

Superintendent Surveys Headaches of the Job

By **N. J. SPERANDIO**

Supt., Concord (Mass.) Country Club

AFTER 26 YEARS in golf course maintenance I would like to see the USGA Green Section get more money for turf experimental stations so these stations can try the new products and new grasses that keep coming on the market, as well as continue and extend research on some of the older products and grass strains that seem to have merit.

We who are experienced in golf course work have our own problems in turf and turf treatment experimentation. Time sharply limits a lot of work we'd like to do in our own experimenting and in applying the work of the turf experiment station scientists. We may see several things we'd like to follow up closely and thoroughly but even if we did have the money for this follow-up in our budgets we wouldn't have the time to spare from the primary needs of our jobs.

The matter of time available has been impressed on many superintendents who have had to add construction and alteration jobs to the normal maintenance work. Often, despite the long hours of the superintendent he has found that required attention to new construction has been taken from the time he knows is required working at the demanding maintenance job he already has on his course.

The objective of turf research is to save time and money in improving the condition of a course, or in keeping a fine course in top condition. Hence, practically, the experimental stations' work must be of the nature that will produce results without too much further expenditure of time of the superintendent and his staff.

But that brings us to the unavoidable gap between station research and course conditions.

Turf Old Age Trouble

A new strain of grass looks good for a few years on experimental plots and under golf course traffic but when the turf gets older it may begin to give all sorts of trouble depending on soil conditions, maintenance practices and other fixed or variable conditions.

Determination of these factors and adjustment to them in course operation constitute the necessity for more financial help to the stations.

Recommendations made as a result of research at the stations are applied by superintendents who, in turn, must continue the stations' experimenting and in doing this follow-thru under the abuse of golf traffic and the sometimes difficult demands of the golfers.

Adverse weather that may touch experimental plots lightly has an easy time damaging turf that bears golf course traffic. Almost all of us whether in station research or in course operation have seen that. So we who have to do an effective job of applying research adjust the scientists' recommendations to work best under conditions at our own courses.

We don't censure the scientists for not having the complete answers. The superintendent knows what the scientist is up against for the superintendent sees greens, apparently identical, of his own course react differently to conditions and treatments. We have to learn, often, the hard way, the slow way, and the expensive way the variations in maintenance required on different greens, tees and fairways.

So, the reason that we who are responsible for course condition see the urgent need for more money in turf research is that we want to save money and time — time not only of our staff but time of our players who desire to spend their leisure moments on a course in excellent, pleasant condition.

Cooperation Pays

The turf specialists at the experimental stations need the close, informed cooperation of the superintendents just as we need the invaluable services of the specialists. Together the scientist and the superintendent must make research more rapidly and extensively useful.

In the case of my own club, and of every other good club that I know, the investment in bringing together the superintendent and the turf research specialists is bring-



DALLAS AC CC COMPLETING NEW CLUB

Great growth of Dallas, Texas, with hundreds of new firms building in the city in 1953, a \$15,000,000 Statler hotel being built and other solid signs of progress are brightly reflected in the new country club of the Dallas Athletic club. The new clubhouse, pictured above, will be completed in April. It is claimed to be the most modern and completely equipped for efficient operation of all country club clubhouses. The new 18, designed by Ralph Plummer and having four scenic and shot-testing lakes which are tied into the drainage and irrigation system, will be in play in May, additional 18 will be built later. The club's present golf establishment will continue in operation as the Glen Lakes Club. The over-all cost of the new DAC CC plant will exceed \$1,000,000. The course will represent an investment of more than \$200,000 and will have supt. house, and one of the finest equipment barns, containing complete inventory of new equipment. The pro shop, pro Graham Ross declares, will be the best that has been proved anywhere for member service. L. B. Strayhorn is pres., DAC CC and Joe H. Banks, gen. chmn. of the committee responsible for the new course.

ing greater returns every year. With high costs of labor, materials and equipment we all have to look to more turf research and its practical application to keep our budgets sound.

And, in thinking about the scientific aspects of turf research we superintendents might look somewhat scientifically at our own jobs and their comparison with the work of others.

We realize that what a scientist may discover a doctor will administer to a patient to combat what nature and human abuse are inflicting. If the doctor fails, the patient is buried.

But the golf course superintendent who treats ailing turf, regardless of its age and what nature is doing to it, is not supposed to lose the patient. The doctor and the superintendent are on duty many more than 40 hours a week. But, oh, what a tremendous difference in pay per hour.

Boston plumbers get \$3 an hour for their work and knowledge. They also get time-and-a-half and double time for overtime. The golf course superintendent at \$3 an hour for the time he puts in on the job would

be in a far higher tax bracket than any superintendent is now.

And, about overtime: one superintendent told me his wife is threatening to divorce him if he doesn't cut down on his hours of devotion to his work.

Labor Relations Touchy

You hear over and over again how tough it is to get help at what golf course labor is paid. But that's not all the trouble when you do, as you must, plenty of scientific research in labor relations. A superintendent tells me that when he, or any of his help, are working on the course, members of his club, without warning, bang shots at the employees. How would that sort of treatment go in a factory?

Now, whether or not the members realize it, the superintendent has to be one of the world's greatest labor relations experts. Otherwise he wouldn't be able to keep help, considering competitive wages, hours, vacations, insurance and other benefits.

He also must be a rapid-fire executive, making an accurate diagnosis of a trouble or emergency and making the right decision immediately. He must organize and

administer the correct action promptly. He must always be set to move the right way in case of sudden changes in weather.

Then, in addition to being somewhat of a research scientist, he must be a water system engineer (motors, pumps, valves, gauges, pipelines, snap valves, sprinklers, pipe-cutters, threaders, etc.). He's a mechanic, with a lot of engines and other equipment to be kept in good operation on today's mechanized course.

And he'd better be a pretty good all-around mechanic as any job around the clubhouse probably will require the superintendent in an emergency. Then, of course, he must be a painter, a carpenter, an entomologist, a botanist, a section boss, a diplomat and a teacher.

Diplomatic Strains

He must know when to tell the truth and when to lie to make the members happy. One friend of mine had a foursome come in after playing in the morning and complain about fast greens. The superintendent said, "The greens were just cut; that's why they're fast." A few hours later another foursome came in complaining that the greens were slow. To that the superintendent replied, "I'm sorry but we just couldn't cut the greens today."

If an efficiency expert wants a constant problem — let him try to figure out, as the superintendent must, how to place labor where it will not work in the vicinity of players, yet minimize unproductive time.

Where our scientific view of our own business may bump into a dead end is in trying to get golfers to realize that more than planting, cutting, feeding, treating and watering grass goes into the maintenance of a golf course. If we could get them to do that then superintendents wouldn't have the headaches of the locker-room and pro shop greenkeepers.

Sometimes I think the directors of the turf experimental stations, the Green Section and the superintendents should stop spending time and money on their problems (some of which will go on forever) when all the turf specialists would have to do is to walk into a locker-room or pro shop and get all the answers.

There may be some signs of hope in easing these headaches as the USGA and the Massachusetts Golf Assn.—to name two—are beginning to realize what superintendents are up against and giving them some help in their bulletins to golfers.

Another phase of our science concerns the directions with manufacturers' prod-

ucts. I'm not the only superintendent who thinks quite a few directions are due for revision. Often the treatments may be too little in order to set up economy claims, or to protect against misuse. I think more frankness in the directions might well be considered by some manufacturers.

It's nothing against a fungicide if it won't work the same way everywhere. What may work wonderfully well for me, won't work for another superintendent not far away. Why? Both of us wish we knew. I have a nursery that is fed once a year and never watered except by rain. The turf is rugged and has a great root system. This turf never has been attacked by disease or wilt and never has been chemically treated. If I maintained my greens the same way I would be fired.

But, enough of our problems. Now and then we get cheering answers that make the spirit and the job bright and fresh again. This year we got one of our big answers in a new pump with more pressure and volume. Instead of spending 11 hours in every 24 to water greens we now do the job in less than 3 hours; a saving of 8 in every 24. We water all our 19 greens at the same time.

Now the players are not inconvenienced by watering as it's done when there's no play. And I don't suffer by players forgetting to turn on water after shutting it off to putt.

We were buying 30 per cent of our water from a municipality with very low pressure. Now we have very satisfactory pressure and volume from our own supply; a supply that won't be rationed by the municipality.

It's a dream that has come true. I suppose some of my other dreams about the coordination of station research and course maintenance application and about improved morale of course working personnel also will become realities in time.

Topsoil Use Examined

There's growing discussion among superintendents about questionable gain in use of topsoil in planting turf areas. Subject was brought into spotlight by Dr. V. T. Stoutemyer, USLA turf authority. Stoutemyer says there's considerable successful experience in Los Angeles district in conditioning soil available with fertilizers, gypsum (if necessary) or by working in organic matter rather than hauling in 4 or more inches of topsoil and have a sharp break in soil profile.