

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

by

Roger J. Thomas
V.P., International Sales
Operations
Jacobsen Manufacturing Co.



Traveling throughout the World, it has become apparent that superintendents in some foreign countries try to bring their courses to the maintenance perfection of the American golf courses. International television of Championships played in the U.S. encourages foreign superintendents and/or greenkeepers to bring their courses to the same standards.

Some of the practices in foreign golf courses observed in recent years are following the American trend of cutting fairways closer, closer, and closer! In some areas they were cutting at 1" to 1½" on the fairway and were generally pleased with the results. But, the Championships they see played on many of our courses continuously show closely cropped fairways.

In Northern climates they experience basically the same problems that we do here in Wisconsin. Some years they experience high heat, high humidity, stress on Poa, heavy traffic, or insufficient water and sometimes all in one year!

The American superintendents generally have more **formal** education on turf subjects and receive more information from both the local chapters and the G.C.S.A.A.

American superintendents generally feel free to exchange information, visit each other's courses and, in some cases, try to help each other to produce the best turf in the area.

Some foreign Golf Associations are not that strong yet, golf clubs are geographically spread out and do not have the opportunity to exchange information **freely**. They depend on American publications, and are constantly requesting books or articles produced by American professors or publications where superintendents supply ideas that solve problems. All of this leads to the subject of a problem beginning to appear in some countries, including the U.S.

The foreign concepts seem to develop from, "now that we have irrigation, and the grass is green, we can produce golf courses just like those seen on television." "Since the fairways are green, we have to cut them lower and lower to produce the kind of turf we have seen on our visits to the U.S." In some cases, these foreign greenkeepers have placed themselves in difficult situations:

1. Cutting at 1½" on a lumpy or thatchy fairway does **not** really show up the deviations. Cutting at those heights can forgive a lot of 'sins' from showing up.
2. Passing by some of these fairways being watered, I noticed a lot of pockets of water, probably the size of dinner plates! At these lower cutting heights, these deviations really show up in a fairway when cutting low.

So, in approaching "greens-mowing cutting heights," some people do not seem to be aware of the increase in cultural practices that are necessary when you mow closer and closer.

My personal thoughts are that when fairways are cut close enough to begin to approach greens mowing heights, they are going to require similar care as that of a green. Maintenance practices such as top-dressing, overseeding, aeration, fertilization, etc., may have to be done on a regular plan to smooth out the fairways.

The speeds of the machines with which they mow may have to be reduced because traveling at 5 — 6 — 7 miles an hour to mow an uneven fairway being cut at 3/8" certainly is not going to lend itself

to a smooth finish cut. Even with machines of the triplex size, unless the important cultural practices are applied these very low cut fairways can produce problems of uneven cut.

Another thought that occurs to me is that some fairways will require substantial **preparation** for closer mowing. Surely aerification, overseeding, and possible top-dressing should be considered **before** dropping cutting heights to 3/4", 1/2", or 3/8."

The writer is fully aware that superintendents of Wisconsin know what cultural practices are necessary on turf. It would be interesting to hear your comments regarding the idea that "the closer you mow, the more important these cultural practices become." Not being an Agronomist, but being a golf club member, these closely mowed fairways are very attractive to me and other golfers. I have to wonder whether asking for such perfect fairways isn't putting a strain on both the budget and the superintendent. Yet, I see a general trend, even in the U.S., toward this effort of very close mowing with light machinery. One has to wonder if we are going back to labor intensified costs for maintenance of very closely mowed fairways. (Look at what the costs of removing clippings can do to a budget; however, if you have the budget, "go for it".)

Some "food for thought" is to wonder whether players will expect more and more in terms of grooming, but without the increase of dues or fees for larger budgets. Try on a few questions like these before lowering the cutting height on your mowers:

1. Can the grasses on my fairways withstand close mowing **through** the Summer?
2. Are my fairways smooth enough now for close mowing or will it take a period of time to prepare them?
3. Does my budget allow the extra expense of performing the **extra turf maintenance** for ½" high fairways?
4. Are we laying ourselves wide open to all the problems of stress and disease with close mowing **if** we **really** have a 'tough' Summer, i.e., high heat, high humidity, lack of water, etc.?

Please, let's ask ourselves, where this practice of low cutting

is leading; is this trip necessary; and, **where** do we go from here?

Editor's Note: ROGER J. THOMAS is a native of Green Bay, Wisconsin. He received his Bachelor of Science Degree from St. Norbert College, and a Masters Degree in Business Administration from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

He is beginning his 37th year with Jacobsen Division of Textron Inc., and has traveled throughout the World in the field of sales and service.

Currently, he is Vice President of International Sales and Marketing for Jacobsen Division of Textron Inc., in Racine, Wisconsin, who produce turf maintenance products.

ZONTEK LEAVES GREEN SECTION'S NCR; REPLACED BY LATHAM

The Wisconsin golf community is still reeling from surprise as a result of the news that Stanley J. Zontek is leaving the North Central Region. He is moving east to assume the directorship of the Mid-Atlantic Region for the USGA.

Adding to the shock of this move was the announcement that Stan's duties in the NCR will be handled by a new member of the Green Section staff, Mr. James M. Latham. Latham's leaving his position of manager of agronomy and promotion for the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District to rejoin the Green Section staff. His 25 years of active participation and involvement with the MMSD was pre-

ceded by 3½ years as an agronomist with the USGA.

Very few men in the grass business could have done a better job of developing a region, of capturing the loyalties of that region's Golf Course Superintendents, and have been as influential as Stanley has. Although we are all sad to see him leave, at least we were able to learn from his advice and counsel for four years. Maybe some friendly persuasion will get him back each year for the Symposium and for an occasional WGCSA meeting. Stan, his wife Marti and son Chris plan on settling somewhere between Philadelphia and Baltimore.

The selection of Jim Latham was an excellent move by the USGA. He brings along with his many years of experience the kind of formal training required of his new position — a B.S. degree and an M.S. degree from Texas A & M University. It is also a distinct advantage to us that he is so familiar with the midwest golf course industry. Beyond that, it is a pleasant thought to know we will have a good friend in this important USGA position.

Latham's absence will increase the work load at MMSD for Bob Welch, their National Distribution Manager. In addition to replacing Jim, the MMSD is interviewing for a new field agronomist's position.



Photo taken in 1960; left to right are Charlie Shiley, Ron Verhaalen, Jim Latham, John Stampfl, and Les Verhaalen. Latham joined MMSD in 1960.

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