

1959: That Trying Year

*The Turf Blight That Came With
Last Year's Horrible Weather
Has Greenmaster Wondering How
A Recurrence Can Be Avoided*

*So they chop and change,
And each fresh move is only a fresh
mistake.*

The above quote from Robert Service via the pen of Al Schardt, the competent greenmaster of Wanakah CC in Hamburg, N.Y., may have compounded the ills that beset supts. from coast to coast in what will be remembered as the "trying and horrible year of 1959." But those who resorted to desperate measures are quick to point out that Service apparently didn't have a country club membership to contend with when he was inspired to write that couplet.

Al Bertucci, supt. of Old Elm Club, Ft. Sheridan, Ill., for one, would have maintained that Service's observation was "words, empty words," particularly where excessive rainfall in the midst of the extreme hot, humid weather of August was involved. And a few hundred others in the fraternity who saw the poa annua go out when it was wanted most, the greens wilt and several species of disease sweep in, would have backed him up.

Took Double Punch

A review of 1959 is well summed up in what Paul E. Weiss, the veteran greenmaster at Lehigh (Pa.) CC, has to say: "A fall meeting of supts. in our area," Paul notes, "brought forth tales of woe from everyone who attended. The previous winter had been bad enough, but we finally corrected the trouble it had brought. Just

when we thought we could sit back and recuperate we were hit by two of the worst summer weeks we ever had to endure. It was enough to make strong men weep," Weiss continues, "and I saw quite a few on the verge of tears."

The Lehigh supt. goes on to say that from late August on there was a great deal of renovation carried on for the second time during the year in order to bring courses back to something like normal. "But what worries practically all of us," he adds, "is that while we may know most of the remedies, we don't know how to prevent the many troubles that hit us in 1959. As one not too cheerful supt. said, 'What if we're in a cycle of tough weather. What if we have to go through this again next year and the year after?'"

Advice From Noer

Perhaps O. J. Noer, in two articles that appeared in GOLFDOM in 1959, has some of the answers. In May (p. 29), writing of winterkill, Noer said: "When moisture and temperatures become favorable for growth, recovery should occur. There is no reason to become excited. Patience is the better approach. Recovery of established grass is apt to be as quick and more satisfactory than renovation and re-seeding. But a way must be found to impress these things on club members."

In October (p. 51), writing of summer-time turf loss, Noer said: "The natural reaction in a year like this is to condemn the grass and turn to something else. This may be best for some but not necessarily for everybody. As assessment of performance and scrutiny of management practices is justified. In those places where turf survived in good shape, we may find the answers. Management in these locations may be a helpful guide to others."

This may seem to put Noer in a league with Service and Al Schardt. Only the trouble is that members don't understand or don't want to recognize that what Nature destroys in a hurry it is very slow to heal.

Work With Nature

Schardt, in fact, hints that Nature probably resists the supt's impulse to speed its healing process. "The trouble with many of us," says Al, "is that when things start to go wrong we panic. The first thing we think about is saturating the turf with fertilizer or chemicals to snap it back. I've seen more turf ruined in my 45 years through over-control than through lack of attention.

"I'm willing to work with Nature," Schardt continues. "I advocate moderate

Club Sales Up 4.4 Per Cent

Golf club sales for the fiscal year ended Oct. 31, 1959, totalled 4,412,920 units, an increase of 4.4 per cent over the comparable 1958 period. Making up the total were 3,071,349 Iron clubs and 1,341,571 Wood clubs.

In releasing the report, Carl J. Benkert, pres. of the National Assn. of Golf Club Manufacturers, said: "It has been gratifying to all manufacturers of golf equipment to note a constant increase in sales each year over a number of years. The present outlook is that increases in the sale of equipment will continue and the percentage of yearly increases will perhaps become even greater because of increased interest by the public in the game. Then, too, there are new facilities for golf being constantly added in all sections of the country."

and frequent treatments rather than heavy dosages. Fertilizers and chemicals should be used as boosters and not in the hope that they are overnight cure-alls."

More important than growth stimulators or controls, Al Bertucci opines, are the few key men a supt. has who are willing to work overtime during critical periods and are just as concerned with saving the turf as he is. "If you have fellows who will stay on in the evenings when temperatures are more favorable for mowing, fungicide spraying and watering," Bertucci notes, "your chances of at least minimizing damage are fair. Without this kind of help you are going to lose your turf in a hurry."

It Was a Nightmare

So far as 1959 is concerned, Frank P. Dunlop of Baltimore CC remembers it as a nightmare. Turf was weak after the winter's desiccation and when spring turned out to be hot and dry, recovery was further retarded. By mid-July his course was starting to come around but 23 days of hot, humid and wet weather in the last days of July and in early August completely upset the recovery schedule. Poor drainage took its toll. Dunlop had taken some steps to forestall catastrophe by installing tile drainage under greens, but this is a long range program and enough hadn't been done to avoid trouble on the large scale. Baltimore CC greens are now being overseeded with Penncross and fairways are being converted to U-3 Bermuda because it is felt that these two grasses will

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that guard the elongated 17 Mile Drive are easy on the eyes but bad for traffic.

There always are complaints from disgruntled professionals, amateurs and gallery-trodden spectators. It has been rumored that not all of the club members have welcomed the thunderous invasion of golfers, cars, parties and other general hullabaloo.

But in spite of a few faults, the occasional complaints and some hurt feelings there is nothing, Californians will tell you, quite like the Crosby. And they'll say this within earshot of the people who run the Open, the Masters, the PGA Championship or any tournament you can mention.

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hold up best when play is heaviest and the bottomland weather toughest to cope with.

Now it is hoped that Baltimore weather for the next three years will be favorable so that both the Pennecross and Bermuda can become well established. Dunlop, however, had one thing working in his favor in 1959. His green committee had complete understanding of the harmful effects of the weather and did everything possible to get the membership to cooperate in preserving what was left of the course.

The West Coast didn't escape the 1959 blight, according to Elmer Border, supt. of the Los Posas CC in Camarillo, Calif., although damage to turf probably wasn't as widespread as in the east and central sections of the country.

Poor Course Structure

Where greens and fairways suffered, Border says, it wasn't so much the fault of the supt., or for that matter the weather, as it was the structure of the course. "If drainage, airflow, contouring, etc., were right," Border declares, "the supt. didn't encounter a great deal of difficulty except for occasional and temporary loss of grass. But where the architecture was faulty, the greenkeeping dept. had more than its share of headaches."

The Los Posas supt. feels that everyone in golf has much to learn from the lessons of 1959. If more attention is given to building for easy maintenance of turf and the course in general, the difficult years will be taken in stride. As for the supt., Border thinks that he is being exposed to a great deal of good research findings and reports on the causes and cures for a season like the last. If he gives them proper atten-

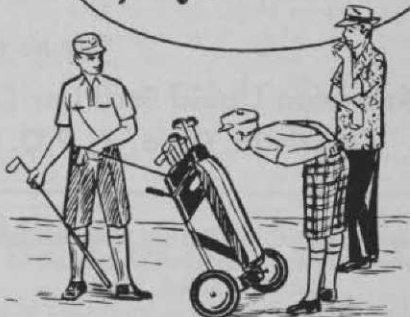


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tion and tries to profit from what has been learned there is much to be gained.

Rain Bothered South

Outside of a cool, wet spring the South didn't suffer too much in 1959 because of the weather. This is the opinion of E. A. Shields, supt. of Capital City CC in Atlanta. Due to a prolonged wet spell weeds got a head start on the Bermuda grass and clubs that hadn't carried on rather concentrated spraying programs in previous years were quite hard hit. At Capital City, crab and dallisgrass had been pretty effectively eliminated in 1958 and on June 15, 1959, fairways there were 90 per cent free of these species. Later, because of sub-normal rainfall, crowfoot became a menace. But a program in which 2-4-D and arsenicals were used and mowing and dragging done more frequently than usual, resulted in effective eradication of this weed.

Bill Lyons, supt. at Firestone CC in Akron, O., had the twofold job of preparing for the Rubber City Open, which was played in late August last year, and the long range task of getting ready for the 1960 PGA Championship, which will be played this July. If these weren't headaches enough, Bill had the 1959 blight to

contend with. He thinks that close mowing from May through July left the turf in rather poor condition to withstand the August heat, humidity and rain. But at Firestone there was enough poa annua mixed with Bermuda, which had been planted for each of the five preceding years, to pull the fairways through in reasonably good shape.

It was Lyons' observation that courses with watering systems fared worse in some instances than those that didn't have them. Soil tests at a few of these irrigated locations showed pH as low as 4.5, low potash content and phosphorous med. too high. Mowing at these courses in all cases was below 1 in. Lyons came to the conclusion that the more water that is applied the more lime and balanced fertilizer that are needed to offset possible leaching.

Cassier is Midwest President

Emil Cassier of Sycamore (Ill.) GC has been elected pres. of the Midwest GCSA for 1960. Vps are Ted Woehrle, Beverly CC, Chicago and Marvin Gruening, Midwest CC, Hinsdale. Don Gerber of Wheaton CC is secy-treas. Directors are John Ebel, Joe Canale, Ed Burke, Bert Rost, Herman Woehrle and Ray Gerber.