

Cutting Maintenance Budget Often Unwise Economy

By CHARLES PARKER

Short sighted policies for cutting golf course maintenance costs appear to be cropping up once again, especially in sections of the country where winter weather curtails the active use of the course.

In some instances the ways and means being proposed follow in a measure the attempts to reduce maintenance costs during the lean days of the depression. Apparently a "new generation" of club officials and greens committees has come into being.

The pattern followed in such cases is generally directed toward cutting the cost of maintenance and it is unfortunate there are no authentic records from the past available for examination and study. Too often, money, man-power and turf have time and again been wasted because a policy of cutting the maintenance budget has been put into effect without first consulting records from the past to learn the end results of such a policy.

At the top of the list in the economy move, where golf playing has a more or less quiet period of three or four months, are the golf course requirements and the maintenance force. The superficial reasoning for this is that since no golf is being played there cannot be any justifiable reason for keeping any of the maintenance force on the pay roll during the dormant season.

Before taking this ill-advised step the "new generation" should acquaint itself with what the golf course superintendent and any other maintenance force personnel who are employed the year around actually do during the winter months.

Every golfing section throughout the country has representative golf course superintendents who are so recognized and who can submit planned programs and schedules of necessary and effective work in answer to the question, "What do you do in the Winter?"

Consult with Own Supt.

Obviously the first superintendent to sit down with, and get the answers from, is the man at the club in question. But often the newly elected or appointed club official consults with everyone but the man on the job. Rarely is his initial approach to the new job through the superintendent of his own club. Because the new official has not first familiarized himself with the problems of his own club and at least got-

ten the intimate picture from his superintendent, the confusing and contradictory opinions that he will collect from the less experienced tend to support his position, and since he knows that he will not be criticized for any action that he may propose for saving money he will announce that his first official act will be to cut the budget.

Since there is a definite quiet period of golfing activity it follows that a reduction in personnel can be made and the budget cut is made in the maintenance force without further consideration.

Off Season Work Varied

To draw up a check list of what is being done and what can be done by the golf course superintendent and his maintenance crew during the "dormant" period might be the answer but it will still be incomplete because each club has its own particular problems and possibilities. The off season job being done by superintendents with a few key men employed on a full time basis covers an amazing field of trades and skills. The complete repair and reconditioning of all maintenance equipment and golf course accessories, painting, both interior and exterior; plumbing if local building laws permit; floor refinishing, carpentry; etc., etc. All such work can be and is being done under the supervision of the golf course superintendent at definite and proven savings to the clubs.

The "new generation's" first approach is based on the assumption that when the last round of golf is played at seasons end then golf turf automatically goes into a state of suspended animation and consequently can be forgotten until definite signs of winter's departure excites the urge to "get out and hit a few."

Impossible to Anticipate Winter Injury

Because no two winters are alike, it is not possible to anticipate if mid or late winter conditions will require follow-up protection against snow mold. Unusual snow conditions or periods of freezing and thawing can have a detrimental effect on turf that will show up the following spring. An open winter with severe winds in late March and early April will result in drying out of turf with much more serious results than the most severe mid-summer drouth. These are common conditions in sections of the country

where golf courses are considered to be dormant because there is no play. Certainly these conditions cannot be anticipated in November or December.

It will be a most unusual winter that will not have numerous days when outside conditions are favorable for accomplishing many odd jobs. What these jobs may be is beside the point but where is there a club that hasn't any number of such jobs that never do get cleaned up during the active season or else are finally accomplished by putting on extra labor or by calling in an outside agency. Always an expensive solution.

Justify Year-round Employment

For a study to show there is enough productive work to justify the employment of a golf course superintendent and as many key maintenance men as is possible for a twelve month year the "new generation" needs do three things.

(1) Sit down with the superintendent and learn in full detail what is being done and what he feels should be done.

(2) Delegate one member of the greens committee to make a fine tooth inspection, with the superintendent, of the golf course and other club property and develop a schedule of clean up and improvement for off season work.

(3) Find out from the superintendent any special skills or trades that may be available through unsuspected abilities in the labor force and work up a program for using these skills for the overall benefit of the club.

Under the first suggestion comes repair and reconditioning of all maintenance equipment and golf course accessories. This is a must for any soundly operated maintenance department and will show definite savings, increased productive life and trouble-free operation for all equipment. The other two suggestions will return a savings in money and equally important will produce the feeling among the members that their club has the best overall maintenance of any club in the section.

Personal Interest in Job

No man will, nor can he be expected to, return intense personal interest in the job that in turn is not interested enough in him to give him full time employment. The eight or ten months greenkeeper is not going to be much concerned about what may happen to the turf when he is working at some other job. The last few weeks of his seasonal employment will find him more interested in finding some other job to tide him over the winter than insuring that the golf course is being put to bed for the winter to the best of his ability. How the turf will come out the following Spring will not rest too heavily on his mind for he cannot be held accountable for any winter

damage whether it has been caused by unkind nature or by trespassers.

Loss of productive time because of unfamiliarity with the layout adds to the cost. It is a discouraging experience to have an inexperienced and disinterested tractor operator misjudge the swing of a gang fairway mower and demolish the wing unit against a tree or lose his nerve on a steep slope and jump off leaving the tractor and mowers to wind up in a tangled broken heap. Unfortunately this is not unusual where the maintenance policy is set up on a limited season employment for everyone from the superintendent down.

While it may appear that a real savings has been accomplished by revising the budget so that none of the maintenance force from the superintendent down is given twelve month employment, an objective study and analysis will demonstrate that this is a definite fallacy.

Here is an actual example. Through an unfortunate set of circumstances it was possible to make a mutually satisfactory agreement for a new superintendent to be employed only for eight months of the year. The club had three or four men who were employed the year around because of other off season activities and these men formed the nucleus of the golf course maintenance crew. The superintendent was charged with correcting a long standing turf problem and it was felt both by the club and the superintendent that the four "old timers" could and would carry out routine assignments without much supervision. The first season's results were not remarkable in any respect. Unexplained hitches in maintenance routine developed and turf losses still were a problem.

The second year which should have been at least as good as the first wound up with an increase in overall turf troubles and as a topper 1200 square feet of turf in one green had to be replaced, and this during the active season. The whys and wherefores in turf disappointment and general maintenance deterioration are of no moment, but this point is. The club saved \$1400 in salary by employing an eight months superintendent and for this savings showed an overall deterioration in maintenance plus an actual turf loss of one unit alone that, if honestly figured, cost the club all or more of the salary savings.

Golf course superintendents do not punch a time clock nor do they adhere to whatever may be the standard hours per day or days per week prevailing. If the superintendent has paper work, and few if any do not, this will be accomplished by burning the mid-night oil. The actual hours put in on the job during the

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ting the organization in good financial condition.

The Educational committee program put on by Chmn. George Lake was excellent although it came at the finale of the convention when many delegates had left for home. The program was tightly crowded with profitable features. There was some discussion about extending the Educational committee's part of the show at the 1953 convention as the tight schedule hasn't permitted deserved balance in the PGA's annual meeting.

The Educational program is covered elsewhere in this issue of GOLFDOM.

Plein Elected Mississippi Valley Supts. Chief

Mississippi Valley Golf Supts. Assn. has elected its officers for 1953 as follows:

Pres.—Clarence Plein, Lakeside Golf Course, 1139 Hilltop Drive, Olivette 14, Mo.

VP.—A. C. Longheinrich, Sunset CC, R.F.D. No. 14, Box 2490, Afton 23, Mo.

Secy.-Treas.—Robert V. Mitchell, RFD No. 1, Alton, Ill. Box 65.

Executive Board—Joseph F. Lammert, August Schnatzmeyer, and Elmer Wagner.

MAINTENANCE BUDGET

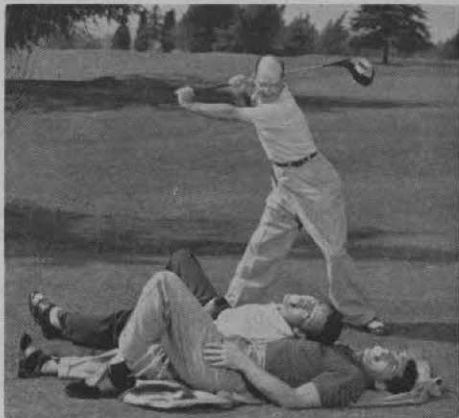
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active season by any superintendent when balanced against the standard for hours per day or days per week prevailing would show a credit for overtime which, if compared with the off season time the superintendent is supposedly utilizing by doing nothing, would bring to light a picture a little surprising to most people.

The following point is probably the least understood or appreciated of the many values attached to or that accrue to a golf course superintendent who is employed for twelve months of the year and whose term of employment is, and is expected to be, uninterrupted through the years. Experience will bring to such a superintendent a broad knowledge of the innumerable factors affecting the happy operation of his club that no other man anywhere can hope to equal. His knowledge and ability as applied to the course cannot be equalled by anyone. Aside from turf maintenance he will know so much more than anyone else about the external property of the club that it will be most unwise for the club to plan any major changes of relocation or construction without first finding out from the superintendent such vital information as the location of water lines, sewerage disposal systems, underground electrical installa-

tions or soil conditions as well as drainage or accessibility of marginal pieces of club property. The full and complete information that accrues to a superintendent after a few years experience is amazing. All of it valuable to the club and some of it can save a club much money.

HAZARDS IN "INSANE OPEN"



In preliminary antics of Paramount's forthcoming Martin and Lewis picture tentatively titled "The Caddie" Harry Cooper tries one of Paul Hahn's trick shots with Hahn and Dean Martin as victims.

Court OKs Munny Course Racial Segregation

Special Federal Judge Robert N. Wilkin at Nashville, Tenn., recently denied a motion for summary judgment seeking to force Nashville to permit Negroes to use municipal golf courses. He also held that the city must provide equal and adequate facilities for those Negroes who wish to play golf.

Nashville city council has authorized sale of \$40,000 in city bonds to finance construction of a golf course and recreation center for Negroes.

Judge Wilkin said, "This court concludes that segregation itself (where legal rights are unaffected) is not unconstitutional or unlawful; that it is a natural tendency which in the progress of man's political, social and spiritual evolution may change or disappear; but that it would be inexpedient and unwise to attempt to prevent or prohibit it (or enforce unrestricted association) by judicial decree."

The judge is a native of New Philadelphia, O. and served on the federal bench for the northern district of Ohio in Cleveland before retiring in 1949.