



THE GREEN CHAIRMAN: WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE SYSTEM?

A green chairman
takes a hard look at
the office and sees
a need for change and
improvement

by ALLAN E. GROGAN



The office of green chairman is not honorary; it is not avocational and it certainly is not meant to be a stepping-stone or a means to some political end at the club. It is a unique and pivotal position, so important to the club that it should be looked upon as an end in itself. Any club member thinking of taking on the responsibilities of green chairman should weigh the decision as he would the prospect of a new job in the commercial world.

Around the chairman revolves the club's success or failure. He is charged with the management of a primary operation, the green department, the effectiveness of which can set the tone for the entire club.

His relations with other club officers often determine the acceptance or rejection of important programs. His rapport with the superintendent can affect significantly the quality of the golf course. The policies he makes can meet successfully the members' needs and desires or they can ruin their enjoyment of the club.

What are the qualifications for such an important office? At too many clubs the question is never raised. Experience is one criterion—at least three or four years as an active committee member. If nothing else, this experience will give the chairman a realistic idea of the nature of the job.

After the apprenticeship, ideally, he should be prepared to serve as chairman for at least five to six

Discussing Poa renovation with calcium arsenate are from left, Robert Finney, immediate past president at Baltusrol and vice chairman of the green committee; Al Grogan, green chairman; Joe Flaherty, superintendent and Matthew Glennon, president of Baltusrol. Communication of long and short term goals holds the key to successful results and has worked out well at Baltusrol.

years. The period of time is not arbitrary. Some maintenance programs take that long and require consistency, if the program is to succeed.

If ideal circumstances cannot be met, alternatively, a system could be set up in which the chairman picks an assistant, with the understanding that he will probably take over the chairmanship after a specified period of time. Under this type of an arrangement, the club would be assured of getting an experienced man, and programs that have been started would have continuity.

Communication with other green chairmen to determine the nature of the job and its requirements must be discussed at all levels—local, regional, state and national. This area of education has been greatly neglected. These meetings could be set up by local golf associations, the United States Golf Assn. or the Golf Course Superintendents Assn. of America.

Many other facets of the office need discussion. Among them are:

□ Knowledge (a) entry require;



ments and (b) on the job training, including formal and practical;

- ☐ Attitudes;
- ☐ Time needed for the job;
- ☐ Management ability (a) includes long- and short-term planning, (b) coordination, (c) ideas and the ability to elicit ideas from others, (d) direction and control of programs, (e) personnel policies and (f) ability to generate departmental enthusiasm;
- ☐ Inquisitiveness;
- ☐ Interest in serving the club;
- ☐ Ability to absorb and filter much criticism;
- ☐ Member relations and communications;
- ☐ Term of office. What is a realistic minimum period and when should he be replaced?

THE SUPERINTENDENT

The green chairman's relationship with the superintendent is a primary one. Together they develop both the long-range plans and the current operating policies and procedures. One important note: After they plan where they want to go and how they are going to get there, the chairman then allows the superintendent the freedom to get his job done without needless interruptions and confusion.

At Baltusrol we have what we think is a good operation. The superintendent, Joe Flaherty, began as an assistant after graduating from Rutgers in 1964. Four years later he was appointed Baltusrol's superintendent.

Baltusrol is now completing a five-year improvement program. Among the projects are:

- ☐ Installation of a new irrigation system;
- ☐ Construction of a new green department-workshop;
- ☐ Complete up-dating of green department capital equipment;
- ☐ Conversion of the course from *Poa annua* with its attendant programs to bentgrass through scorched earth renovation and gradual rehabilitation;
- ☐ The start of a tee improvement program.

Present ongoing programs are:

- ☐ Control of *Poa* with tri-calcium arsenate;
- ☐ Continuance of the tee improvement program;
- ☐ Upgrading of course drainage;
- ☐ Planting of about 100 trees a year from the nursery to improve playability and appearance of the course;
- ☐ Removal and relocation of bunkers to firm up course for low handicappers and remove unneeded hazards that harass the average player;
- ☐ Trying to respond to our members' increasing demands for improved and housekeeping.

At Baltusrol we use a team approach to course management involving two simultaneous plans of action: long term and current operation. Both plans are written up after discussion and are reviewed by the club officers, the committee, the board and the superintendent. After review and approval, we usually have a very workable plan. The plan is then followed through.

Communications is another key element of successful management. Again, using Baltusrol as an example, Joe, myself and the club officers examine frequently the way things are done, looking always for improvements. This includes listening to comments from members. If their ideas have a place in the program, they are used. Joe and I review progress daily, and

during the golfing season we assess the course by riding it no less than every other week. We are continually looking for ways to improve our operation whether in the area of work procedures or new equipment. Once policy is established, however, Joe runs it. We do not interfere with the day-to-day operation. We have found that free and easy interchange of ideas are very constructive and have worked for us.

Planning is continuous on both the long- and short-term levels. Joe maintains a "tickler file," which helps him keep current on short-term operating decisions. Long-term planning is being combined with history in a book with a page for each hole. Each page will contain a map of the hole, history on soil, types of grass, drainage, chemical treatment, comments and planned improvements. We feel this information will be essential as we plan for the future.

One unique thing Joe and I do is to visit other clubs. At most clubs the chairman and the superintendent work together, but only at their own club. They never visit other clubs or go to meetings together. I think it's essential that both go out together for visits to other clubs to compare practices. It would be helpful if clubs could schedule reciprocal visits with other chairmen and superintendents for frank in-depth discussions. After all, we can learn from each other.

CLUB OFFICERS

The chairman must work closely and harmoniously with the club officers. They must understand and approve his program. Then they in turn help sell it to the board and the members.

When presenting his program, the chairman should be fully prepared. Otherwise his credibility may be destroyed. This doesn't mean the chairman goes into boring technical details. It does mean that he know what is going on and why.

continued on page 41

CHAIRMAN *from page 39*

The average member wants sometime green "out there" and wants to be able to tell his friends how nice his course looks. He doesn't care, really, if the green stuff is *Poa*, crabgrass, clover, bermudagrass or ryegrass. Actually, he likes winter rules more than summer rules and regards the chairman as a sadist when the course is played at rated distance.

THE GREEN COMMITTEE

The green committee members can be used effectively in many ways: for special assignments; for information gathering and for public relations to the membership. They can also serve as a sounding board for the chairman's ideas. The committee is run by the chairman not vice versa. Yes, he listens to comments and criticism with an open mind. If they are constructive, he takes prudent action.

Eventually all chairmen go stale and must be replaced, preferably by the man being groomed for the job. The top man of the group, through sustained interest, will generally surface for grooming as the next chairman. However the system is set up, a chairman should always have his replacement standing in the wings ready for action.

CONCLUSION

I realize in this article that I have raised more questions about effective green chairmanship than I have answered. But the time has come when answers must be searched out. Hopefully, future articles will present solutions to problems in golf club management for the non-professional and in that way a forum will be opened. For above all, the job of green chairman entails service to the club by truly dedicated people. □

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