



# GREENKEEPING— TODAY *and* TOMORROW

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## CHAPTER V—THE INFLUENCE OF LABOR-SAVING MACHINERY ON GOLF COURSE MAINTENANCE

**G**OLF clubs throughout the United States are reducing, or have already reduced, the course maintenance budget. Some reductions have been made because of real necessity, some because of believed necessity, many because other clubs have done so, and some because of the belief that better management will be the result.

Whatever the cause is, the fact remains that the budgets have been reduced and the Green chairmen and greenkeepers are faced with the problem of redistribution of the budget.

Undoubtedly the quickest and surest way to meet the reduced budget is to employ fewer laborers, and use labor-saving machinery, for labor is usually thought to make up a large proportion of the golf course maintenance budget.

A consideration of what labor-saving machinery has done for golf maintenance in the past is extremely important at this cost-cutting period of golf course maintenance. Without doubt the greatest labor-saving machinery has been mowing equipment, and its influence on golf course maintenance has been very marked, and I believe in many cases misunderstood.

### GOLFERS DEMAND BETTER PLAYING CONDITIONS

**T**HE modern mowing equipment has made possible the playing quality of the tees, fairways, rough, and greens. Such playing conditions are so good, and expected, that none will tolerate a reversion to the old greens and fairways. The "labor-saving" machinery has influenced the golfers'

demand for better playing conditions by making such conditions possible. Has golf course labor really been reduced by the use of such equipment?

Twenty years ago, one shepherd tending his flock of sheep, or in some instances the sheep alone, mowed the fairways at a very low cost, or no cost at all to the golf club. Today one mechanic (?) tending a tractor which hauls three, five or seven cutting units, mows the fairways. During the growing season; when the fairway watering system is liberally throwing water, and the fertilizer spreaders are distributing their stimulants (in some cases "hooch" to the grass) these modern fairway mowers work continuously throughout the week. Are labor requirements reduced by their use? No!

Thirty years ago putting greens were mowed by hand-pushed machines cutting approximately the same width of swath as the modern machine. Those machines were operated by men who walked just as fast (probably faster) than the modern greensman. Has "labor-saving" machinery really reduced the labor payroll? No! The influence has been to increase the labor payroll to maintain the playing conditions made possible by the use of modern machinery, and more labor hours are required.

This fact applies to all golf course machinery. Believe it or not, but be sure to answer this question. How many golf courses are being maintained today with fewer laborers than they had in 1911?

The greatest influencing factor in the increased labor payroll is "labor-saving" machinery.

Today, executive committees and Green committee chairmen are listening with an attentive ear, and in a receptive frame of mind to any salesman having a labor-saving device to sell, and the magic phrase—"this piece of equipment represents a saving of so many hours of labor"—leaves nothing but the signature on the dotted line to close the sale. Green chairmen, before signing the order, think what experience has taught, and carefully weigh and evaluate all other factors involved. Labor-saving machinery is valuable to golf course maintenance if properly used and managed, but it can be the direct influence that will cause great expense if its influence is not fully understood.

#### LABOR-SAVING MACHINERY MUST PRODUCE RESULTS

**L**ABOR-SAVING machinery must produce results equally as good or of better quality, at a lower labor-hour cost and a lower total cost of any unit, to be worthy of consideration. On golf courses, as any place where plant life is a factor the results must also guarantee no ill effect upon the turf that will be cumulative.

Labor-saving machinery and devices have been made for routine work only. This is quite natural and right, because an obvious and definite saving of labor can be made in this type of work. However!—the devices have caused routine work to become still more routine or mechanical.

Golf course maintenance can be divided into routine work, new construction, alterations, and turf nursing or puttering. Other divisions can be made to suit the individual club, but whatever they are, routine work and puttering or nursing are the two most important operations.

Routine operations on most golf courses represent the bare necessities of golf course maintenance. Whether the management is good or bad, they consume an almost uniform number of labor hours each week or day. Routine work seldom considers its influence on the turf next week, next month, or next year. Today is all important.

The present *very dangerous* influence that labor-saving machinery has on golf course maintenance is not due to the machinery itself, but to shortsighted management. This dangerous influence

is the cutting of labor hours to carry on routine work only. "If we can reduce labor-hour requirement on this or that job", says the manager, "we can save money."

If the influence of the labor-saving machinery is not great enough to cause a reduction of labor to a routine minimum it is influencing a reduction to such a low point that turf nursing is absolutely out of the question, and new construction and alterations reduced to far below the longed-for changes. Note, I said reduced for the new construction and alterations. No matter how small the budget is, a Green chairman would not consider his job properly done if some changes were not made.

#### BEWARE OF TOO MUCH LABOR SAVING

**T**HE influence of labor-saving machinery will mean one of two results. Golf course labor will be reduced to such a point that all labor will be operating labor-saving machinery doing routine jobs! No labor will be available to nurse the sick green, to do the many individually small jobs that make the golf course enjoyable. An emergency will be a calamity and small repair jobs become rebuilding operations.

Such an influence of labor-saving machinery is being fostered on many golf courses this year. The result will be very costly in money, prestige, members and turf. Such an influence is not intended by the manufacturers of labor-saving machinery, and the better type of salesmen warn against such an influence.

On the other hand, labor-saving machinery can influence a course to better conditions at lower labor-hours cost. If a portion only of the labor hours saved by any device is stricken from the payroll, and the remaining hours released, are applied, first to turf nursing and puttering, and then to alterations and construction, then real benefit can be derived from the use of labor-saving machinery. The hours released are turned into a profit, and under such management the influence is for the good.

Labor-saving machinery divides the greenkeepers' force into two groups. One, mechanics, so-called or actual, and two "lowly laborers." This is a very great influence that the greenkeeper must correct. The "mechanics" look down on the

laborers, have no compassion for the turf and enjoy "crabbing" and repairing their machines. Unfortunately they become very familiar with the greenkeeper and can influence him to purchase more machinery which is not needed, and frequently one of them is made foreman.

The laborer feels his position because he has a natural inferiority complex, is not given the "easy" jobs, and resents the mechanical tearing or destruction of living turf. He thinks of his work as dealing with something which wants to live. The mechanizing of the labor gang, I suppose I must say operating force, to satisfy the mechanic, is very dangerous to good golf course maintenance.

The influence of labor-saving machinery upon the greenkeeper will be that it will increase his importance as a turf expert. Greater value must be placed upon his judgment to compensate for the decreased value as foreman, because of the fewer men to direct. He should not be expected to do more actual work, nor should his value to the club decrease, for he will be more professional.

Properly managed, labor-saving machinery can influence golf course maintenance to more perfect conditions or a better factory product. To accomplish this it must release labor hours from routine work, that they may be employed on nursing and putting work which gives character to any golf course and is conducive to a happy membership and excellent playing conditions.

On the other hand, I repeat, if the influence is to reduce labor from the payrolls to such an extent that nothing but routine work can be performed, the influence is going to be bad, and eventually costly.

The writer is much in favor of the use of labor-saving machines if used to reduce from the payroll only a portion of the hours saved, but is decidedly against the use of such machinery if quality of product is to be impaired by too great a reduction of labor.

*Next Month—Chapter VI—The influence of salesmen, professional golfers, and low handicap members upon the results and cost.*

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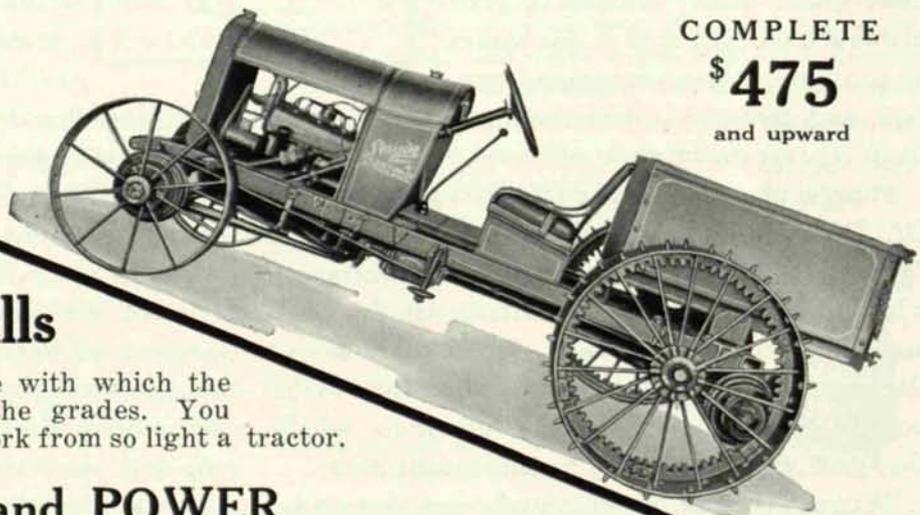
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