

Course Neglect Persists

By L. S. Dickinson

A VERY few years ago when officials of more than a few golf clubs first began attempts to keep their club from the bank, receiver, or mortgagee, the first step was to reduce the "outside help"; the second to reduce the wages of the "outside help" and the third, in some instances, was to abolish the position of greenkeeper. During the same years the writer, together with others who were deeply concerned over the fate of golf courses, greenkeepers and the "outside help" wrote many warnings as to what might happen to the courses if their care was neglected.

At that time, I strongly urged golf clubs to carefully consider all factors involved, from a long range as well as immediate viewpoint, before reducing the labor hours or the effectiveness of the greenkeeping force. I emphasized the fact that the golf course was comparable to a factory and that its management required exceptional ability, as not only the tangible dollar was at stake but the intangible, pleasureable golf; also, the important fact that grass being a complicated living organism, makes greenkeeping a profession.

Since 1935 I have refrained from writing articles concerning the value of a greenkeeper and the necessity for sound business sense in the management of the golf course, as I found a more appreciated and effective way to help was to work with individual clubs. This type of work not only consumed all spare time, but has greatly broadened my experience and conception of the entire golfing situation.

Since the 1938 season, my observations,

correspondence, and personal interviews have been filling me with a desire to again "spill over". The "cap-sheaf" came recently in the form of a letter stating that a well-known 9-hole golf course, facing the necessity of reducing costs, is to reduce the outside labor, the greenkeeper's salary, the fertilizing program, and equipment repairs. Also, the club is considering "doing away with the greenkeeper." Why? Because someone discovered that another 9-hole course which was in "pretty good shape" was being maintained for \$2,000 per year.

Money Is False Comparison

"If one course can be maintained for \$2,000, why can't ours"? is the cry, and the comparison is made on the amount of money alone. When confronted with questions the individual shows the weakness of his argument. He spouts like a cheap politician and refuses to listen to reason for fear he will be defeated because of his lack of actual knowledge of golf course maintenance. Before the depression there were very few golf courses that were really under-manned; some had barely enough men, and about the same number had too many laborers. The majority, however, employed the optimum number of "outside men" for the particular golfing requirements of the club. Nearly every club had a greenkeeper who, at least in times of trouble, was responsible for the care of the golf course. Clubs were spending money very freely in the clubhouse and on the course.

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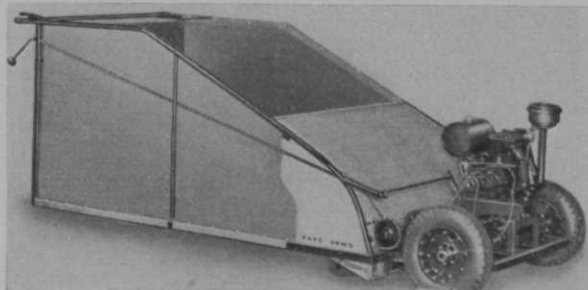
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their organizations, club officials were beginning to be aware that greenkeeping was not simply mowing the grass and watering the greens, and that it had the earmarks of being a profession; in fact, all that remained to make greenkeeping a profession was professional attitude by the greenkeepers themselves. The position of the greenkeeper on the smaller courses was likened to that of the country doctor when compared with the city specialist, both having recognized ability and professional ethics. Before and at the start of the depression, things were really "looking up" for the greenkeeper and golf management.

Then Depression Struck

Then came the depression. At the beginning, the standard of maintenance was apparently kept, because of the resourcefulness and ability of the greenkeeper. Many greenkeepers made personal sacrifices to attend winter schools, and with the knowledge thus gained were able to offset in part the reduced budget with improved cultural practices. Unfortunately, these men received little or no recognition or security of position by the golf clubs. In fact, many were reduced

to the status of laborer or were forced to resign. As a result, the golf clubs of the United States were losing two of their greatest assets because of false ideas of economy: the skilled nurse and caretaker of the golf course, and the golf course itself.

Consider in general what has been the effect of the forced reduction in maintenance budgets and the unwise discarding of skilled greenkeepers, on the cultural condition of the golf courses. It must be remembered that the wear and tear on the courses continued. That does not mean only divot taking or similar obvious scarring. It means real depreciation such as continued clipping of the grass; the effect of over-watering in an attempt to cover up fertilizer needs and unknown troubles; the effect of continued tramping on the soil and its influence upon drainage, fertilizer assimilation and root development; the continued use of stimulating high nitrogen fertilizers; the effect of the use of labor-saving machinery not adapted to the particular course or improperly operated; the effect of repeated attacks of uncontrolled fungus on turf already weakened by insufficient care, and many other factors that lessen the resist-

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While this depreciation was taking place because of lowered budgets, green-keeping policies were reduced to routine work only; no time or funds was available to replace depreciation losses. During the first two years of the depression those courses that had been skillfully maintained (and there were many) held their cultural condition. Good greenkeeping had enabled the grass and soil to make a sufficient reserve to partially take care of the normal loss.

Budget Cuts Hit Course Worst

Beginning with the third year of the depression practically all courses that were being operated with reduced budgets began to draw upon the "capital investment" in cultural condition with the result that these courses were headed toward bankruptcy of their principal investment, the golf course. I do not mean dollars and cents bankruptcy, but bankruptcy in cultural condition.

As proof of the fact, I call your attention to the large loss of turf that had been incurred during the summers of 1937 and 1938. In almost every instance the loss could have been avoided had the clubs curtailed expenses elsewhere than on the "outside help," the maintenance supplies and equipment, and the greenkeeper. If golf courses ever needed greenkeepers and a reasonable number of trained laborers, they have most certainly needed them since the depression began. Many courses have lost in cultural value that, because of its nature, will require years to replace.

In 1936 and 1937, when golf appeared to be on the upswing toward pre-depression conditions, it seemed for a time as though golf clubs in general had realized their false economies and we would see better courses because of better management. These prospects were short-lived for with the recession came a series of more fervent appeals to reduce the "outside help," maintenance supplies and the greenkeeper. If the reductions are made, many more courses will become so poorly kept that some club members will resign,

causing a few more of our private clubs to go semi-private, or even municipal. We shall see the quality of labor lowered from the contented, thoughtful and careful worker of pre-depression days to the very opposite type.

Two other factors that influence the present situation are the so-called "panaceas" and the few groups of greenkeepers who are on what I believe to be the "wrong foot." "Panaceas" have caused some inexperienced green-committeemen to believe greenkeeping requires little training and is merely cutting and watering the grass. Also, certain groups of greenkeepers have sought to obtain the services of an ever-ready trouble-shooter for their district. By doing this I believe these greenkeepers may have implied their inability (whether true or not) to cope with their troubles.

It is my hope that this retrospection helps to explain in part why many golf clubs find their courses in a critical condition today. Very few persons actually inventory the cultural condition of a golf course and therefore their opinion that the course is better, (or worse) than a year ago is formed by comparing the present "quick glance" condition with the memory picture of its condition last year when they lost an important match, allegedly because the greens weren't good, or some other absurd reason.

Lists Plans for Sound Management

From these experiences during the past 6 years it would seem that a campaign platform for the sound business management of golf clubs would include the following planks, and that the present critical condition of many clubs and courses demands its adoption:

1. The golf course is the most important feature of a golf club, and therefore it should be maintained in the best cultural condition possible.
2. The minimum standard of maintenance should assure reasonably good golfing conditions at all times.
3. The minimum standard of maintenance should not require the grass and

soil to call unduly upon its reserve energy and natural resources.

4. It is essential that the management of the golf club be directed by a person who, in his cultural practices and distribution of labor and machine effort, will apply scientific facts and sound business principles.

5. It is essential that only experienced laborers be employed on the golf course and that their wages should be high enough to compare favorably in total with those of laborers in year-around work in other occupations.

6. The minimum total number of labor hours available should be at least 20% in excess of that required for routine work; a higher percent is very desirable.

7. The minimum ratio between available labor hours and routine hours should be maintained regardless of the amount of machinery used.

8. It is not only fair, but a sound business investment for a golf club to send its greenkeeper to one of the schools for greenkeepers and pay his entire expenses. A sum of \$150 plus travel would cover the cost at the longest school.

9. Any remedy, cure, or proposal that implies it is a panacea, very seldom acts as such and its use is usually costly in money and cultural conditions.

10. A comparison of maintenance costs of golf courses can not be made because there is no common factor measuring stick, or accepted standard.

Maryland's First Short Course Proves Popular

THE state of Maryland's first annual greenkeeping short course, held January 25-27 at the university of Maryland, was very successful, both from standpoints of fine attendance and of presenting a most interesting and informative educational program. The Mid-Atlantic Assn. of Greenkeepers has been plugging for such a course for quite some time, and judging from the fine things said about the inaugural school, the Maryland session will hereafter be one of the fixtures of the annual greenkeeping courses.

More than 75 greensmen heard Dr. H. C. Byrd, president, U. of Maryland, open the session Wednesday A. M. with words of greeting, to be followed by O. B. Fitts, Columbia CC greenkeeper and president of the Mid-Atlantic group, who responded

for the organization. R. P. Thomas, U. of Md., got the educational program under way with a talk on "Relation of Soil Classes and Types to Plant Growth." J. E. Metzger and F. S. Holmes, both U. of Md. staff members, spoke on fertilizers and seed testing respectively; J. S. Houser, Wooster, Ohio, and John Monteith, Jr., USGA Green Section, concluded the first day's program, Houser speaking on ants, chinch bugs, cutworms, etc., and Dr. Monteith on turf watering practices.

R. P. Thomas opened the second day's proceedings with a talk on "Significant Rapid Tests for Available Soil Nutrients." Demonstrations and questions on this topic immediately afterward brought forth many interesting thoughts. W. B. Kemp, U. of Md., spoke next on new developments in grasses; J. B. S. Norton conducted a weed identification clinic right after lunch, and then Fred V. Grau, department of agronomy at Penn State college, took over, speaking on modern methods of weed control. Grau followed his talk with some very interesting moving pictures on the subject. Monteith's informative talk on turf diseases and their control, concluded Thursday's program.

On Friday, drainage was discussed by R. W. Carpenter, U. of Md. and "Factors Affecting Turf Injuries" by O. J. Noer, Milwaukee Sewerage commission. S. S. Steinberg, U. of Md., opened Friday afternoon's program with an interesting paper on Road Maintenance; C. H. Hadley, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, spoke on "Control of Japanese Beetle and Other Grubs in Turf," and Monteith concluded the educational sessions with a talk on new developments in turf culture. The course closed with a dinner-banquet at a Washington hotel.

Clemens Named Midwest President—1939 officers of the Midwest Greenkeepers Assn., elected at the annual meeting held January 5 at the Sherman hotel in Chicago, are: president, Harold Clemens, Sunset Ridge CC; secy-treas., John Darrah, Beverly CC. John MacGregor and A. A. Germann, retiring president and secy-treas. respectively, were given a rising vote of thanks for their services as officers for the past two years.

Speakers at the dinner meeting were national president Joe Ryan, and O. J. Noer, Milwaukee Sewerage Commission. Other guests were Fred Grau, Penn State college, who put in a surprise appearance, and Leo Feser, Wayzata, Minn.