

# Putting On a "Front" For the Greenkeeper's Big Job

By **HERB GRAFFIS**

A down-east greenkeeper dropped into a supply dealer's office and began unbosoming himself of his reflections after calling on a greenkeeper at a good club. The dealer's visitor was not in a pleasant mood.

He blurted out:

"I've just been to see X. I was glad to chat with him again for he certainly knows how to grow grass. But what he doesn't know about people! If I'd been a stranger I wouldn't have picked out X as the head man from among the laborers on the course. He was very much overdue on a shave and in every other way looked like a guy who could be picked up at one of those places where they recruit railroad track gangs.

"I know he's short of help and has to pitch in. I don't expect him or any other greenkeeper to strut around in knife-creased trousers, a stiff white collar and a Sulka tie, but I do think it wouldn't hurt X any to look like the man responsible for a first-class job.

"X is in an ideal spot to look, act and think in every way so he'd be helping himself and all the greenkeepers, but will he do that? Hell, no! It seems that he deliberately tries to down-grade himself and be just another peasant. Then we wonder why it's so hard to get golf course maintenance established in public opinion as an important, exacting profession.

"Well, we've chewed this over too many times and always have ended up just where we began; deciding that if greenkeepers won't look the part of valuable men they can't expect to be regarded as such.

## Club in Great Shape — BUT

"I suppose I'll keep on growling about greenkeeping. I've been doing it for 17 years. But after what I saw when I was out at X's club I'm getting stronger in my determination to cut loose from the business. His club has been having its best year of the past 15 and never was in better financial condition. Still he's had to let half his men go. Those who have stayed demanded more money and got it. X has been at about the same salary for there's no telling how long. He doesn't look or act as though he was worth more."

The supply man waited for an opening in the indignant recital then cited another case.

"There used to be a repairman for a club in this district. When the war came along

he quit and went to work in a war plant as a millwright. He is a good mechanic. He was called a 'grease ball' for his clothes were greasy and grimy. One day during the war he came in to see me and I was astonished. He had on a white shirt, was clean-shaved and looked like a solid businessman. In the course of our conversation he told me that he'd decided one day to come onto the job looking neat. Before long other men on the job came to him asking for advice on work to be done. They thought from his appearance that he must have some boss rating.

"The superintendent of the plant noticed fellows coming to this former golf equipment mechanic and promoted him. Now he's night foreman of the millwrights in a big plant."

After other exchange of observations the greenkeeper and the supply man agreed that a costly neglect of greenkeepers is failure to "put on a front" at their jobs. There are so many of them who don't that the whole profession is penalized. The pros long ago learned the profit of dressing for their jobs. Walter Hagen taught them that and it was by no means the least of the contributions the pros' Great Emancipator made in raising the standards for the pro golfers.

## Look the Boss Part

It's a sure thing that the superintendent of the course can't go at his job often dressed as dapper as a pro or a manager, but in thinking about this conversation between the greenkeeper and the supply man I honestly think the fellows have got something in their opinion that greenkeepers generally have to pay more attention to looking the part of a responsible executive rather than going around looking like just another one of the maintenance workmen. Outside work makes a man inclined to dress for comfort and doing manual labor rather than for show, but there's a happy medium for the greenkeeper in appearing as the chief who, if needs be, can do any job better than any of his staff.

It's a delicate subject to bring up. There are numerous exceptions of course, superintendents who do dress the part. But the majority don't and I'm certain that their failure is in a large measure the cause of the general lack of appreciation for the greenkeeper and his work. Most club members are city people and put a high rating on "front." To "put up a front" is the

reason a lot of people belong to private clubs.

For 36 years I've been in the magazine and newspaper business meeting "the most interesting people," many thousands of average Americans and Europeans and a large number of dummies. In that work, naturally, a fellow meets a lot of important people—some who really are and others who pretend they are. But among people of practically all occupations and professions the class I've met who are least inclined to make any show of their genuine value are the greenkeepers. A great many times during the past 25 years I've had the privilege of knowing some greenkeepers intimately, on their jobs, in their homes, at meetings and about everywhere else men can get well acquainted.

### **Greenkeepers Under-rate Themselves**

I have seen them at moments of normal human cussedness and frailty as well as at their tops. I have seen them exhibit most of the faults of mankind except one. I never have seen a greenkeeper guilty of vanity. Maybe that isn't the endorsement of greenkeepers it should be. I have seen thousands in other lines—in business, sports, professional and war—who made conspicuous successes of themselves by acting more impressive than their qualifications actually justified. But I can't recall one greenkeeper who over-acted his role.

Yet, with the exception of war-accelerated progress in industry and the rapid advances made in the newer science-based businesses such as radio and automotive industries I doubt that any other business, big, medium or small, can show progress such as that the greenkeepers have brought to the aid of golf. True, the progress has been due in a large measure to the help of several state agricultural schools and partially due to the USGA Green section but in the latter respect nobody knows any better than USGA officials who have headed the Green Section that the chief factor in the Section's great and increasing value has been the intensely interest collaboration of the greenkeepers.

There hasn't been anything else done in golf, or in many other businesses having the salary scale of greenkeepers, comparable with the improvements and economies effected in course maintenance as the result of the greenkeeper short courses and association meetings. Yet until just before the war it generally was the practice at clubs to let the greenkeeper pay his own expenses to these affairs which benefited the clubs so positively.

### **Greenkeeper's Work Takes Time**

A serious handicap to the greenkeeper's achievement being recognized is the gradual rate at which the results of his

work show. A course can be amazingly improved from one season to the next but due to the time it takes for nature to do its part of the job members don't see a sudden and impressive transformation. Yet, if the average of club members' scores had been reduced from one season to the next by 10 strokes, which would be about as phenomenal as some transformations made in course condition in a year the scoring improvement would be the subject of nationwide sports section and magazine pieces and the pro would become famous—as he should be—for his feat.

It has been surprising to me that greenkeepers haven't acquired the capacity for making themselves at least locally noted. Maybe they are rather content to be out of the limelight knowing that what they have to contend with in nature's vagaries, limited budgets and whims of committees makes a man of some prominence a brighter target for blame when anything goes wrong for reasons beyond his control.

In native good judgment, in education and specialized training the greenkeeper at the majority of first-class clubs is generally a pretty well qualified man. I could name you many of college education. In this respect they are on a par with pros and managers. Many are landscape artists and expert horticultural as well as turf men. Their qualifications in this respect are higher than many who are making an income of from \$10,000 to \$18,000 in the landscaping business. Some greenkeepers have been experts with famed botanical gardens in this country and abroad. Others have had successful experience as engineers. Quite a number of them are very well read and scholarly men, although how these fellows are able to get the time to read as extensively as I've found they do I haven't been able to figure out. The greenkeepers' hours usually are long and uncertain. His is no portal-to-portal job but one that keeps him handy most times during the playing season.

### **Independent to What Extent?**

Generally he is an independent character, possibly as the result of being confronted by so many problems he has to solve by his own resourcefulness. Efforts to organize greenkeepers on a union basis have been unsuccessful because, according to several explanations I've received from greenkeepers, the greenkeeper rarely is of the temperament to submit to union officials' dictation. Yet that explanation doesn't stand up when you consider the arbitrary attitude of some green-chairmen and other officials with whom greenkeepers get along quite well.

But regardless of how independent the greenkeeper may feel like being he rarely

(Continued on page 66)

**ALFRED H. TULL**  
**Golf Course Architect**

420 Lexington Avenue  
 NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

Place orders now for early delivery  
**Outdoor Drinking Fountains  
 and Hydrants**  
 Write for copy of catalog "L"  
**The Murdock Mfg. & Sup. Co.**  
 Cincinnati 2, Ohio

**MURDOCK**



**M. J. SULKA**

**GOLF COURSES OF DISTINCTION  
 DESIGNED AND CONSTRUCTED**  
 41 LEONARD AVENUE  
 ATLANTIC HIGHLANDS, N. J.  
 ESTABLISHED 1920

**CLUB OFFICIALS**

A NEW SERVICE OFFERED BY C. S. S.  
 LET US MAKE YOUR JOB AN EASY AND  
 EFFICIENT ONE

It's easy to give good management,  
 good food, good service, and have a  
 good financial showing under the  
 C. S. S. plan of operating.

WHAT MORE IS THERE TO MAKING YOU A  
 HAPPY OFFICIAL?

WRITE: CLUB SYSTEMS SERVICE  
 P.O. BOX 279, DOWNERS GROVE, ILL.

**Putting On a Front**

(Continued from page 34)

is in a position permitting him to be independent of the basis on which most club officials rate employees—the basis of appearing successful and backing up that appearance by performance. Too often greenkeepers reverse that basis. They perform excellently on their jobs and think that's all that is needed to win for them the high esteem of the membership. It isn't. Then the greater percentage of the members are inclined to think of the greenkeeper—if they think of him at all—about as they think of the janitor of a building in which they live; somebody to cuss out when the heat isn't adequate. At the salaries janitors are paid in metropolitan cities they can stand such mild complaint as union regulations permit them to receive. The greenkeeper at his salary is seldom so fortunately situated.

The greenkeeper and supply man whose conversation started this piece were right and the thoughtful greenkeepers must admit it. There has to be more of an important "front" put on by most greenkeepers holding important jobs at good clubs.

**PADDY SAYS:**



"As usual  
 It's  
**LEWIS"**



Yes, Lewis is the golf ball washer that every course should have at EVERY TEE! A clean ball means FEWER LOST BALLS—FASTER PLAY—LONGER DRIVES—MORE ACCURATE PUTTS.

Dept. 62  
**G. B. LEWIS CO., Watertown, Wis.**

**CREEPING BENT STOLONS — FROM THE MOUNTAINS OF NORTH CAROLINA**

The finest and most prolific Bent Grass that has come under my observation in 35 years' experience in growing grass for putting greens. Free of weeds and clover.

Write for Prices and Information.

**BREVARD COUNTRY CLUB NURSERY, E. E. FRASER, PROP.**

Brevard, North Carolina