



View of the conference hall as the opening session of the GSA Conference got under way.

What's Ahead for the Turf Superintendent?

By **HERB GRAFFIS**

Very few appreciate what tremendous effect the greenkeeper has had on the esthetics of American life. Twenty-five years ago there wasn't one lawn in a thousand that would compare in its condition and grooming to the average lawn in the middle-class or fancier residential districts today. Nobody who gives even the slightest thought to this beautification and contribution to property value can deny that it's directly and solely the result of the work of the golf course superintendent in demonstrating what could be done with grass in the United States.

What recognition—by public acclaim or cash—has the golf course superintendent got for directing and impelling this transition of American lawns from weeds to beautiful and healthy turf?

Not much!

Millions upon millions of dollars have been spent by the public, by golf courses, parks, highway organizations, cemeteries and industrial establishments in following the greenkeepers' light, but a very tiny fraction of that money has gone into the pocket of the greenkeeper—to be quickly withdrawn by the needs of his family.

Shortage of Talent Threatens

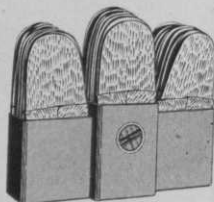
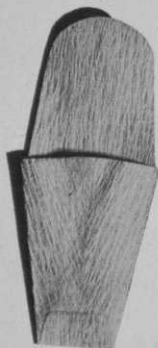
Today we see that far from enough promising young men are coming into golf course turf work. Tomorrow golf club officials may see it. Then, for some of their clubs it will be too late. Competition has been getting very keen in course condition. Tees now are better than greens used to be. The representative metropolitan district public course is in better shape than the private courses were 20 years ago. There'll again come a day when clubs are competing for members and the club with the best conditioned course—as has happened often before—will have a strong advantage.

In attempting to forecast and appraise the future for the golf course superintendent the safest base we have is the past. We properly can attribute some of the failure to make greenkeeping a business having cash returns commensurate with requirements of the job, to the unique nature of operations at private clubs. The season generally is rather short. Top management of the clubs usually is in the hands of unpaid amateurs who most often stay in office just long enough to experiment with the club's money then get out, passionately relieved that they have not

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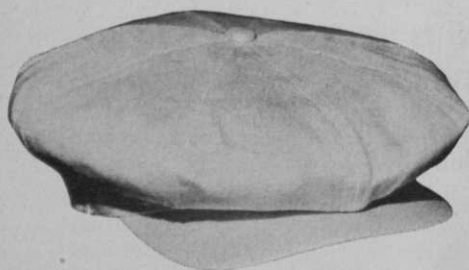
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been sentenced to the job for life.

Nursing the inexperienced officials and catering to their whims and often to their ignorance is very trying to the spirit of mortal. But too often when the superintendent comes right out and tells them man-to-man the facts of turf life they'll get some guy to work for less. The official who's had his feelings hurt by candor will be out of office before the inexperienced cheap new man lets the course deteriorate. The official whose vanity has been hurt won't care about having cost the club the services of a competent and conscientious man.

But the greenkeepers won't get very far blaming the other fellow before he examines his own record.

Salaries Not in Line

I've seen and heard of fewer raises of greenkeepers—and raises in line with increased cost of living and higher standard of results—than in any other industry.

Why is that? Club officials usually are fine, fair men. Your officials are businessmen often with plants of their own. They know what's going on in the working world. They know figures. If they haven't a fairly clear conception of the comparison between the superintendent of a manufacturing plant they own and the superintendent of the golf recreation plant at which they're officials, you can't altogether pass the buck for this neglect of their education.

In about 25 years of being quite closely associated with the golf course maintenance business I've continuously heard "economy, economy, economy."

Very few times have I heard officials say to superintendents "spend what the course needs." Even now, with waiting lists of membership applicants, bars and slot machines registering record takes and most private clubs having more cash reserve than they ever before had it is pretty near a sure bet that not one private course out of 30 will have spent on its course operations and fixed assets this year as much as it actually needs.

Is that altogether the fault of the club officials? Candidly I think it isn't.

And right at that point we bump into

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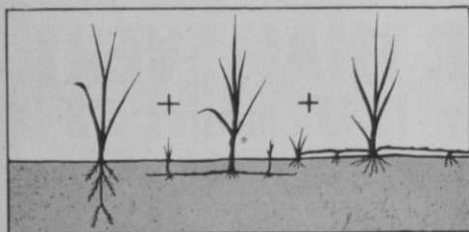
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something that the greenkeeper will have to change if the future of this business, profession or job—whatever you choose to call it—is to be attractive.

The greenkeepers will have to snap out of the generally established habit of thinking and talking in penny-pinching ways.

And that's a difficult thing to do.

Get the Money Picture

Now one thing I do see, after talking with heaven knows how many course superintendents, green-chairmen and other officials of clubs, is that personal and collective progress for the superintendents is going to require that you think and talk bigger about money. You know—or should know—your club's financial situation, what its reserves should be and what money now should be spent on the course as insurance if, as and when the present golden day in golf comes into the twilight that hits the golf business intermittently. Have you ever made up a budget that includes everything that should be bought and done? You might try it just to give your chairmen and boards the novelty of seeing what a difference there is between what they think would be a generous budget and what the course actually could use to good advantage without throwing money away.

It would be a tough job for many greenkeepers to make up a really complete budget, simply because they are so deeply into the habit of squeezing a dollar until the eagle sweats blood. Then they wonder why the chairman and board don't spontaneously get the idea the greenkeeper himself should have a substantial raise to send his kids through school and maintain a living standard that should be that of a responsible, highly trained specialist in the employ of an organization of gentlemen sportsmen.

Perhaps some of this sounds wildly theoretical, or listens like unwarranted criticism. It might sound impossible for a lot of you fellows to do as well by yourselves as you have done by your clubs.

So again, let's consider the possibilities as compared with past performance. You—and certainly the golfing public—do not vividly realize the extent of the miracle you have wrought, with God's help, in golf turf over the past 15 years. If there had been an improvement in golf instruction results to the same degree as the improvement in golf turf the average score of private club members would be in the mid-eighties at least instead of in the mid-nineties. There would have been sensational publicity granted to such an achievement by the pros and they would have deserved every bit of it.

But the results on the turf scorecard

Golfdom

show so slowly the member is eased into the improvement. He doesn't realize it has been made. Hence there has been no special comment on the phenomenal job that has been done in improving course condition. Even so, the job has been done, just as the job of getting members and officials to think of course management as an important job calling for important money, must be done.

Of late years you have read a lot about how faster balls and better clubs have improved the scoring of the stars. And it is a sure thing that improved equipment has done a lot. But certainly a great factor in this scoring improvement is the tremendous improvement in turf. Talk to older pro playing stars whose careers have covered two generations of notables. They'll tell you how much better the ball lies for fairway shots than it used to on the old weedy and frequently sparse turf. They'll have plenty to say about the billiard-table accuracy of today's greens compared with the putting surfaces of 15 or more years ago.

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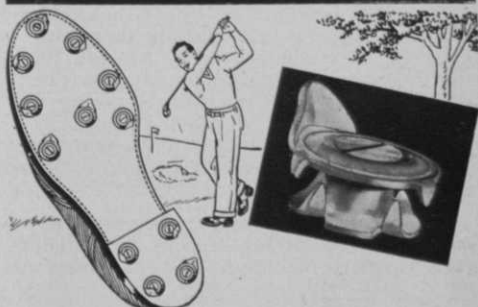
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have to devote more attention to performing miracles on the men who are club officials and members.

They are an exacting lot. They don't realize what you are up against in the problem of forcing the growth of a frequently harvested crop and trying to keep it healthy. You and they have the gap between you that the city fellow and the farmer have.

But these city fellows lately have begun to acquire a considerable, though sometimes reluctant respect for the man who is closely associated with manual labor. The unions have forced that, often by methods that have not been universally endorsed or entirely in public service. Nevertheless unions compelled action on wages, hours and job security. Eventually the new basis will be as much to the benefit of management and stockholders as to the union and non-union workers or there will be equalizing adjustments made.

It is bound to occur to club officials that greenkeepers have not received wage increases paralleling those of unionized trades. It must also get around that when a good club wants to replace a greenkeeper who is retiring or going into another field it has to hire a superintendent away from another club. Competent new men are not coming into the field any way nearly fast enough to supply the growing needs of golf. The average age of Greenkeeping Superintendents' association members is over 45. The school and on-the-job training of course superintendents under the GI Bill of Rights has not drawn young men into the study of course maintenance as specialists. The young fellows want pro-greenkeeper jobs where they have a better chance of making money.

The first class course superintendent today is a rare combination of artist, scientist, farmer, mechanic and businessman.

The businessman phase of his capacities must be emphasized in the future.

There are signs of the road opening for his recognition as a high-powered authority. I noticed the Jeep ad in Colliers headed "The greenkeepers best friend is the universal Jeep." That is a definite step in the right direction. Pros, bartenders, society queens and men of distinction have their fame and fortune added to by these testimonial ads which in many cases are testimony as phony as a \$7 bill. But the greenkeeper's testimonial means something. His standing with the public is based on integrity and performance. He would be the laughing-stock of his colleagues were he to lend or lease his name to the endorsement of something he wasn't absolutely sure from ample experience, warranted his approval. His influence already has been a dominant element in accounting for public acceptance of some fertilizers, mowing and watering equipment and weed-killers.

He has established a fine foundation for future status as an executive and authority. The program of this meeting, the programs of the short courses and the greenkeeper district association meetings show how far he has come as a qualified authority. Much of the technical material in these papers is too technical for the chairman and board members. Practically all of it will mean more financially to your clubs than it will mean to you.

What has got to be ahead for the course superintendent is more of an equalization between the clubs and superintendents of the financial benefits of progress in golf course maintenance. Either that, or there will be a shortage of personnel required for continuing the advance greenkeeping has made since it started to modernize itself when the Green Section was formed in 1921.

BENT GRASS GREENS

(Continued from page 38)

amount of impurities and low germination. A purity figure of 80 percent, and germination of 85 percent is not uncommon. Chaff is the principal impurity but weeds are present, including mouse-ear chickweed, yarrow, and sheep sorrel.

The colonial bents have gained in favor during recent years but have been used on fairways more than on greens. *Agrostis tenuis* includes Astoria and Highland strains grown in Oregon and Washington; Rhode Island bent, produced in New England; Prince Edward Island bent in Canada, and the Brown-top of New Zealand.

The colonial bent grasses have a more erect habit of growth than the creeping

bents because they spread principally by underground stems rather than surface creeping runners. *Agrostis tenuis* seems to be able to survive in drier soil than creeping bent. It is found growing wild on soils of higher elevation, while the creeping bents grow in areas which are subject to overflow. The Highland type receives its name from the fact that it grows at even higher elevations in Oregon than Astoria, and is said to withstand drier soil than the other types of bent. There is a so-called Dryland strain of colonial bent in New Zealand which is said to have similar characteristics to Highland.

The colonial bents are more susceptible to dollar spot than the seaside type of creeping bent. They are more immune to snow mold and brown patch than is seaside.

Some creeping bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*)