

Don't Change Greenkeepers In the Middle of the Heat

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Standing beneath a welcome shade tree, I could not help but close my eyes and dream of the lush blue grass and velvet like greens which but a short time ago grew so abundantly and covered so perfectly our rolling and picturesque golf course. When I opened my eyes it was easy to observe the effects caused by the hot Kansas sun, the warm drying winds of the Midwest and the added drought. Hard baked terrain covered with burnt grass could be seen everywhere and all resemblance of green lush grass was gone except for an occasional undesirable patch of crab grass which delights in taking advantage of any occasion for infestation purposes. As I stood there the problem which caused me concern was not the disappearance of the blue grass—this I knew would return come October and rain. Neither was I particularly worried about the attacks of big brown which I had experienced on several of our greens. The greenkeepers of Kansas and Western Missouri are quite familiar with Mr. Big Brown and his potential. They realize that bent greens are on the verge of life and death during a Midwest summer.

What then was my concern? I believe it was a feeling of great respect for golf course superintendents and one of deep sympathy for some club officials as well as a few influential players who delight in making hasty decisions and working off their prickly heat during hot uncontrollable summers. To some, midsummer usually means open season on Mr. Greenkeeper. I have always believed that the part played by the elements exerted more direct influence on the condition of a golf course than by the man in charge. And, as a matter of fact, I still believe so. Ninety-nine per cent of the time the green superintendent can handle most of the problems within his profession but that remaining one per cent which is handled by nature is beyond the reach of man. We may compete with nature and occasionally gain a slight advantage but in the long run it's almost impossible to win.

It was not too many years ago when I was heralded as somewhat of a turf hero. This, because I maintained the best greens for miles around during a most difficult July and August when no water came down

from the heavens and the temperature bubbled around the 100 mark with plenty of humidity as a side dish. During this same period my best friend, Joe, an expert green superintendent, lost his job even though for five years previously he was considered one of the best in the business.

A few club officials and a small group of players who thought they knew all the answers but never contributed one ounce of sound advice finished Joe. While nature was playing tricks and things were pretty bad the club officials and membership just couldn't take it. The club which previously thrived and built its reputation on the greenkeeper's knowledge now turned against him and forgot his many contributions. Now don't get me wrong. I have been a club official as well as a greenkeeper and realize there are many players and club officials who know the ropes. They along with others have confidence in their man Friday (the greenkeeper) and have backed him to the limit. This is as it should be as long as the greenkeeper has proven his worth. On the other hand I am broadminded enough to know that a greenkeeper can make mistakes as can anyone else in any other chosen profession. The answer here is whether or not the same mistake is repeated and if so then there is a justification for a lack of confidence.

To get back to my friend "Joe," he was discharged and the club lost a competent man. I personally know that they would have doubled his salary a year later to have him back and even tripled it the third year after he was gone. The new but inexperienced gentleman they employed together with the self admitted and friendly advice of the know-it-all group resulted in a completely run-down golf course. Only through the employment of another experienced greenkeeper at double the salary of my friend did they finally come out of their difficulties. The club lost considerable money as well as prestige during this fiasco.

If any reader of this article has entertained or toyed with the untimely idea of changing Mr. Greenkeeper during uncontrollable seasons, may I suggest that you close your eyes and picture the lush green fairway and velvet like greens which will soon return. A Midwest summer can be a tough proposition so leave the job to the man who knows.