

# A CHAIRMAN'S VIEWPOINT

*This paper was read at the recent NAGA Convention*

By JAMES MORRISON  
Green-Chairman Cincinnati CC

**I**N studying over this subject I found myself looking back over a period of about 12 years, the years that I have been green-chairman of our club. The reveries thus indulged in were very pleasant. It was, I found, a review of what for me had become an absorbing hobby; absorbing to the extent, possibly, of letting it take more time than I should rightfully have given it. I have had many a good time on the golf course playing golf since about 1894 and I have had equally good times on the golf course playing greenkeeper since 1925.

I think it is probably a rare thing to find a green-chairman who has a vice-chairman coming along to take over the job when he relinquishes it. The new chairman is, in the majority of cases, a man who may or may not have served on the committee; but if other clubs are like ours, the chairmen of nearly all committees do the work because it is easier than to call a meeting, explain the problems, and get an agreement. Nine times out of ten they say "Go ahead, Jim, do as you think best." So it is likely that a new chairman will know little or nothing of the problems of greenkeeping.

## What Can Be Expected?

When a new man does take on the chairman's job, what does he have the right to expect of the greenkeeper? Let's enumerate them.

First, a thorough knowledge of the regular daily grounds jobs; that is, care of greens, fairways, traps, and rough—what might be termed just grass cutting, grass watering, or sand raking jobs. But are they only that? The men must be instructed to do the jobs right and the greenkeeper must be observing enough to see that they are done right—ball depressions lifted, an occasional weed removed, some new blight or other defects spotted and reported. Fairway cutting can be well done or carelessly done. Units must be sharp and set alike for a good job, and there must be no misses. A neat, evenly

cut fairway always invites a member and favorable comment. A trap raked haphazardly looks haphazard. There must be system to the raking. A weed growing in a trap stands out like a tree in a desert. Do not wait for the chairman to mention these things.

Second, a chairman assumes of course that the greenkeeper knows his equipment and its upkeep and sees to it that the mechanic keeps it in good working condition at all times.

## Some Knowledge of Chemicals an Essential

Third, a new chairman, if he does not know it when he takes the job, soon finds out that there are such things as golf course chemicals, fertilizers, disease cures, and preventives. He knows nothing about their use and of course expects his greenkeeper to know all about them.

Fourth, a greenkeeper is expected to raise and care for plants other than grass; i. e., trees, shrubs, and flowers; their planting, pruning, and fertilizing. For these, too, must look healthy, neat, and thrifty.

Fifth, how far would a factory superintendent get without the ability to handle men? The new chairman may know nothing about grass, or fertilizers, but it is about ten to one that he knows what superintendents should know about handling men; a greenkeeper is first a superintendent in his chairman's eyes. You must know your men and their capabilities. A man may be a good greens-cutter, a good trap-raker, a good tractor-operator, but a terrible man to trust with chemicals. You must know what constitutes a good day's work and see that the club gets it, and at the same time you must see that in return for this good day's work the

men are adequately paid and do not have to wait for the chairman to find out this or any other grievances of your crew.

Sixth, when, where and in what quantities to buy supplies. This is an item the chairman is apt to know something about and the wise greenkeeper will always consult with his chairman before buying supplies. He, the chairman, can probably be of great assistance in this either from his own knowledge or that of his own purchasing department; or, as your club probably has members from almost every type of industry in your community, he can get advice, or assistance, or better prices from some club member.

#### **Greenkeeper Should Keep Posted**

Seventh, the average chairman will expect his greenkeeper to have enough interest in his job to keep posted on what is going on. He must know what is new in grass types or strains, whether certain types will grow in his climate—whether these types will solve the problem on some green in a difficult place on the course. He must know what is new in chemicals, fertilizers, or preventives. New equipment is coming out every year; some good on some courses, not so good on others. Don't get the chairman to buy you something until you are sure it will do the job. If you make a mistake here, the confidence of your chairman is rudely shaken.

Eighth, research is going on in our line all over the country by experts in their lines, men educated for this work and trained in it. You will find them in every college of agriculture, every state department of agriculture, every county experimental farm, every manufacturer of fertilizers, chemicals, and mechanical equipment. What then is left for the greenkeeper in this line of effort? What can he do with his meager training and equipment for research work? I tell you he can do a lot. No research is complete until it is proven in actual use over a long period, and you men are the final testers of every laboratory product, of every experimental station product or development. You are the checkers and with you rests the final verdict.

Then again, you are in a position to observe certain phenomena. A certain thing was done with certain results. Why? You may not be qualified to answer this "why" but you can pass on your observations to someone who has the training and facilities to answer it, and the result may

be most valuable to you and all your brother greenkeepers, your chairman, and your club.

A typical example of this occurred on our course. We play archery golf in winter. We mark with hydrated lime a 30-ft. circle with the target as center. We have permanent locations for these so the lime is always applied in approximately the same place. All our soil tests well alkaline. After two or three years of this, we began to notice during our dry summers that the circle where the lime was applied was much greener than the surrounding grass. First, this was only apparent in the rough; now we can even see a great difference on the fairways. And even in a wet season the grass on these circles is darker in color, grows faster, and the blades are stiffer.

My only warning to you on this phase of your work is to use caution. Take nobody's say so for anything. Try it on a small plot that is out of sight first. Then try it on a small portion of each green or fairway and watch results. Then, if all is still well, go ahead. Encourage and cooperate with all research.

#### **Record-Keeping Is Important**

Ninth, be systematic. Your chairman will hand you a budget. He has, if he is fair, consulted you in making it up. Keep your records daily, weekly, monthly, so you know where you stand in relation to your budget. Unusual weather conditions may upset your estimate on one item; try to make it up on another. In a wet season you have more grass to cut and more chemicals to buy, but you can save on water. Budgets are just as necessary to a club as to a business, and no business can be safely or properly operated without a budget. Club employees are prone to think that club members are rich and a few thousand dollars on a green-committee budget means nothing. It means just this—an assessment; and with every assessment you have resignations, and every resignation means fewer members to carry the expense, and then a larger assessment. Then the ax falls and a new chairman comes on the job—and then maybe a new greenkeeper.

Cost records or budget records are not the only records to be kept. Do you have a record of the number of square feet of every green? How much fertilizer to send to each green? How much brown-patch preventive chemical to each green? Or

do you trust to memory? If you trust to memory you are a poor greenkeeper for two reasons; first, because you are sooner or later going to badly burn some green; second, if you are taken sick nobody can carry on your job properly.

Tenth, neatness. Be a good housekeeper, and your house is your golf course. Nothing adds more to the pleasure of golf than a good course well kept. No course is well kept if it is untidy. Even the rough should be tidy and free from tall rank-growing weeds, refuse piles, and the like. Traps must be neatly trimmed and weeded. Banks must be kept mowed and reasonably smooth. Paper and other litter must be gathered up daily.

#### Cooperate With Other Department Heads

Eleventh, there are few clubs today where golf is the only activity, yet many are called golf clubs. If the golf department of a club fails to cooperate with other departments, there is friction, and where there is friction there is trouble. The greenkeeper must cooperate with the pro, and with the caddiemaster, and they with him. These are his principal contacts, and it is only through cheerful cooperation that the machine runs smoothly; the man who causes the friction is soon found out and let out.

Twelfth, a great many greenkeepers make serious mistakes in their dealings with their chairman. Some look upon a chairman as a necessary evil, a man to listen to while he is talking and then forget all that was said and proceed as before. Then there is the greenkeeper who feels that he must agree with every whim of his chairman and follow his suggestions or orders even when he knows them to be wrong. Both types of greenkeepers are headed for trouble. Listen to everything your chairman has to say. If his suggestions have merit, say so and go ahead. If they have no merit, try to explain why, and unless he is most unreasonable he will see the error. Good ideas can sometimes come from even a chairman.

I have been enumerating the qualities that the chairman has a right to expect in a greenkeeper. How about the other way around? What qualities has the greenkeeper the right to expect in a chairman? After all, the members are the boss and the ones to be pleased and satisfied, yet the greenkeeper only contacts the members, his real boss, through his chairman.

No man should undertake the job of

green-chairman unless he has time enough to give to the job to really know the problems of the greenkeeper. Most men in business reach executive positions by climbing the ladder from the first rung. The chairman occupies an executive position in a club organization by starting at the top without any experience down below. A situation such as this calls for extreme caution on the chairman's part and he must study carefully the greenkeeper's ideas and reasons for the things he does. I have had members come to me with all kinds of complaints, some reasonable from their point of view and from mine, too, until I talked it over with our greenkeeper and found that for some very simple reason the thing complained of had to be done the way it was being done. Being the go-between from member to greenkeeper takes time, but it is only fair to both to give the necessary time.

#### Chairman Should Weigh Greenkeeper's Advice

Then, too, the chairman is on the mailing list and calling list of all the purveyors of golf course equipment and supplies. To him I say too, "Stop, Look, and Listen to your greenkeeper." He probably knows all about it, has read about it, been told about it, and seen it in operation. Maybe he likes it, maybe he doesn't. Give him the credit of having an honest opinion before committing yourself.

A chairman should be a buffer between the greenkeeper and the members. A greenkeeper often has to do things the members don't like. Order winter golf rules, close a green, or even close the course. How the members howl when this happens! Yet a few words of explanation by the chairman to the howlers smooths matters out and the members think more of their greenkeeper than ever.

In final analysis, the relationship between greenkeeper and green-chairman must be ruled by common sense and the principle that two heads are better than one, even if one is on the shoulders of a chairman and the other on the shoulders of a greenkeeper.

#### Shackamaxon's Roller Skating Party Is Big Drawing Feature

**G**OOD idea for maintaining club interest at a time when most members' thoughts are farthest from golf is a roller skating party of the type Shackamaxon CC, Westfield, N.J., put on for their mem-