



President's Message

LOW TECHNOLOGY ON THE GOLF COURSE

I've never been accused of being a Casper Milquetoast, but writing my thoughts on high technology will probably inspire someone to nominate me for the "Curmudgeon of the Year" award. Others may accuse me of crankiness and blurred vision. Some may even suggest I'm guilty of being old fashioned and crotchety. Whatever the case may be, I must proceed with some thoughts about the hottest topic around.

And it is hot. You cannot pick up a journal or a newspaper without reading two or three articles about high tech or biotech or computers. High tech confronts us at every turn. We now have word processors, and typewriters are rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Biotechnology and genetic engineering offer the promise of huge economic gains in agriculture by developing crops resistant to drought, insects, diseases and pollution. Chances seem good that plants will be developed that grow bigger and better fruits and vegetables, and ones that grow faster, mature quicker and that fertilize themselves.

High tech is seemingly everywhere in our lives. Computers are used in grocery stores and banks. They are used in the post office and on television — surely you've watched the new TV program on PBS called "Hi Tech Times." What a sign of the times! Computers are an integral part of higher education and research on college campuses, and now we

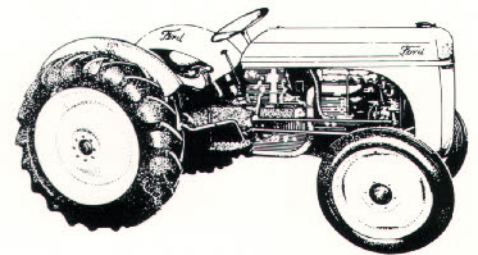
can even find them in grade schools. It seems the modus operandi is fast becoming "education as entertainment" in American schools. The list becomes endless.

The advanced state of technology is highly visible in our business, too. The GCSAA now offers seminars that give instruction in computer use. Those same computers are being used to operate irrigation systems, maintain inventories, assist with payroll and aid in the formidable recordkeeping our job now requires. Researchers are using high tech in their investigations. Plant pathologists are using high tech to help predict disease outbreaks on a golf course and guide fungicide applications. Plant breeders give hope to improved grass varieties on our golf courses. Their is little doubt that we are in the midst of the technology revolution in our profession.

I am not suggesting that most, if not all, of these developments are not good. They probably are. But as so often happens when a mind boggling array of anything is advanced at a break neck pace, not enough time is spent to reflect on the proper and best role it should play in our lives. I think this is particularly true of the high technology invasion in the past five years.

When anything goes wrong these days, it is quickly blamed on "the computer." Responsible actions seem less important, now that we have this convenient scapegoat. Increases in **word** processing have led to decreases in **thought** processing, and we are losing the importance of learning to correct errors of thinking in favor of correcting mistakes in transcribing. Kids need less modern math and more lessons in basic arithmetic. Likewise, they need fewer hours of computer time and more hours of instruction in English and composition. Classrooms should be filled with better teachers who are paid a fair wage, not robots or PC computers or mainframes. And wouldn't it be nice if the advanced state of technology in our telephone systems, which rivals higher mathematics in its complexity, could tell us who to call for repairs and service and to whom we send our monthly bill?

Similarly, I propose what we often need on our golf courses is a return to and a recapturing of low technology. We are, all too often, losing those abilities and attitudes and implements that make our profession an art or craft as well as a science. I most certainly do not want rethinking at the cost of proper use of high tech. Without progress and innovation, for example, my pumphouse would not be the efficient and effective unit it now is. Without invention and research I would be unable to use many of our newer machines, or would be struggling without sterol inhibiting fungicides. But neither do I feel we should abandon established practices from years ago or implements that have provided services for many years.

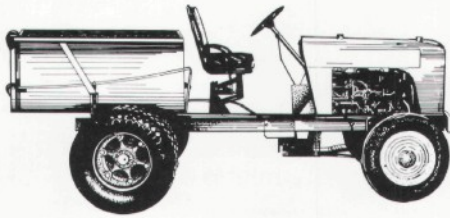


8N Ford — "The best little golf course tractor ever made."

The best little golf course tractor ever made went out of production in 1952 — the Ford 8N. We have one, and when employees have a choice between the 8N and a tractor that is 25 years newer, the 8N is selected every time. It is smaller, easy to operate and offers great visibility for the operator. And for a mechanic, there are few towing vehicles that are easier to service or repair. Young engineers working to improve these kinds of machines should learn some design principles from the Ford 8N. It is low technology at its best!

The first time I visited Bill Roberts and his maintenance facility at SENTRYWORLD I could see that Bill also appreciates low technology. As we walked the length of his fabulous shop we passed untold numbers of the latest equipment available for maintaining a golf course. Surprisingly, he had little to say about any of it and barely paused to comment on features or advantages or shortcomings. But he lit up like a Christmas tree and started a lengthy conversation when we reached the other end of the

building where several older TORO Series IV tractors were parked. His story was of how he acquired them and of the work done to overhaul, refurbish and bring them into service. They are among the most useful machines in his equipment inventory and are clearly his pride and joy! Right in the midst of high tech, no less! I also have a TORO Series IV tractor of WWII vintage, and no amount of money could buy it. Solid, multi-functional and low technology machines like it just aren't available anymore.



Toro Series IV Tractor

From time to time we become confused with what is low tech and what is high tech. One of the "latest" trends in our business is the hand mowing of putting greens. A dozen years ago, walking greens mowers were considered low, low technology when viewed with the new triplex riding greens mowers. Now, suddenly, the walking mower (which was low tech) is one of the newest innovations, sophistications and refinements in preparing a golf course for play! Score another point for low technology.

With the move back to walking greens mowers comes the thought of transporting them from green to green, and more low tech moves forward. One of the handiest methods I've seen for this task is the stone boat. It is of such low technology that we are able to design and build them right in our shop! And another implement that is nearly as simple and useful as a stone boat is the wheelbarrow. Yet, I've watched young employees load a Cushman truckster, move it 20 feet and struggle to dump the box. When I suggest "Why not go back to the shop and get a wheelbarrow?", they look at me and wonder if I'm serious. Why use something of such low technology when you can use a \$7,000 machine?

I have a fondness for the superior job other low tech practices give me. Each and every spring, before we open our golf course for play, we hand sweep all of the putting greens with stiff bristle barn brooms. All debris and trash from winter is removed, the excess topdressing is evened out and cleaned up, and any sloughed leaf tissue is removed by this procedure. Even though it is a time consuming and physically demanding task, there just isn't a machine that will come close to the excellent results. It is low tech at its finest. And if there was a similar example, it probably would be hand raking sand traps. The finished product by hand raking is so superior to that of a machine that PGA Tournament officials insist on it for tournaments under their sponsorship.

To continue would be flogging a

dead horse. My point, I think, has been made. But one broad and simple yet important advantage to low technology must be recorded or my essay will be incomplete. It is, in fact, probably the most important point of all. More than sentimental pleasures or unnecessary hard work, low technology gives employees (and Superintendents) a kind of salvation. It can, if only briefly, remove us from dependency on and slavery to machines. It gives everyone a greater sense of value and self-worth. That can only be good.

So I will continue to make appropriate use of high technology, when it is logical and offers true usefulness. And at the same time I hope I'll be able to maintain a common sense perspective on time proven and helpful low technology.

I wonder where my shovel is?

Monroe S. Miller



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