

A 50-Year Survey of the GREENKEEPER'S JOB

By W. E. LANGTON



Every once in a while GOLFDOM runs an article that registers with unexpectedly strong and wide force. Such a one was the piece in February GOLFDOM headed "Putting on a 'Front' for the Greenkeeper is a Big Job."

This editorial analysis of factors that have retarded competent greenkeepers' earnings so they haven't kept pace with general rise in salaries was further developed in the address of GOLFDOM'S editor at the Greenkeeping Superintendents' association convention. In that talk it was pointed out that the average age of GSA members is over 40 and the scarcity of young men being attracted to course maintenance as a profession is a serious and growing threat to golf's future.

The paradox in the situation is that no phase of golf club operation has advanced as greatly as greenkeeping has due to the self-education programs of the greenkeepers.

GOLFDOM, as the only independent and informed advisory service, is frequently called upon by club officials searching for men of fitting qualifications. GOLFDOM is in position to see

clearly that capable young men are not being kept in greenkeeping or attracted to it in numbers any way near great enough to meet the growing needs of the game and business.

Veteran club officials commented on the GOLFDOM article by saying, invariably, that club boards are not able to appraise qualifications and responsibilities of a greenkeeper and, since the greenkeepers have nothing at all resembling a scale of salaries, are disposed to take the man who works for the least amount. Cases were reported of greenkeepers who had been on the job for years and had done remarkable work in bringing courses through the war years in good condition, getting very little more than laborers on the courses.

Among the many letters from club officials and greenkeepers commenting on the article that put the spotlight on the greenkeepers' salary and status one especially stirs additional thought.

It is the letter from the veteran, nationally noted, superintendent of the San Gabriel (Calif.) CC, W. E. Langton, which is printed here.



The article in February GOLFDOM on the greenkeepers' status was of particular interest. Perhaps one who has nearly reached the half century mark at greenkeeping should be permitted to make a few observations.

Greenkeeping, like most other vocations, is peopled by all kinds and conditions of men. Some are fat, some lean, some hard working and some lazy, some efficient and some just plain dumb. There are some dirty ones and some very clean. There are college men and others with no education whatever. There are good talkers among them and others who have not a word to say for themselves. There are some greenkeepers who know very little but who can sell themselves and cash in abundantly, others there are who could not sell a \$10.00 bill for \$8.00.

If ever there were a heterogeneous bunch of men it would be in a group of greenkeepers. Yet there is an affinity and social cooperation between them that cannot be surpassed in other professions. The reason

is they are one and all subject to the same economic climatic and natural laws, and it matters not what part of the country they come from. So after all, they are all brothers in grief and are willing to help where they can. But there is so little one can do for the other fellow, that most greenkeepers have to stand alone with very little help from outside sources. What is good for one club often will not suit another.

There are so many factors that govern the destiny of a greenkeeper that only grim necessity has allowed him to survive at all. First and foremost all golf clubs are governed by an inexorable condition of making income at least equal to expenditure. Golf is a pleasure although some would like to call it a necessity. When economic conditions are bad, many people quit spending money on things they can do without, and golf is one of those things. Hence when depressions come, club officials look around and see where they can cut, and the man who stands alone is the most vulner-

able to these economic attacks. And when once a greenkeeper's salary has been reduced club officials can find so many excuses to keep it down. Generally it takes some unprecedented condition like a war or a business boom to place a greenkeeper in the same financial status as before.

During my 50 years as a greenkeeper I have been through 2 wars and 3 major depressions, so can speak with some truth and conviction. It is my belief that during all that time the greenkeeper's status has not been raised very much.

Greenkeeper Stands Alone

He is surrounded by wealth and by men in high positions in the professional and business world, which cannot help but give him an inferiority complex. It matters not how tolerant these men in high places are or how good they are, there is one fact that always stands out, that a greenkeeper is never regarded as an equal in social standing, and is generally looked upon as a glorified laborer, subject to the vagaries of those in authority over him. If they want to be mean there is nothing a greenkeeper can do about it.

He stands alone, mostly financially unable to talk back, for he is dependent on his job to live. In this vast country where doctors, lawyers, business men, technical men, artisans, clerks, railwaymen and others are all organized, the greenkeeper still goes it alone. He has an organization that gives him technical advice but no solid protection, and oftentimes some ambitious worker will sell him down the river and secure his job. If we could take a census of greenkeepers 20 years ago and see what has become of them today, the story would not only be astounding, it would be alarming. In my own locale out of a master greenkeeper personnel of nearly 40 a decade ago, only 8 are in the business today and these are old reliables who have borne the brunt of battle and are nearly ready for the social security benefits to give them relief in their old age.

Perhaps the greenkeeper has not done all he could to raise his own status, perhaps he drank too much or neglected his work, did not shave and keep himself clean. Perhaps he should have put on a clean shirt more often and cultivated those social niceties that pros and managers do so prettily. What would that avail him if he had bad greens and a ragged layout? Even Hagen had to have something on the ball besides dress. But Mr. Editor, I know what you mean; a man at least should be respectable (or able to stand inspection) but even this is no guarantee of holding his job.

The most deplorable insult a greenkeeper can suffer is, after years of satisfactory work, to be denied the opportunity of giving one's best effort in a major improve-

ment, of being pushed aside as of no consequence and allowing some so-called expert to come in and take all the glory in achievement. This has been done so frequently that all the ambition and glory has been taken away from a greenkeeper, and only dull routine is left for him to do. When opportunity is denied him to prove himself an artist, his status will never be raised for he is just a hireling of no importance.

How to raise the standard of a greenkeeper is one of those complex questions that can never be answered satisfactorily. It depends upon the man, the club, the opportunity, and dear old Lady Luck. The unfortunate part of the whole business is that there is no ladder to climb. Today we are a worker, tomorrow, by some unforeseen circumstance, a greenkeeper—the change is too swift. We are either a man or a mouse.

It does not matter what our associations think, it's what club officials think that counts. If we had an organization that had the strength to decide who should be who, then things might be different, but we have neither strength nor power. We are like a bird in a cage, we can move a certain distance and no further, and to think we are masters of our own destiny is one of those pious dreams that carries us on and on but gets us no place. The only power we have is the privilege of quitting if we don't like the job.

S. CAL. TURF RESEARCH PUSHED—

Meetings at the Los Angeles CC have brought together Southern Calif. GA Golf Club Supts. Assn., UCLA officials, PGA officials, SC Public Links Assn., park and cemetery officials, golf architects and supply men interested in establishing a turf research program at the University of California, Los Angeles. Greenkeepers in the LA district have been advocating location of a turf experimental station and research work at the UCLA for some years. They have maintained that such work would effect tremendous savings in contending with unique problems of turf development and maintenance in Southern California. Presence of Dr. Vern Stoutemeyer of UC LA faculty and availability of his successful experience with the Iowa State college turf research work caused Southern California greenkeepers to renew their drive for this work. C. C. Simpson, chmn., green committee, Southern California GA, and George Armstrong, pres., SGGGA, went to bat in bringing other organizations into the collaborating group. Now there are hopeful signs that turf research in Southern California soon will have the benefit of university tie-up that has proved highly profitable in other sections.