

# Golfdom

The Business Journal of Golf

JANUARY, 1938

Vol. 12



No. 1

## OVER HERE, OVER THERE

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WHEN anyone interested in golf or golf courses returns from a visit to Great Britain he is expected to give at least a locker-room dissertation on turf on British courses as compared with American courses. To conform with this old American custom the following discussion is presented, based on a visit to Great Britain during summer 1937 in connection with the Fourth International Grassland Congress.

ANY comparison of British and American golf courses is almost certain to bring out the striking difference in cost of golf in the two countries. This contrast is particularly striking when one considers the Scottish courses. There one may belong to 6 or 8 first-class clubs at no greater cost than membership in one first-class American club. The number of playing members at many British clubs is likely to give one the impression of more crowded conditions than actually is the case, due to the low fees which serve to encourage membership in several courses.

The question of why British golf is so much less expensive than American golf leads one to consider the principal costs of course and club maintenance. In Great Britain the big majority of golf is played at golf clubs rather than at country clubs. There the golf course comes first not only in theory but in practice. Therefore the cost of golf in Great Britain is likely to be in reality the cost of golf rather than the cost of enjoying the privilege of an elaborate clubhouse. Also, British turf can be maintained at a much lower cost than is necessary to keep turf in good condition in America.

Countless arguments have developed in locker-rooms and in executive board meet-

ings over suggestions or demands of club members that efforts be made to duplicate certain British turf conditions in this country. In most of such arguments the participants know very little about grasses and less about maintenance methods. The important factor of weather, on which they have information, they invariably ignore.

Before attempting to compare turf and maintenance methods in the two countries the differences in climatic conditions and their affect on vegetation should be fully recognized. Golfers acquainted with manufacturing processes too often incline to the opinion that by using the same materials turf can be duplicated anywhere the same as identical goods may be manufactured anywhere by using the same base goods and similar production methods. Unfortunately, their arguments sound quite logical and convincing.

They overlook, however, that climatic conditions are not so all-important in manufacturing operations as in the production



Building up the bank of a trap with layers of sod is common in England, but rare in this country.

of any plant product such as turf. This little oversight has cost American golf clubs hundreds of thousands of dollars in a futile effort to duplicate certain types of turf that are found commonly in Great Britain. What is even more unfortunate is the fact that some golf club officials have as yet not learned the lessons that certain fundamental laws of Nature can not be set aside at any price.

To illustrate the importance of prevailing climatic differences as they affect plant growth in Great Britain and the United States let us take just two examples, corn and tomatoes.

When the early settlers came here they found the Indians cultivating corn, which is now raised almost anywhere from Mexico to Canada. The tomato likewise will produce good crops in all our States but in Great Britain it will grow and produce green fruit but will not ripen without greenhouse protection. Agronomists and horticulturists in Great Britain have tried without success for many generations to produce crops of these two most important plants. It is not surprising that a good many of our golfing enthusiasts ignore climatic differences and try to duplicate British turf conditions over here simply by the process of planting seed used on British courses and giving turf the same care that is used successfully in the British Isles.

#### Weather More Even

Weather conditions in Great Britain are nowhere near as variable as they are in the United States. Extremes of heat and cold that we have in most parts of the United States are not experienced over there. The extremes from torrential rains to prolonged droughts do not occur there.

Excessive evaporation, which is so injurious to grass, is not experienced in Great Britain to a degree comparable to that experienced in many parts of this country for long periods. Other important differences in climatic conditions might be cited.

The British Isles have long been famous for their natural covering of grass. In our country, wherever the rainfall is equal to that in Great Britain, when farmland is abandoned and allowed to turn back to Nature it soon becomes covered with a growth of brush and trees. In Great Britain on the other hand similar land would soon be covered by grasses or low-growing plants like bracken, gorse and heather. When these other plants are kept cut down grasses soon dominate in the ground cover.

#### Little Evidence of Man's Handiwork

We have heard much of the famous turf of Great Britain. When one looks at this turf critically and compares it with turf in this country he is likely to be reminded of comment made by a visitor after looking over and admiring the campus of one of our famous universities located in a beautiful situation but where the architectural development had certainly left much to be desired. This visitor summarized his impressions thus: "Nowhere in the country has God done so much and man so little to accomplish effective results." In critically comparing American golf course turf with British turf it is quite apparent that there God has done much, man little. This statement is not made in any way to belittle the ability or accomplishments of British greenkeepers. They have simply had Nature on their side instead of against them and their progress has no doubt been hampered by the natural public attitude that the problem of raising grass is simply that "You plant it then roll it and mow it and roll it and mow it for a hundred years and there it is."

Turf maintenance methods in the two countries are naturally somewhat modified by the differences in temperament of the club members. This difference is perhaps best illustrated by a conversation with a club secretary who kindly showed us around his interesting and well-kept course. Observing some badly scarred turf in a prominent place, we inquired as to the procedure that would be followed to repair the damage. He explained that nothing special would be done about it



Typical rough natural terrain of a British seaside course. The grasses are all native.

for under ordinary care it would soon recover and one would then not be able to recognize it had ever been injured.

We registered our astonishment and immediately began questioning to try to determine the ordinary care that would accomplish such remarkably rapid recovery. The secretary obviously had no secrets to retain and obligingly answered fully all our questions. Not satisfied that we had a reasonable explanation, we tried to figure out some more questions. Then it occurred to us that he had not defined his meaning of "soon," so we asked him how long he meant. He explained, "It will be back in good condition in, I should say, about two years."

Anyone acquainted with our American speed (which the Britishers designate by different and after all perhaps more appropriate terms) as applied by certain of our golf club officials might readily name several greenkeepers who would have lost their jobs if they had been unable to restore such turf within **two months**.

#### **No Answer to This Question**

In any discussion of turf in the two countries the question most likely to be asked is, "In which country do you find the better turf?" The answer to that question is essentially the same as to the question, "Which is the better fruit—the American pear or the oriental pear?" The Orientals relish the pear to which they are accustomed and have no use for our pear. Likewise although oriental pear trees will produce large crops of attractive looking fruit in this country there is no Amer-

ican market for this fruit since the flavor is distasteful according to our standards.

Although the British and American standards of turf represent no such wide difference as the above mentioned case of pears it nevertheless is true that golfers in the two countries have developed different demands for turf. This is perhaps particularly true in the case of putting greens. The rather universal American use of the "air route" to the pin calls for a putting green that will hold a pitched shot far better than is required or even desired for the run-up approach shot that is used much more frequently in Great Britain. The turf on the average American putting green is better for pitched shots than is British turf, and the reverse is the case for the run-up shot.

#### **Weeds Tolerated**

American golfers apparently will tolerate far fewer weeds in turf than will the British golfer. This is no doubt due to the fact that the weeds which are common in both countries for some reason in this country tend to develop into distinct mats and therefore are more objectionable here than in Great Britain. Likewise one might make several comparisons which would lead to the same conclusion that British turf is better for their conditions and American turf is better for our own conditions.

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*Dr. Monteith will continue his comparison of British and American turf in the February issue.*