



## Thirty Years—And Counting—On The Future

James M. Latham, Director  
Great Lakes Region, USGA Green Section



### Thirty Years

Just about this time of the year in 1957, the Midwestern Office of the USGA Green Section was opened by a brave young man named Jim Holmes. The first office away from the Green Section headquarters in Beltsville, Maryland, had been set up by Charlie Wilson in Davis, California some five years earlier. Offices in New Jersey, Texas and Georgia were established in between. There was some conjecture as to who would staff this office - Holmes or Latham. Since Holmes was more understandable to Yankee ears than Latham, he came here and I went back South, to move the Green Section's Southeastern office to Athens, Georgia.

In winning this assignment, Jim Holmes began evangelizing about topics which remain of major interest today. He agitated for and helped to build the first "Green Section Greens" in this area, if not in the country. Unfortunately, we did not know enough about the playing performance of sands at the time. Concrete grade sand can be agronomically acceptable, but it never "ages" well for shot receptivity.

Further, everyone expected the new greens to play just like the 30 year old greens on the other holes when they were at their best. They didn't. After all, nobody rebuilds a good green. This same parallel can be made today, although good quality sand-peat combinations do play extremely well early on. In spite of the artificiality of the growing medium, good greens are like good wines and do improve with age. (But they can also become vinegary if mishandled.)

Another of Holmes' innovations was disease identification in the field. We still have the laboratory microscope he carried around in the trunk of his car. Untold numbers of superintendents and their assistants got their first peak of plant disease causing organisms through that microscope. He delighted in showing off dollarspot and brown-patch organisms, but his real pleasure was Pythium and its rate of growth.

During these show and tell periods, he began to see some snake-like animals moving through the microscope view. They prompted his becoming interested in parasitic nematode damage to turf. He became a leading exponent of nematode awareness in the North even though the names seemed to be too difficult to pronounce, much less spell. Today, however, Tylenchorhynchus has no more fear of superintendents than Gaeumannomyces or Xiphenema than Xanthomonas.

A final chapter on this story is that Jim will team up with Carl Schwartzkopf, another former Green Section staffer here, to build a new course near Lansing, Michigan. I wonder who will be making book on agreement about sand type, peat quality, drainage specifications and the scale of other decisions. I'll lay odds that there will be few, if any, disagreements if the principles which both know so well are followed.

### And Counting

The 1987 Season should now be foremost in everyone's mind since there was a bit of favorable weather early-on. Many fall jobs were postponed because of the wetness in September and should get ASAP treatment. Hopefully the poorly drained areas left undone last year have been marked for work now. In Milwaukee, at least, 1986 was the third wettest year on record, receiving 42.17 inches of rain. Unfortunately, those records don't include the beginning of the wetness problem in November of 1985.

If everything was marked or mapped during high water times, there should be no reason for a repetition of the same degree of damage the next time we have a January thaw or a wet and hot July. The rapid removal of water from the turf surface should remain a primary goal at every golf course. Drowned turf is just as dead as dehydrated turf, yet who has even hinted at a drainage system half as elaborate as a "modern" irrigation system? Nah - just cut a trench over there and dig a

hole to absorb the water. Even in clay!

We must be slow learners, because almost every book, paper or lecture on golf course design or construction stresses drainage above all. And who has ever seen or smelled a Black Layer where drainage was unimpeded? Drainage encourages an adequate oxygen supply in the soil. Layering and compaction reduce drainage. There may be other problems but they are minor when compared to these two. Sulfides do not form in well aerated soils. They are usually formed by organisms or chemical reactions which take the oxygen out of sulfate ions under anaerobic conditions.

### On The Future

The next 30 years in the Great Lakes Region may be no more revolutionary than the last. But that's just fine, since evolution means more solid development of desirable characteristics. Changes will occur, but of much less magnitude.

Perhaps the most likely thing will be no-fault (or at least no-gripe) year-round play. With functioning Green Section-style green construction, with continuous golf car roads (or reasonable turf-saving facsimiles), with the total and learned control of irrigation and drainage water and with hardier grass types, this goal is not unreachable.

Some of these required components are available today. Others may come out of the USGA/GCSAA Research Program if it continues to receive adequate financial support to achieve its goals. The other needs will be met by the industrial community if a demand is created. Note that this means that the bottom line financing comes from within the golf industry. If we are to create ultimate turf for optimum golf, we can no longer ride on the coattails of traditional agriculture. If we are to rely on state universities for help, then they must pay more heed to the needs of Urban Agriculture, where their major source of tax support (people) originates.