

# Turning Back the Clock

*Can We Return To Sensible Maintenance Practices?*

By Tom Parent

*River Oaks Golf Course*

If we feel this is necessary, this will be the hardest challenge. Golfers in America have what my wife calls the McDonald's mentality. They know exactly what a Big Mac will taste like whether it is served in San Francisco or Ames, Iowa. Just as they want to know their food will taste the same, they want to know that the golf course will play exactly as it played yesterday or last week.

In other parts of the world the challenge of golf is adapting one's game to the conditions. Our golfers want us to adjust the conditions to manufacture the challenge. The odd part of this philosophy is that they go bananas if there is any challenging shots before they get to the green.

This in turn means that the difference between winning and losing must be determined by next to impossible playing conditions on the green. This leaves no room for adapting cultural practices to reflect environmental conditions.

**Common sense would lead us to raise the cutting height** of the greens during hot, humid weather. If we did this, the small vocal minority that determine the conditions at most clubs would scream bloody murder. The result for us is algae, disease and badly thinned or dying turf.

Golfers, particularly at private clubs and at upscale resort, and daily fee courses, expect perfection! We would all like to give them perfection. But at what cost to our reputation?

I do not know if this story is true or not, but it typifies the golfing mentality of what I call the vocal minority. A prominent tour professional, who also designs and builds golf courses, was playing an inaugural round, at one of his newly completed courses.

This professional landed in the rough on a patch of clover. The superintendent was called over and this leader of the golf industry stated that "there is not clover on my golf courses! You cannot get a clean lie off of clover." Over the next several days the course was sprayed wall to wall. I am sure it has stayed clover and any other type of weed free ever since.

**Is this necessary?** Can we and the golfing public learn to accept less than perfect? Do a hundred dollar spots on a two-acre fairway necessitate the spraying of that fairway, much less the whole course? Can we tolerate some weeds and disease in our rough? Can our greens roll at seven feet in July and August?

These are questions we need to answer and reach agreement with the golfing public if we are to improve the game of golf's image.

Anyone that has been in the golf course business for more than ten years can probably remember when cutting greens at 5/32nds was extreme and an eighth of an inch was considered fool hardy and a formula for disaster. Now anything over an eighth of an inch would be considered slow at many courses. We now talk about cutting our greens in thousandths. It's too much of a tongue twister to say at whatever 64th or 128th we cut our greens.

**What happened to our common sense along the way?** In 1995, the reasons why many considered an eighth fool hardy, only a half a generation ago became painfully clear. We have reached the biological limits of our turfgrass under the best of conditions. We have surpassed those limits for years like 1995.

Yet, the vocal minority demands forever faster greens and ever shorter fairways. We need to set aside our egos and firmly state that it cannot be done! Our turf can only take so much!

**Have we forgotten what the game of golf is about?** It started in Scotland on sheep pastures, where you teed off for the next hole two club lengths from the cup. Old wood-shafted putters had a few degrees of loft. Ben Hogan played on greens cut at 1/4 of an inch and loved it! It was o.k. to have blades of grass between the ball and the club face on the fairways, it was part of the game.

The saddest reality of all is the average golfer would prefer greens cut at 3/16th and dense bluegrass fairways at 3/4—one inch. To quote David Burns of the rock group "The Talking Heads," My God, how did I (we) get here?!"

## *Superintendents On The Move*

**Michael Brower**, formerly at Minikahda Club is now at Hillcrest Country Club. . . **Michael Brual**, Hazeltine National Golf Club to Faribault Golf and Country Club. . . **Paul G. Diegnau**, CGCS, River Falls Golf Club to Keller Golf Course. . . **Michael Teske**, Prairie Ridge Golf Club to Elmcrest Country Club in Iowa. . . **Tim O'Driscoll**, Woodhill Country Club to Rochester Golf and Country Club. . . **Paul Mayes**, Nasu Highland Golf Club to Iono Golf Club in Japan.