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# The NATIONAL GREENKEEPER and TURF CULTURE

The only trade journal in the world devoted to the growing of fine turf grasses.

## Rehabilitating Old Golf Courses

By GRANGE ALVES, *Pro-greenkeeper and Manager  
Acacia Golf Club, Cleveland*

Reprinted from address delivered at the Annual Greenkeepers' Educational Conference in Chicago

OUR worthy president, Mr. MacGregor, has greatly honored me with the task of discussing with you a most interesting subject—the rehabilitation of old golf courses. In delegating this privilege to me, I can sense a certain degree of foresight in the mind of Mr. MacGregor. It may be that he is an admirer of our newly-elected president of the United States, and is hoping to have a portion of the glory in bringing back our lost prosperity, and in returning ten million unemployed to work. If we could convince our several thousand country clubs of the advisability of building their golf courses all over again, the situation as to the unemployed would begin to clear up immediately. This would be very easy to do, if only the clubs had something to use for money.

It is true enough that hundreds of golf courses could stand a lot of revamping and reconstruction . . . that alterations would make the game more interesting for hundreds of thousands of players. A necessary preliminary in each instance of rehabilitation, however, is the dull job of balancing the country club budget.

In 26 years as a professional greenkeeper, and golf architect in the United States, I have seen the



*Very few men (I know of no other) combine in their knowledge and experience every department of golf course construction and management as does Grange Alves. He built the Acacia course and many others—he acts as pro and instructor—he has charge of the maintenance of the course—and he serves as manager of the clubhouse. That takes brains and Grange has them.—Editor.*

courses undergo many changes. When I came to this country from Scotland in 1907, golf had been under way here for nineteen years, but was still in the embryo stage.

### ST. ANDREWS ON THE HUDSON WAS FIRST CLUB

THE first golf club in the United States was organized at Yonkers, near New York City, Nov. 14, 1888. The club was called St. Andrews, and Robert Lockhart, born in Dumferline, Scotland—the home town of Andrew Carnegie—was the organizer. Lockhart, making numerous trips to Dumferline as buyer for his firm, came to the belief that the United States should not be without this indispensable adjunct to civilization.

At Yonkers, Lockhart attracted an enthusiastic recruit in Jack Reid, also from Dumferline, and the first games were played in Reid's orchard. Reid was elected president of the first club, Lockhart declining that honor because it was necessary for him to be abroad so much of the time. A certain John C. Ten Eyck, of historic Dutch stock, was the secretary. It is with considerable satisfaction that I go into detail about these two Dumferline "bairns" and the origin of golf in this country, as it

happens I recently won a bet as a result of an argument on some of the facts.

In the beginning, courses for the playing of the royal and ancient game in this nation were of rather painfully plain design. The putting greens would lead you to believe they were laid out with a plumb lever, square and compass. The greens were almost all perfectly round or perfectly square, and the putting surface practically flat. These greens were generally located in hollows or gulleys, where nature would do the watering, irrigation at that time being considered out of the question. This enabled them to hold all available moisture.

Driving tees were small and square and bunkers had face designs like stone walls. Players did not expect perfect playing conditions in those days; this was before the day of extravagant spending; players were not taxed heavily, and they made the best of what was available. At that, there was one hole that was far superior to anything we have today—the nineteenth.

#### RUBBER CORE BALL CHANGED EVERYTHING

THE first great change in everything relating to golf courses came about 1903 and 1904, when the old gutta percha ball went into the discard, and was superseded by the Haskell ball, with a hard rubber core. The new ball lengthened drives, and in fact, all shots, many yards, and players had to adjust themselves to new conditions, because of the ball's liveliness. Naturally, this brought a necessity for rehabilitating and lengthening the courses. This meant purchase of more land, and almost every club faced the problem. Careful consideration was given all plans, but by 1910 the reconstruction generally was well under way.

It was about this time, I believe, that the big golf "boom" began. The game grew by leaps and bounds. It was about this time, too, that the first fairway power mower, manufactured by the Coldwell Mower company, was introduced. The horse departed from the fairways, and his leather boots were tossed on the ash pile.

The knowledge gathered in these rehabilitation and enlargement processes has been of inestimable value to the study of golf architecture. Credit for the rapid advancement of the game can be given largely to the lively ball.

#### MANY OLD COURSES STOOD THE TEST OF TIME

MANY of those courses rebuilt 20 to 25 years ago have stood well the test of time; they remain, today, fairly modern and interesting. Others have lost their attraction; clubs find their members drifting away to other organizations with more recently-built layouts. Then, too, we have the clubs that started modestly with nine-hole courses, desiring at the time of organization only a "place to knock the ball around." Members of these younger clubs soon want a real course, and eventually, have to dig down in their pockets and build one.

So the subject of rehabilitation, reconstruction and enlargement is always with us. It is a matter that requires a great deal of study. Primarily, the club's officials, who must shoulder the responsibility for whatever is done, should consider first the size of their pocketbook. It is much the same as in going abroad. The steamship company offers you the choice of first, second or third-class passage. If you take first-class, you get the milk and the cream; if second class, the milk without the cream; if third class, you get what is left.

This same thing applies to the original establishment of a golf club. The club that has the vision and the money to buy the best expert knowledge, and supervision, as a rule always gets the best results and has to worry the least of the future. If the course is built of championship caliber and on proper land, with favorable soil conditions, so that maintenance costs will not be excessive, that course is destined for success.

The clubs that suffer the most, in my opinion, are those clubs that, with rehabilitation in mind, seek the most for the least amount of money. They generally wind up confronted with everything wrong, and have to begin all over again.

#### EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN A GREAT BUT COSTLY TEACHER

EXPERIENCE has been a great teacher, and in the era of inflation and overproduction, from 1920 to 1930, there were formed some golf course contracting companies that I blame, along with too credulous club officials, for disastrous results. Eventually new expenditures of money were necessary to correct conditions that, if the job hadn't been let out on too close a margin, would have been right in the first place. It seems to be true that you get what you pay for and no more.

I am not a believer of contracting golf course work. I believe in the old-time practice. My suggestion to any club contemplating changes is to secure the services of a competent architect and greenkeeper. Hold your architect responsible for the planning and frame-work of putting greens, driving tees, traps, etc. Then the greenkeeper should be held responsible to the architect in supervising this part of the work. He should employ whatever equipment and labor is necessary at the lowest possible figure.

After the plans are completed, the job is the greenkeeper's. He knows the texture of his soil, what are its requirements, and what it will take to bring it to perfection. If he grows up with the course, he is familiar with every detail from the beginning. I am sure there are many clubs that can vouch for the success of this practice, who have learned that it is more satisfactory and much more economical.

You have often read articles appearing in our golf magazines, of certain individuals building a standard 18-hole course at a cost that would in our district at least, hardly begin to purchase the grass seed, fertilizer, and galvanized pipe. These articles read well, but if you take time to go and investigate, you will find that these projects generally are built from the top down instead of the bottom up. Whether building old or new golf courses, one of the most expensive mistakes a club can make is the above type of construction.

Experience has taught me that wherever this kind of construction has been practiced, it has meant beginning all over again. If club executives, who have their club welfare at heart, give the proper attention to procuring the right set-up to solve their problem, they will save money in the end.

It also can be said that there are many clubs existing today, who are striving to correct a wrong start, who would have been much better off if they had started more modestly. In the beginning, they were not financially ready, but they insisted on having a full length 18-hole layout. It is the old story of "keeping up with the Joneses"—trying to maintain the same standard of living as a neighbor, who may have or be making much more money.

#### NINE GOOD HOLES BETTER THAN 18 POOR ONES

**A** CLUB that hasn't the backing to build a real 18-hole layout should do the next best thing—con-

struct nine holes, and build them right. You can always add to a golf course, but trying to straighten out 18 holes that are a hopeless hodge-podge of mistakes, is a task that requires real financing. I should think a club member would prefer nine holes well-built than 18 gone to destruction through trying to stretch \$50,000 to \$75,000.

There is just one more thought I would bring to your attention, having to do with the matters of accessibility and tax rates. There are often clubs located near city limits who have contemplated making alterations on their courses. They hire the best architect possible to recommend his ideas, and when he begins to deal with the problem, he generally concludes by seeking from the club executives information as to land valuation. This is the deciding factor in making his report.

If the information is unfavorable, a conscientious architect tells the club the truth. He advises them to sell out and get another site, further from the city. If, with an excessive tax valuation, he goes ahead with the work, the membership soon finds itself burdened with high dues, assessments, and you hear the complaint about the high cost of golf. This is bad for the game; it creates the impression that only millionaires can play. What the members of these highly accessible clubs are paying for is not golf, but for the upkeep of their property. Further from the city, even though it did take a few more minutes to get there, they would be much more contented, and the club much more successful.

In this day and age, transportation is becoming more and more rapid with every succeeding year. What used to be a 45-minute drive is now less than half an hour. I bring up this point because it may happen that in the audience are greenkeepers or members of clubs who are studying rehabilitation problems. Or it may be, that some of you come from clubs that are faced with virtual extinction because of diminishing revenue in the face of taxes that refuse to come down to any appreciable degree. There is but one solution; to give up the club built on expensive land, and start again elsewhere.

#### SOUND ADVICE TO THE GREENKEEPER

**I** MIGHT wind up this talk with some advice to the greenkeeper—advice that in most instances hardly is needed, but that does no harm by repetition.

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greenkeepers. It is what we call welfare labor. The city issues grocery orders to many unfortunates and they have to work them out on the golf course. They stay three or four days and then new ones are sent out. A crew may consist of bank clerks to bricklayers. Many of them are too weak to work. Many can never learn to do manual work. Others will not work. You have to be with them all the time, because they have a habit of picking up golf balls. You can not let them go. It is trying to do things well under these conditions, but we appreciate that the other fellow may have it just as hard or harder on his course.

The municipal course has to be self-maintaining. Golf receipts have dropped off. Competition has increased. It will be necessary to maintain good courses on less money. All we can do is work hard and intelligently, hoping that Mother Nature will stick with us.

## Rehabilitating Old Courses

(Concluded from page 7)

If your club board of directors has in mind any extensive alteration of your golf course, study the problem yourself, then go to your chairman of greens, or whoever you deal with, and make yourself heard. If he has in mind hiring some alleged authority on golf construction who you know to be what in legal parlance is called a "shyster" (a fellow who doesn't know his stuff), tell him the danger of such a procedure.

Go over the course with your chairman, and show him how much money it will cost to do the job well—to have interesting greens and hazards, and to carpet the fairways with real turf. Try to find out how much the club intends spending, and figure out for yourself whether it will do the job. If you are convinced the money allotted will not cover materials and labor, speak your mind. Better to have an old-fashioned course, well kept up, than a fancy new one with only a few blades of grass here and there.

### ALVES DOES NOT ADVISE RECONSTRUCTION

I DO not advise any reconstruction. Far from it. I hope that there will be much rehabilitation in the next few years; it

will make more work for the bona fide architects, seed salesmen, and the equipment manufacturers, and the wideawake and progressive greenkeeper. But, being an architect and greenkeeper myself, I would be a poor business man, if, even in these times, I attempted to encourage haphazard jobs and slipshod work that, in the end, would help none of us. If the club has the money and if conditions are correct—go ahead; if not—forget it.

## Municipal Maintenance

(Concluded from page 17)

Complete fertilizer is mixed in the top-dressing with the mixer because a uniform mix is obtained. This plant puts our top dressing program on a business-like basis.

Progress can be made by the greenkeeper when he is responsible to one man. He happens to be the County Engineer on my course. That is not the case on the average municipal course. There is a manager of the clubhouse who likes to tell the greenkeeper what to do. Then there is the Park Foreman, Recreation Supervisor, General Superintendent and Park Commissioner. The greenkeeper is responsible to all of them. He can not buy his own material. He can not hire his own men. No one takes a personal interest in him, no one encourages him. He works hard and tries to make his course the best he can.

### WELFARE LABOR IS A PROBLEM

A NEW problem reaches the municipal greenkeeper that does not affect other

## Turf Culture News

(Concluded from page 23)

Association have disbanded or gone bankrupt in the last three years, golf continues to boom in Cincinnati, for it was learned Tuesday that plans are under way for the building of another golf and country club in this district.

The proposed new club may be built on a site overlooking the Little Miami River above Remington. Besides an 18-hole golf course facilities will be provided for tennis, aquatic and equestrian sports.

Charles E. Dornette, attorney, is one of a group organizing the club.

Stewart & Stewart, architects, are designing and receiving bids on the clubhouse, which will cost \$60,000.

\* \* \*

### PAMPA, TEX.

All that is needed to place the Country club golf course in the best condition of the year is a nice heavy rain. The rough is clear of weeds and the fairways have been rolled until the ball has a long, straight roll after flight.

Greens and tee boxes have been worked over and the putting surfaces are deep and even. The new drags give any kind of surface desired.

Caretaker Autry is waiting for the rain to make the grass green before he rolls the course again.



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