

Maintenance Changes from Art to Art and Science

By HANK MILLER

Supt., Briergate Golf Club, Deerfield, Ill.

Greenkeeping 25 years ago was an art. Now it's an art and a science. It required just as much work 25 years ago as it does now, despite the extensive use of power equipment today.

Although things have changed in the supervision of greenkeeping, there are more headaches. More specialists have had to be discovered and developed, more super-fine grasses have had to be produced to satisfy the demand of always something better wanted by the golfer who knows very little about what goes on in course maintenance and why the greens may not be up to his expectations. We have left a good many things behind—things that are old today, but which would be new to the present day golfer if cultivated and put back into the golf course for putting greens.

It was my experience that a fine new Zealand Chewings fescue putting green had about as fine a surface or surface texture to control the speed of the ball as it is being stroked for the cup as you could find. I have seen some excellent greens of this fescue and had charge of some greens at a club in the Chicago district that had some of these fine texture greens years ago, but, in golf, like everywhere else, we strive to get better things so the fescue greens went out for the bent greens which replaced them.

If you make one mistake as far as greens are concerned, you may have a setback as far as good greens are concerned for months, especially in mid-season. Generally today if you lose a bent green in July, it is out for the balance of the season, but the fescue green had its drawbacks too.

Watering Problem Changes

The fescue greens could stand the hot and humid weather better, and were not so apt to burn out. You never heard of tight spots such as you find in bent greens today. So what do you do? You now have to aerate a green to get the water down into the tight spots, but you are not bothered with angle worms, as you were with a fescue green, because the worms don't seem to get through tightly-woven bent greens. The worms took care of aeration of the fescue greens. Therefore the fescue green didn't get baked out or hard as some of our present day bent greens unless they're mechanically aerated.

The old style flat or square green, which most of the old courses had 25 or 30 years ago, were easy to sprinkle uniformly without flooding out the middle, and some greens had very little drain tile in them to carry off the excess water. As it was, the water went straight down into the green and could not run off and leave the high spots dry as is often the case today.

The undulating greens being built today in place of the old-style flat greens make watering more of a watchful job for the night man who sprinkles greens. He must be sure not to drown out the middle of the green in trying to get water on the outside elevations. Once a green has been drowned out in the middle you can expect trouble, and if it frequently gets drowned out, you can rest assured that your green, especially when it's hot the next day, will get diseased.

We have many kinds of grass diseases I believe are mainly caused by over-watering. If they are not treated with chemicals and the water kept off, you will find your bent green will just melt away.

Some of our architects went to extremes in years gone by as they neglected the maintenance job. Building a green and maintaining it were two different things.

You see greens with such abrupt contours, that they are hard to water and hard to mow without scalping them in places. An architect built a green and left it to the superintendent who had to take care of it as his job, even though it might be a difficult and expensive problem to keep fine turf on the green. Yet, from an architectural standpoint, this might be a beautiful green to look at.

A trend in construction has been to "hang the green up there" with traps that also hang. The green may look like a perfect picture on the horizon and provide an interesting shot but it is a constant job for the superintendent to maintain such a masterpiece from spring to fall, from daylight to dawn. Every day has a new problem for the superintendent and some days are tough ones too!

Experts can bang shots into these elevated contoured greens with confidence that they will surely stop, unless, of course, the green is hard. Compare that to the old flat green where the same golf

shot probably would not stop, nor would the backspin take hold, as fast as on the elevated green. Chances of getting close to the cup on the old greens were not so good, therefore, scores were higher than they are today, because today's elevated greens are built to hold shots. Putts are, therefore, shorter and you have a chance for a better score.

Architects Are Maintenance-Minded

One of the best breaks that the man who is responsible for course condition ever got was when architects began to give a lot of attention to the maintenance factors involved in course design and construction and, with course superintendents, studied how to get the most interesting course while minimizing troublesome and expensive details in maintenance.

If foresighted and cooperative architects hadn't seen the wisdom of this consideration of the superintendents' problem, there wouldn't have been much of a chance to attain today's general standard of condition at a cost within the reach of the majority of golf clubs.

One of the most important changes in golf course maintenance that can be observed today — contrasted with the situation 25 years ago — is in evidence in the remodelling jobs so many architects are doing. The maintenance factors are carefully studied by the architects. The player, of course, outranks the grass, but a judicious compromise between the players' wishes and what the course superintendent can provide without exceeding his budget is getting consideration from architects that it didn't get in the bygone days.

I have played on many bent greens but it is hard to find two courses that have the same greens even of the same strain. There's always something different about them.

Today we mow greens short, yes, very short, with power mowers. A quarter century ago they were not mowed that short. Hand-pushed putting green mowers, which were used in those days, always left enough texture on the greens to hold the ball on line. Today power mowers can cut greens so short that the ball can skid over the green, sometimes gaining momentum, without control of direction. That is just one of the changes over the past 25-30 years.

Old Hazards Were Brutal

I can remember the old bunkers. If you got in them you were lucky to get out with any club!

Bunkers today are called traps. You can use anything from a wood club in the fairway traps to a putter around many green traps.

The rough 25 to 30 years ago was mowed two or three times a year. Now

we mow it every week or two. How different from the rough of the old days! In those days rough was hay — dry, old grass. Today the rough is watered on some courses and kept green, along with the fairways. Mowing equipment wasn't built for speed 25 to 30 years ago but it had to be used carefully. The courses were not mowed very often, therefore, and the ball always set up well in a lie, more so than on today's fairways that are cut frequently, thanks to the present day speedy mowing equipment.

Course maintenance today has got to a point where the expensive demands of players are tremendous and unless the superintendent has an adequate budget he is working on just about a hopeless cause.

The golfer of today demands far more than the golfer of yester-year, and knows very little about grasses and the care of them. He may ask many questions and today's work in course maintenance is so complicated the questions are hard to answer.

I have been a greenkeeper — or superintendent as the job is called now — for 32 years (professional and greenkeeper for the past 22 years) and I find by playing the course myself I can see its condition at all times. That makes my maintenance work more successful inasmuch as I can watch the greens very close and keep the "touch" of the greens, in putting, to suit my golfers. I can also check on other important maintenance of the course in general, thus keeping the course in fine playing condition.

We had finely maintained courses 30 years ago, but they must be better today. Our job is tougher. That's a price we've got to pay for progress.

\$3000 Pro-Am Annual Fixture in Texas

Oak Hills CC, San Antonio, Tex., has put on a \$3000 pro-amateur 18 hole tournament each year, for the past three. The event immediately precedes the Texas Open. Sixty members pay entry fees of \$50 each, drawing pairings out of a hat. The affair has been a life-saver for pros who are running short of cash on the winter circuit. Pros split \$2500 in cash, with first winning \$650. Amateurs get \$500 in merchandise prizes.

Warren Smith, Oak Hills pro, thought up the tournament and W. "Red" Steger, club mgr., handles promotion and operating details. The tournament draws a big gallery of members and guests. This year supt. Frank Machok had the course in best winter condition of its history for the pro-am.