



## A Player's Perspective

# THE ROLE OF THE GREEN COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

By Dr. David U. Cookson



Your editor assigned me this topic this month; but in thinking about what I would say and reflecting on experience, it is obvious that a complete summation would include both the ideal and hoped for exemplary role of the Green Committee Chairman, but also recognize the too often opposite example of the Green Chairman who fails to play his role effectively. Both results, success and failure of accomplishment, can best be noted by outlining the Green Chairman's role in golf club interaction.

The fundamental duty of the Green Chairman is to serve as liaison between the club membership and the Green Superintendent. All else is peripheral to this basic obligation. If the Green Chairman fails this role, he fails completely. He succeeds by earning and maintaining the confidence and respect of both the membership and the Board as well as the Green Superintendent. He must be politic enough to recognize and deal with the various interest groups within the club, and maintain lines of communication with all, yet tactfully synthesize these concerns in presentations to the Green Superintendent such that advice and counsel is not perceived to be arbitrary and unrealistic. At the same time he must be cognizant of the real needs of the Green Superintendent in performing his job to his best capability, and be prepared to lobby the club membership and Board to support the necessary expenditures and policies to keep the golf course in top condition. Unhappily, this ideal Green Committee chairman is too infrequently found; generally due to either inexperience, lack of interest in or understanding of the position, or commonly, a dogmatic and authori-

tative approach to problems which leaves little room in the mind for breadth of understanding or interest in accommodating diverse points of view. A wise Green Superintendent would spend some effort subtly promoting the concept of the ideal Green Chairman to the club leaders in hope of influencing selection of the appropriate type of individual to this position.

There are of course other important roles for the Green Committee chairman. He must be knowledgeable about the best turf conditions for playing golf, and have travelled sufficiently and visited enough other clubs to have a general appreciation of this subject. This is necessary to be able to convey meaningful suggestions to his Green Superintendent as to whether things are on the right track, and also that the Superintendent will respect the opinions he is hearing. The Green Chairman must play his own course enough so that he is always aware of the current status of its condition. He must educate himself to some understanding of the kinds of grasses and disease processes prevalent on his golf course, as well as acquire knowledge of the usual problems of cultivation and maintenance of turf. Lastly, he must be able to make a decision, and then to take responsibility for those decisions made even if adverse consequences occur, without placing blame on other factors or trying to shift responsibility to the Green Superintendent.

The successful Green Chairman will certainly maintain a close relationship with the Green Superintendent, close enough so that policy questions are clearly understood and acknowledged by both, but not so close as to interfere with day

to day management, decisions of the Superintendent in relation to his crew, or in the details of precise utilization of fertilizers or pesticides. He will be available; and an individual that the Superintendent will feel comfortable in presenting problems to and recommending solutions, feeling that the Green Chairman will listen fairly and be reasonable in his evaluations.

Finally, I feel the Green Chairman should provide continuity in the ongoing relationship between the club and the Green Superintendent. Every successful and continually smooth interaction involving the club and the Green Superintendent that I have observed has also included a Green Chairman providing continuity in service. Short term Green Chairmen lead to inconsistency of direction and disruptive operations and policies, and should be resisted. Clubs which pursue this practice feel they are promoting healthy conditions by bringing in fresh faces to try new approaches; but in fact, there are few members at any club whose talents exist in broad enough measure to be good Green Chairmen, and they should not be wasted once they have undertaken these duties by being too often rotated out and retired.

These then are what appear to me to be essential in the role of the Green Chairman, at least in a good Green Chairman. Most Green Chairmen will fall short in some or perhaps most of these attributes, but there are also a number who do successfully combine these qualities into their performance, and serve to show all of us how effective and important a good Green Chairman can be; the club and Green Superintendent who have one of these working right now are fortunate indeed.

Editor's Note: Dr. Cookson has accepted the Green Committee Chairman assignment at Maple Bluff Country Club for 1985. It is a role he previously held for 8 years at Maple Bluff.