

What Club Officials Don't Know About Course Labor

By **FRANK W. TULL**

Supt., Hercules Country Club, Wilmington, Dela.

Outweighing all other problems of golf course management today is the inability to attract and hold good men on the maintenance staff. This difficulty may be overcome to some extent by providing year-around employment for a substantial part of the normal operating force and providing benefits such as paid vacations based on length of service, sick leaves, etc., comparable to the minimum benefits given by industry. And obviously the prevailing rate of industry pay in the area must be met in getting desirable men to work on the courses. There is a definite fascination, challenge, artistic appeal and comparative freedom in outdoor work about employment on a golf course but those attractions don't help the golf course worker pay bills at price standards set by the community's large majority of higher-paid workers.

This year labor will continue to be the serious problem that it's been in the past few years for although inflation may be halted — or slowed down — there'll still be so many labor contract negotiations mentioned in newspapers the difference between golf course wages and those in general industry will be emphasized. What golf course superintendents and a few chairmen know is that the golf course needs a better than average worker if full advantage is to be taken of the advances in turf maintenance. Mechanized course operations and the applications of fertilizer, chemicals and water required under the varying and exacting conditions that determine golf course work are not jobs for mere manual laborer.

Need Efficient Men

Contrary to the impression apparently held by many club officials and members efficient course maintenance requires the employment of men of higher calibre than is found among the average men looking for labor jobs. An efficient maintenance man should be trainable, have a keen sense of responsibility, pride in his work and have the ability and sound resourcefulness to follow thru on any task assigned him within his capabilities as an individual. While he must team-up with

all of the corps he cannot be only another member of a team. He should be a star on an all-star team.

The extensive mechanization of golf course operations sometimes has golfers forgetting that it takes good men to operate good machines efficiently. The golf course worker must have an appreciation of the value of mechanized equipment and an elemental understanding of it so he can be trained to safely and correctly operate it.

It goes without saying that the golf course worker must be reliable and so conscientious about his job that when weather or other emergencies dictate skilled work at unexpected times, long hours without premium pay and work on days when others are playing he can be depended upon completely to do his important part in meeting the situation.

It is simple and fundamental good business when such a man is found, for a club to do everything within reason to retain his services.

Must Compensate for Skill

To me it seems perfectly plain that the men responsible for establishing policy at country clubs will have to realize that they are confronted by a major labor problem and must appreciate that after a well-qualified man has been properly trained he becomes a semi-skilled worker and will have to be treated and compensated accordingly. Then, and only then, can the superintendent apply to advantage all of the vast fund of new and valuable information which is constantly being supplied to him by the USGA Green Section and cooperating agencies and to which the superintendent has access by attending national and regional turf conferences and the monthly meetings of his local organization of superintendents.

Something else to be understood by those who set golf club policies is that higher standards now demanded in golf course condition have meant much more work on courses. Chemical treatments and turf aeration now are routine procedures. They add to the labor cost and require workmen who have heads and can

use them. Before World War II the rough seldom got much attention. Now, at the majority of courses, there isn't rough that can be allowed to grow wild for a few mowings a year. Almost the entire area of the course calls for man hours on the budget.

Those factors have run up the labor bill and necessitated a rather skilled class of labor but the change hasn't been recognized by the authorities who make golf clubs' labor policies.

A year like 1952 brought the labor situation into painfully sharp focus before superintendents because the most expert kind of labor and a lot of it was needed to minimize or repair the damage of excessive rainfall during April and May, followed by excessive heat and humidity that continued in our section thru June, July and August. *Poa annua* did beautifully during May and June and went out during a spell of hot, dry weather in July. In many cases the *Poa annua* was replaced by crabgrass. There appeared to be more silver crab than usual, probably due to compaction caused by heavy rains during April and May and the use of mowing equipment during that period. Those courses which had been applying some form of chemical control over a period of several years seemed to have less crabgrass than others.

We were able to reduce our crabgrass considerably with a program of light applications of sodium arsenite beginning just before the crabgrass produces seed and continuing for 3 or 4 applications at 2-week intervals, followed by aeration and generous fertilization. We usually aerify fairways in the spring as soon as the fairways are dry and again between June 1 and 15.

Machine Maintenance Brings Need for Expert Workers

By W. E. UPDEGRAFF
Supt., Wichita (Ks.) Country Club

In this part of the country the labor problem is acute, especially in our line of work. This is because the club expects us to keep only from two to four men on our payroll the year round. At the end of our busy season when we are compelled to lay off good men we know they will not return to us. If they are really good they can obtain work elsewhere and usually for more money than we can pay.

Work on a golf course can no longer be done by a common laborer. It requires an expert to operate our modern machinery. Modern machinery is risking injury to the golf course and maintenance

is becoming increasingly higher when operated by inexperienced men.

About the only way we can eliminate this problem, which is growing steadily worse each year, is to keep a minimum crew on the payroll the entire year round, giving them two weeks vacation during the winter months. On practically all golf courses there is adequate work to keep these men busy.

The work on a golf course is hard and the hours are long but I find that most of the men like this work after they become familiar with it. We cannot expect to keep good men if we cannot promise them a steady, permanent job. In the past we could lay a man off in the fall and find him waiting to come back to us in the spring on account of the scarcity of jobs. Those days are gone forever.

There is no question but that new, modern equipment has helped to improve the golf course but new types of grass, together with demands from the players, make it necessary to mow much oftener than we used to. At the present time fairways need mowing from three to four times each week to suit the grasses and the players. In the past we used to mow them once each week with a 3-gang mower. That did not cost nearly as much for operation or labor as it does at the present time.

The power green mower has saved some time on the greens but now we need various types of aerifying equipment to relieve the greens from the compaction caused by the heavier mower; also heavier play. We all have much more equipment than we used to but in order to profit from this newer equipment we must have experienced workmen to operate it.

1953 TURF CONFERENCES

Mar. 9-11 — 19th Annual Superintendents and Turf Assn. Short Course, Iowa State College, Ames.

Mar. 11-13 — Minnesota Short Course, Curtis Hotel, Minneapolis, Minn.

Mar. 13-14 — Michigan Golf Turf Conference, Michigan State College, East Lansing.

Apr. 22-23 — Southeastern Turf Conference, Abraham Baldwin Agri. College and Georgia Coastal Plain Experiment Station, Tifton, Ga.

Oct. 21-23 — Central Plains Turf Foundation Conference, Kansas State College, Manhattan, Ks.