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# Green Chairman and Supt. Teamed to Serve Club

By J. PORTER HENRY

Green Chairman, Algonquin Golf Club, Webster Groves, Mo.  
(At Midwest Turf Conference.)

In my 15 years as green chairman of Algonquin GC I am sure that I have learned one thing, and that is, there is no royal road to a wholly satisfied locker room; or to paraphrase Mr. Lincoln, while you can please some of the members some of the time you can not please all the members all the time. Some like fast greens, some like them slow. Some want heavy fough, some want none. But they all want good turf. That's where the rub comes in.

During this incumbency I have been impressed with the variety and difficulty of the problems confronting the superintendent. They are legion. In spite of his efforts it seems to me that our progress comes in great measure through trial and error. What we learn is somewhat of a negative character. To a large extent we learn what not to do. If we try one thing, we wonder if we should not have tried another. We are constrained to draw the conclusion similar to that of the bachelor who married late in life, and thus gained familiarity with both single monotony and matrimonial annoyances, and in a contemplative moment concluded, whether you marry or not you'll regret it.

## Handicap of Time Element

The great difficulty with grass culture is that all experiments are handicapped by the time element. Unlike the chemical laboratory where an experiment may involve a day or a week or a month, yours is a year to year affair. The seasons make it so. If, for instance, you try one strain of grass this year, you must wait until the next for even a partial answer, and then you may find yourself completely fooled a year or two later. The time element is discouraging and demands the utmost patience. I have recalled many times the craftsman's lament, "The life's so short, the craft so long to learn."

This difficulty and uncertainty makes skeptics out of us. We just spent about

\$4000 at Algonquin reseeding the whole course last fall, preceded by burning the fairways, with magnificent results so far. But being a little skeptical I said to the superintendent, "suppose all this new grass disappears this summer and leaves the same old crabgrass, goose grass, knotweed, etc., and the members come to us with the inquiry, 'What are you going to do now, what's the answer?'" It came very quickly — "Take to the woods."

In a strenuous effort to do something about fairways my predecessor tried an experiment with yarrow. During the first two hot dry summers the experiment seemed entirely justified. We enjoyed lush green fairways for these two summers. However, the third summer was a hot one and out went the yarrow. A few small patches survived and when Miss Joyce Weathered, the English woman champion, was playing an exhibition match at Algonquin and noticed the yarrow she said to her partner, "I see you are also troubled with yarrow over here."

## Chairman A Happy (?) Medium

While the superintendent's job is precarious and often discouraging, let no one contend that the path of the Green chairman is strewn with roses. If a footprint in the sand trap costs a player a stroke he rarely fails to tell the Green chairman about it. If the topdressing on the green is a little heavy, especially when he is playing with a guest, or the cut of the green is too short or too long to suit his style, or if a long and continuous rain in hot weather seems to justify the closing of the course, if he loses his ball in the leaves, or the too high rough, or if he thinks he has acquired some knowledge about grass, based on the fact that he mows his own lawn, or has thrown away a few pounds of seed each spring, and complains when he sees the men showering the green in the sunshine, the Green chairman always hears about it.

A Green chairman can be an asset to a club or a liability. If he thinks he knows too much about grass culture and maintenance, based upon a mere superficial acquaintance with the subject, and insists upon putting his own ideas to work against the advice of his superintendent, the Lord pity the golf course and the superintendent.

If on the other hand he knows nothing about the subject, and is therefore unable to appreciate the problems of the superintendent, he is worthless as a liaison officer between the superintendent and the locker-room.

Likewise, if the Green chairman hasn't the courage to risk the displeasure of the



Education and advance publicity are used by this team to give service to members of the Algonquin GC, Webster Groves, Mo. (L to R) Oscar Bowman, Supt. and Green Chmn. J. Porter Henry. members when the situation requires, he is failing in an important aspect of his job. Many times a temporary inconvenience to members is repaid a hundred fold in the long run. Such temporary situations invariably arouse the ire of a few members, but that ire must never be permitted to interfere with the program. Nor must it be assumed that the vociferous few represent the majority of the members.

A Green chairman is smart if he keeps his Board and, to a large extent, the members informed in advance as to the moves of the superintendent and the reasons therefore. This often forestalls criticism. In order to give adequate explanations the Green chairman should acquire a sufficient knowledge of the problems to be able to answer the many questions that may be asked of him. The Green chairman should be a reasonably good publicity agent. Here are two cases in point. When I became Green chairman our greens would thin out in the summer-time and often leave patches of dead grass. Our superintendent was of the old school, who had plied his trade for 20 years, who shied away from the agronomists, the agriculture departments and col-

lege professors, who, he allowed, had never been a greenkeeper and therefore were theorists and couldn't advise a practical man.

In my dilemma I sought the advice of the Green Section of the USGA, and I began making a little study of my own about soils and drainage and fertilizers and watering. I studied many of the pamphlets of the Green Section. I went to greenkeeper conventions. I had long talks with men like O. J. Noer and John Monteith. Unfortunately, Fred Grau wasn't available at the time. I began to see some of the mistakes of our superintendent. I urged him to cooperate more fully with the Green Section, to attend conventions, etc., but in spite of my efforts his attitude continued and so did our troubles.

His attitude reflected in some measure the then attitude of many of the superintendents in our district. There was little, if any, cooperation among them. Most of them, and the least informed, did not want to have an association because they did not want to disclose their deep secrets—secrets that had kept the St. Louis District near the bottom of the ladder.

#### Explaining the Trouble

Finally I went to the USGA for recommendations for a new greenkeeper and I got one. After going over with him what appeared to be some of the problems, his immediate discovery was heavily compacted soil. Heroic treatment was in order, not merely with tining forks, but with a more disfiguring instrument. It was concluded that large holes had to be applied.

Because this treatment would shock the members and interfere with putting, I held a meeting with the Board and showed them the problem and the remedy.

For this meeting the superintendent made blocks of a proper soil consistency, also blocks of soil in the greens. We showed the breaking point of our regular soil to be at about 35 lbs., whereas, the breaking point of proper soil structure was about 12 lbs. We showed how gravitational drainage was impossible in the old greens.

#### How to Be a S.O.B.

Our experiments were made available to many of our members. Consequently, when work began on our greens the members realized that inconvenience to them was necessary and justified. They were perfectly willing to be inconvenienced on the prospect of better greens. It warded off a great deal of criticism. Thus, the chairman served as a publicity agent and liaison officer between the superintendent and the locker-room.

A contrary experience occurred a few years previously where I fell down on

publicity. Our fairways had become infested with everything but cultivated grasses. We had crabgrass and goose grass in abundance, and there was considerable dissatisfaction. I solicited the help of John Monteith, who was then Director of the Green Section. We decided to burn and reseed about six of our fairways. I did coax the reluctant approval of the Board, but no information was given to the members. The Board was afraid. After the burning process was completed and there was little turf left, the fireworks began. The Green chairman was properly held responsible for the desecration. I learned that I was every S.O.B. in the calendar. It happened that my term of office on the Board was expiring a month or so later, and it was perfectly apparent that the membership was going to take special delight in relieving me of any connection with the Board or the Green department.

After seeding, our watering system was put to work effectively, aided by a few fall rains, and a good germination followed. Three or four weeks later these six fairways were beautiful. The contrast with the other fairways was particularly noticeable. Gradually the number of S.O.B.'s with which I was greeted began to diminish. Some began to wonder why we had not operated on all the fairways.

By Election Day, which was a beautiful Saturday, the six fairways were the major topic of conversation. All my remaining S.O.B.'s disappeared and suddenly I became a hero. After the voting was tabulated I received 207 of 215 votes cast, the largest ever received by a member of the Board. The point I wish to make is that I could have saved the preliminary scolding had I given the work a thorough piece of publicity and advised the members of the temporary inconvenience and the probable ultimate results.

#### **Grass Educational Dinner**

We adopted another expedient of procuring a sympathetic attitude on the part of the membership by acquainting them to some extent with grass problems. With the aid of the Entertainment committee we had a dinner meeting devoted to grass. Many of our members live in private homes and are interested in their lawns. We felt that they could profit by our experience.

The program started by the Green chairman giving a rather detailed explanation of the grass plant dealing with the function of the root, the functions of the leaves, with soil conditions, with fertilizers, which showed them why a short cut was injurious and why a long cut could be adopted without difficulty in their lawns.

I took up the question of weed control and explained some of our practices in

this respect. I took advantage of the occasion to give the reasons for closing the course. Then I drew the meeting open to a question period at which time, let me hasten to add, I very discreetly turned the meeting over to the superintendent. They spent nearly an hour on questions. Interestingly enough the first question was "How can I get rid of clover without injury to my grass?" Oscar looked at me as if to say you answer it. I looked at him and remarked, "This is your part of the program."

Another dilemma existing in most clubs, which the Green chairman can resolve, is the pressure exerted by the low handicapped players to lengthen the hole or tighten the green to make the course more difficult, and the opposite pressure exerted by the 100 shooters to keep the course as it is or make it easier. This problem has been solved. We have satisfied the 100 shooter by eliminating all dub traps, traps in front of tees, for example, which penalize only the dub. We have satisfied the low handicap player by adding traps at the green, which challenge his bold shot.

On the par 4, for instance, the scratch player attempts to reach the green on his second shot. A well-placed trap at the green will catch a good shot lacking in accuracy and will offer little difficulty for the third or fourth shot. We have eliminated about 30 traps which interfere only with the poor player. We feel that his dubbed shot is its own penalty, and that there is no sound reason to add to a high score. After all, for the business man past middle age, who supports the club, golf is a game not an ordeal, and there would seem to be no reason to keep him climbing out of bunkers all afternoon and land in the clubhouse with a dozen triple bogeys and one foot in the grave.

On the other hand we have added about a dozen traps which challenge the low handicap players. Thus our course has been made harder for that player and relatively easier for the 100-shooter. Besides we have thus reduced the cost of maintenance which is destined to become the biggest hazard in club survival.

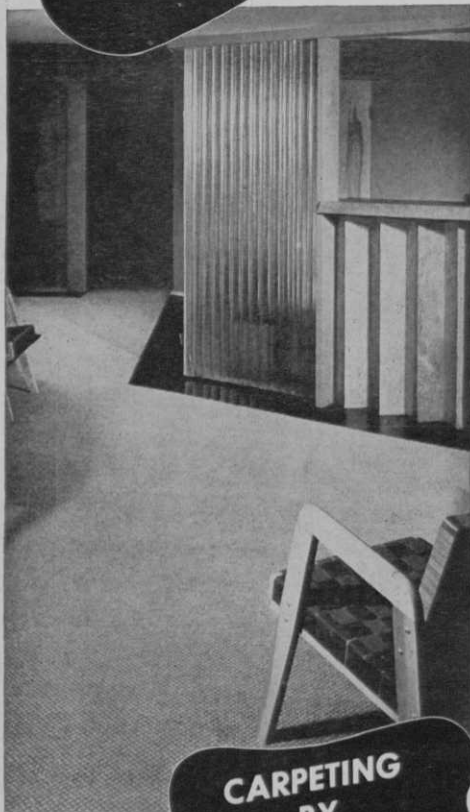
#### **Closed Course Problem**

A prolific source of annoyance to the locker room as well as the Chairman is the question of closing the course when weather conditions demand. In the winter every club has a few mudhens who would play if they had to wear rubber boots. Deep heel prints in the greens or heavy foot prints on the fairways means nothing to them at least for that day.

In our district when the long hard rains saturate the greens in hot weather, and when the hot sun may appear at any time, and when saturation prevents capill-

*(Continued on page 78)*

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counts. Late fall and early spring suits both the superintendent and the plants, and with the exception of azaleas, bugs are not a problem. When grouped heavily azaleas can be sprayed in a short time, and two sprayings each summer is all that is required.

Just why privet should be always selected to hide the garbage cans has always puzzled me when there are a dozen flowering shrubs that would do a better job with less care. Where you have a fence exposed to the fairway tie a piece of chicken wire on it and let the honeysuckle climb. When this is sheared as you would a hedge, you have one of the prettiest pictures on the course, as treated in this way it will flower right through the summer on the hard wood.

Crepe Myrtle in all the colors from white to red cannot be overplanted. In July and August when the greens are beginning to look a little sad, a good planting of this southern shrub, preferably facing east or south, will send the average golfer back to the clubhouse talking about the beautiful color at No. 6 instead of the first thought that came into his head when he saw the green.

Superintendents, to my mind, should be no less psychological than the game they sponsor. — *Hugh McRae at Mid-Atlantic Assn. of Golf Course Supts. meeting.*

## GREEN CHMN. & SUPT.

(Continued from page 35)

lary action and the heat causes some wilt, we have found that a great deal of damage results from play. When these circumstances arise we close the course.

After consulting with the superintendent I personally assume the responsibility of the actual closing. Those who have planned their games for the day start their fussing, although I have found that the vast majority are always behind the Green chairman in his decisions. And even the objectors, although indulging in some Durocher lippiness, have come to realize that their objections fall on deaf but ever-patient and friendly ears.

We find the same objections with reference to the cut of both the fairways and greens. We have had a hard time getting the high handicap players accustomed to slick greens. We cut them about 3/16ths of an inch in the spring, while in midsummer we go to 4/16ths. We have always developed a good thick turf and have to a great extent avoided attacks of algae in spite of the low cut. Here is another place where I endeavor to take the responsibility off of the superintendent. I find that it pays to let the membership know that the Green chairman is the one responsible for these various practices so

that the superintendent is not subjected to 300 bosses and is not interfered with by the membership. The result has not been perfect. The superintendent still comes in for some ribbing, but I am sure the policy has tended to reduce it.

### Long-run Responsibility

A conscientious chairman must be mindful of the fact that he and the superintendent must exert every effort to provide the best possible course for the pleasure and pride of the membership. But he has learned from experience that most members are somewhat myopic. He is interested primarily only in the immediate. He finds it difficult to understand, for example, why we should spoil a beautiful green and his game in the early spring by brushing and topdressing. Naturally he knows nothing of the consequence of matting and therefore it means nothing to him. He is thinking in terms of today's play and not the tomorrows.

The Green chairman therefore must support the superintendent in his programs when known to be beneficial even though they risk the displeasure of members. Like the surgeon who may amputate a leg to save the patient, the Green chairman and superintendent must be willing, however reluctantly, to displease and be criticized and spoil a few days play rather than multiply the bad days of the future.

For the superintendent and chairman to do a good job therefore and succeed in giving the most pleasure to the members they must not be appeasers in order to postpone criticism. They must not be thin-skinned and permit the jibes and taunts of a few or even many of the members to get under their skins and tempt them to entertain the idea of throwing in the towel.

Acting from a genuine motive—to do everything to build better turf for the members' enjoyment—the superintendent and Green chairman must pursue their efforts willing rather to be replaced than to let possible criticism induce them to avoid a necessary, if annoying, practice.

It must not be inferred from the above observation that constructive criticism and suggestions should not be welcomed. Indeed they should be invited. In our interest and absorption in our work we often neglect many details of grooming the course, or some detail or convenience, when a suggestion or criticism of a member may be a welcome reminder. I have profited by many constructive suggestions over the years.

The Midwest Turf Foundation is providing valuable assistance to the Course Supts.' Assn. in St. Louis, organized about eight years ago, which has resulted in greatly increased efficiency in course maintenance, and a marked reduction in the complaints from the locker room.

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