a few facts about turf production. The organization of the Green Section of the USGA was the first constructive move toward efficient course maintenance. The men in charge of turf research began to dig. They got some facts. They passed them on to the bank-and-law-trained chairmen who became "authorities" on the subject. Other chairmen began to realize that becoming "authorities" meant lots of study and practical application of facts gleaned by the research men.

They didn't have the time to become "authorities." They passed this business on to the greenkeeper, and at that point the sun poked up over the horizon. Then in due time we entered the depression period with a bang. Budgets were slashed and even rich golfers were wondering how long they would be able to pay the golf bill. It was a real problem that might have ruined the game. It did ruin a lot of top-heavy clubs.

#### **Greenkeepers Were Prepared**

Here the greenkeeper came into his own. The torch was tossed to him, and it was hot to the end of the handle. We didn't have much money, but we did produce better golf courses. We had quietly trained ourselves to meet the emergency. We formed local and national associations prior to the test, and these associations enabled us to exchange ideas and experiences. We avoided costly experiments and methods. We carried the torch.

To demonstrate how well that torch has been carried, pick up a groundkeeper's report to his chairman covering any year since 1932. Hand weeding has disappeared as an item of expense. Craters and shell holes are memories. Fungi are controlled by preventive measures, not by resodding. Fairways are properly watered and fertilized, and reseeding is rare. Scores are low, owing to the splendid condition of courses. Much thought and time is devoted to beautifying and landscaping courses. Yet the amounts spent yearly for maintenance operations are less than they were 10 to 15 years ago.

The modern golf course standard of maintenance did not just grow. It did not reach the present high standard simply because some research work was done and scientific facts were determined. It reached the present standard because of the constant efforts of the greenkeepers to ap-

ply in a practical manner the facts determined. It is possible to maintain on our present standards because the greenkeeper insisted on better equipment, better fertilizers and chemicals, better knowledge of fundamentals, better counting systems and better management.

Manufacturers cooperated with the greenkeepers and brought out equipment, fertilizers and chemicals that meet our specific demands. Short courses for greenkeepers have become an annual event at several leading colleges. Equipment shows and educational conferences have been sponsored annually by the National Association of Greenkeepers. Experimental work by the Green Section has been carried on because of the greenkeepers' insistence.

#### **NAGA Should Be Larger Body**

We haven't had much credit for our work. As a professional organization our National Association of Greenkeepers is not as large as it should be. Too many club officials do not realize what we have done. They have not considered the part that the greenkeepers have played in bringing golf through the depression, and bringing it through in a vastly superior standard so far as maintenance conditions are concerned.

Many chairmen of green committees and many golfers are ready and willing to help us if they knew our problems. We cannot and should not expect technical advice from chairmen and other golfers. Club officials can best assist us in carrying on by insisting that their greenkeepers belong to local and national organizations, and then making it possible for their greenkeepers to get the most out of these organizations. Too many greenkeepers are not financially able to pay dues and traveling expenses to meetings. When golf club officials will insist upon placing in their budgets an ample amount to take care of the greenkeepers' association dues and traveling expenses, golf maintenance will go on to still higher standards.

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**Managers Asked for Ideas**—Club managers with suggestions for the program of the eleventh annual convention of the Club Managers Assn. of America to be held at Louisville, Feb. 16, 17, 18, are invited to send suggestions to J. Fred Smith, secretary of the organization, University club, Columbus, O.