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N.E. Supts. Tell Officials Labor Problems Critical

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THE 1953 annual University of Massachusetts Fine Turf Conference differed from the usual turf conference in that it was a real conference in which there were no lectures. The entire time was taken by the superintendents discussing by themselves without academic supervision or influence three important questions.

At many golf courses the basic cultural reserves have been drawn upon heavily during the past several years. Player demands, poor quality of labor, scarcity of labor and "low budgets" have been charged as being the cause. Some superintendents have lost their positions and others have been called on the carpet. Something must be done to reduce the casualties to both courses and superintendents.

This report summarizes the opinions of the conferees.

Golf course maintenance is no longer simply mowing and fertilizing the grass.

It is a profession in that it deals with the health and development of living organisms and must recognize the natural laws of plant life and the soil factors involved.

It is a business in that costs, both money and cultural, must be evaluated, labor skill and hours economically used; a product, enjoyable playing conditions sold; reserves accumulated and protected; and the "manufacturing plant," the golf course, kept in repair as in profitable business. Unfortunately in golf the

product, pleasurable golf, has no definite "take home pay" or "cash dividends" to remind the golfer of these facts.

The conference was not a gripe session, but an unselfish, serious, and detailed study of the emergency situation.

Only three subjects were discussed:
1. The Golf Course Labor Situation.
2. Present Player Demands vs. Golf Course Cultural and Maintenance Practices.
3. The Greenkeeper, the Golf Club and The Profession.

Ample time was allowed for discussion and the conferees kept very close to the subject, rarely mentioning grasses, fungicides, etc.

Discussion groups consisted of:
Superintendents of large courses.

Superintendents of small or summer courses.

Owners of golf courses.

Superintendents of Municipal Courses.

Course Labor Situation

Shortage of course labor is acute and because of its accumulated and immediate effect on maintenance alone, omitting course improvements, an emergency exists. Club officials have not realized the insidious creeping up of the fact. The shortage is felt as less actual manpower, and fewer efficient labor hours available, due to interruptions, slowdowns, and diversions that steal time from necessary maintenance.

The opinion was unanimous that the increase (30% to 40% or more) in the

number of players of both sexes, together with the wider spread of playing hours during the day necessitates an increase in work slowdown and actual stoppage.

Women now start to play at 9 a.m. or earlier and to avoid player annoyance work must cease while players pass. The policy of inviting convention groups to hold tournaments also increases play. Traffic may even as much as double the labor hours required for a routine operation.

New construction and course alterations also add to the required routine labor hours rather than reduce them. During a season many hours of productive time are lost.

The present generally recognized poor quality of labor is not confined to golf courses, but because of the type of work and the small number of workmen involved, it is by comparison much more costly than in industry.

The superintendent now has little or no chance to choose his labor, so except for the year-round man the laborer cannot be depended upon, is careless, slow and indifferent requiring "from two to as many as four men to do the work of one man before World War II."

There are plenty of very good men now working in factories who would be glad to work out-of-doors on a golf course, but cannot afford to because of the seasonal work, comparatively low wages, lack of security, and the number of week hours.

Permanent Force Advantages

Failure to offer year-round work is as much to blame for the present labor condition as the low wages.

The advantages of having a well-trained permanent working force were expressed in detail and, if explained to the club officials, should prove that the idea is sensible for good cultural conditions and as sound business.

There is much work that can be done on the golf courses and repairs made on the clubhouse in the winter to permit an earlier opening date for both at a saving of labor hours during the playing season. Demand for year-round golfing and earlier opening of closed courses costs labor hours which, unless especially supplied, are stolen from the summer maintenance budget.

For an 18-hole course a superintendent and four to six permanent men (if the clubhouse is closed in winter, three to

five) can reduce the number of summer employees and start maintenance work when advantageous without delay for spring clean-up work and timely maintenance.

An increase in wages without an equalizing increase in the budget will actually reduce the available labor hours and the possible improvement in morale will not noticeably increase efficiency. The cost to cultural conditions and in added labor hour consumption to train new men is large. Therefore, if possible, the summer or seasonal men should be assured regular winter employment elsewhere to eliminate annually training new men.

Labor unions have already become established in certain districts and are endeavoring to add a considerable number of golf course employees to their roster. The union closed-shop subject was discussed in detail and was considered as undesirable and to be avoided if possible. "Unionization of labor will hurt the smaller clubs more than the larger ones and may cause some of them to fold up."

If golf clubs can offer a reasonable increase in wages, reasonable security for full-year employment, and usual social security benefits, there would be ample labor of excellent quality available and improved skill, interest, and loyalty of the men and improved playing conditions would be assured with fewer labor hours than are now required and the unionization risk would be eliminated.



THORNTON

"The grounds committee pays me regular caddie rates to follow him around."



Albert A. Tenner photo

THE BOYS WELCOME "THE HAIG" AT SIWANoy

Left to right — Kenneth Telfer, Pres., Siwanoy CC (NY Met. dist.); Walter Hagen, Bud Geohagen, pro, Crestmont CC, West Orange, N.J.; and Tom Kerrigan, Siwanoy's pro for 30 years, at Steve Hughes Day at Siwanoy.

Hughes, former Siwanoy president, died suddenly two weeks before formal opening of the course remodeled by Robert Trent Jones. Steve was there though, in merry spirit and loving memory.

Foursomes of pro, TV, golf writer and member composition put on a hot event with the Tommy Armour, Dave Garroway, Dave Eisenberg and W. R. Cook team winning with a net bestball of 61. Craig Wood's 74 was the best gross of the day. Gene Sarazen had 76 and Johnny Farrell, 79.

Geohagen mc'd the affair with his customary high talent. Jack Redmond put on his amusing trick shot routine.

There was a gallery of more than 2,000.

Kerrigan arranged the golfing program which, with the dinner entertainment, provided one of the liveliest schedules any club could present.

The present 44-hour week should be continued as a basis for normal pay but labor problems should be handled by the superintendent and the club without union interference.

Beyond a certain point additional equipment does not save labor. It may improve playing conditions, but its incorrect use often accumulates a cultural cost that requires a major operation to correct. Quoting again, "Equipment is no better than the man who operates it" . . . "A green man will do more damage to the piece of equipment and to the golf course than a saving on his wages can pay for" . . . "Equipment may break down more than man power and when it does break down man hours are also lost."

Favorable sources for summer laborers varied from high school boys, college students (athletes in particular), older men, teachers, to bus drivers from the 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. shift for late afternoon or night watering. Young men operate machinery faster than older men, but break it oftener and are more careless because of the monotony.

Typical of group discussions: A budget

should be set at the beginning of the year and adhered to because mid-season cuts waste many hours. Long-term maintenance plans should continue even though the Greens chairmen change frequently. Good business principles should underly all transactions including one man in complete charge, winter employment arrangements, proper insurance coverage, etc.

Player Demands vs. Cultural Practices

Players are buyers of the manufactured product, pleasurable golf. Their exacting specifications must be met if possible. However they may be getting their golfing at a price far below the cost of production. No business can be successful if continually being operated at a loss.

It is the low-scoring players who set the player demands and they want "things not thought of five years ago" and "complain the most," but "There are many club members who will be satisfied with less exacting conditions."

In trying to meet these demands the standard of course maintenance has been raised, without a realization of the cost to reserve cultural conditions, economical

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hospitality some unreasonable customer may give you trouble. Working for the public is tough, but it is only that 1 per cent that makes it so. So, do the best you can bearing in mind that, there is that 1 per cent that you never will be able to please. If you please the rest you are doing a fine job and a fine service for golf and building yourself a profitable business.

ARCHITECT, GLASSMAN TEAM

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Upon entering or leaving the shop, one has to pass the "Point of Sale" — where buyer, product and seller meet. Here is where I have placed a glass show case with "impulse" items such as balls, gloves, caps, socks and sportswear.

An old closet door in the shop became a most important item for the ladies — when we covered it with a 34 in. x 68 in. full length polished plate glass mirror. They love it and admit it — the men golfers love it too, but won't admit it.

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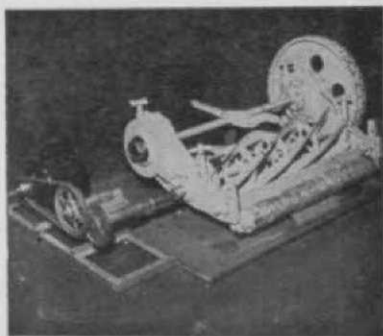
N. E. SUPTS. TELL OFFICIALS

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labor hours, and dollar distribution. Superintendents have absorbed some of the cost by their own efforts and professional improvement. A 14-hour workday is not uncommon among superintendents.

These costs, unrecognized by the player and not met by club officials, accumulate to the limits of tolerance of the grass

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plant and course monetary budget.

As an example, many clubs are spending large sums of money and exhausting players' patience, rebuilding or renovating fairways because of the player demand for extremely low cut fairways.

Without itemizing the factors of cost as discussed at the meeting the following is a list of high cost player demands given serious consideration. (1) Year round golf. (2) Rivalry between clubs, especially spring opening day. (3) High stake gambling on scores. (4) Demand of fairway watering system. (5) Broader and low cut rough areas. (6) Better trap conditions. (7) Course open for play regardless of weather conditions and injury to greens. (8) Twelve month play on regular greens. (9) Changes in construction and design. (10) Less player inconvenience by workmen.

In the past five years players have so added to their demands for exacting specific turf and playing conditions that superintendents can meet the demands only if given increased budgets, but the clubs cannot afford to continue the loss on investment.

Nine-hole courses are in particular danger if they try to "keep up with the 18-holers" for, on "9-hole courses the greens receive twice as much play as on an 18-hole course if a player plays 18-holes." Golf courses have a limit to their cultural capacity as well as their player capacity.

Supt's. Business Status

The real problem discussed was the superintendent's position with relation to the golf club and the profession. Superintendents realize that they are employees of the clubs, but feel that the importance of their work and knowledge should be recognized. They take pride in their work and study for professional improvement.

It is unfortunate that some members think that working clothes should not be worn by a professional man or menial work ever be performed by one.

Some club members are narrow-minded and do not recognize the superintendent as an expert in his field. This is indicated by the fact that clubs asking for a superintendent specify "A working green-keeper." All superintendents work hard and long hours, but are usually modest and do not beat their own drums loud enough or often enough.

The course superintendent's position is similar to that of a superintendent in charge of production or plant superinten-

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dent in manufacturing. Neither the size of the golf course nor the swankiness of the club alters the similarity.

The position should be filled above the actual production level—more than simply growing grass and doing routine work; the know-how and business side of the work are equally as important. It was recognized that in some cases the "low consideration given the superintendent is his own fault" as failure to improve his professional ability will lose the confidence of club members, officials, and critical players. The main objective of every superintendent should be the ultimate benefit to the club as a whole. Ability to play a "passable" game of golf would also enhance appreciation.

Very often Greens chairmen who are unwisely selected avoid responsibilities or are "too busy" to talk over problems with the superintendent thus leaving him and the golf course without adequate representation at gripe sessions, obviously to the detriment of the club as a whole and especially the golf course.

Player griping to workmen is inexcus-

able and definitely adds to the maintenance costs. A club rule requiring all complaints and suggestions concerning the golf course be channelled through the Greens chairman is desirable.

Periodic meetings with the club manager, the golf professional, the Greens chairman, the superintendent and such club directors as are affected should be held regularly and should include the superintendent's report as to plant condition and manufacturing costs. All facets of each problem would then be officially understood and decisions would be made with the full cooperation of all concerned and thus be in the best interests of the club as a whole.

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