



Better Turf for Better Golf

# TURF MANAGEMENT

from the USGA Green Section

## The Superintendent, the Chairman and the Locker Room

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IN MY FIFTEEN YEARS as Chairman of the Green Committee at the Algonquin Club, near St. Louis, I have learned that on account of the differing whims and fancies of the members, there is no royal road to a wholly satisfied membership. I have been impressed with the varieties and the difficulty of the problems confronting the superintendent.

Without disparaging his excellent work and that of turf foundations, it seems to me that our progress comes largely through trial and error. What we learn seems to be somewhat of a negative character. We learn what not to do. If we try one thing, we wish we had tried another.

We are like the bachelor who married late in life. Having gained a knowledge of both single monotony and matrimonial torments, he concluded, "Whether you marry or not, you'll regret it."

The difficulty stems from the time elements. Our experiments are year-to-year affairs. It takes several years to determine the success of any venture. We have acquired answers to some problems, none to others. Our experiences make skeptics of us.

We recently spent \$4,000 on a reseed-

ing program, preceded by burning the fairways, with magnificent results; but being a little skeptical, I said to the superintendent, "Suppose all this new grass disappears this summer and leaves the same old crabgrass, goosegrass and so forth and the members ask us what we are going to do. What is our answer?" It came very quickly: take to the woods.

On the theory of trying anything once, one of my predecessors tried yarrow on the fairways. During the hot, dry summers the experiment seemed justified, but the third hot wet summer proved disastrous. Only a few patches survived and when Miss Joyce Wethered, then British Champion and now Lady Heathcoat-Amory, was playing an exhibition at our club and noticed the yarrow, she said: "I see you are troubled with yarrow over here, too."

While the superintendent's job is precarious, let no one contend that the path of the Chairman of the Green Committee is strewn with roses. If a footprint in the sand costs the player a stroke, he rarely fails to tell the Chairman about it. If the topdressing on the green is too heavy or the cut of the green too short or too long

to suit his style or if long and continuous rain in hot weather seems to justify the closing of the course or if he loses his ball in the leaves or the rough, it is the Chairman who invariably hears about it.

#### **The Dangers in the Job**

The Chairman can be an asset or a liability to a club. If he thinks he knows too much about grass culture and maintenance and insists upon putting his ideas to work, the Lord help the golf course. On the other hand, if he knows nothing about the subject and therefore is unable to appreciate the problems of the superintendent, he is worthless as a liaison officer between the superintendent and the locker room.

Likewise, if the Chairman hasn't the courage to risk the displeasure of members when the situation requires, he is failing in an important aspect of his job.

#### **Importance of Publicity**

The smart Chairman adopts a program of keeping his Board and membership well informed in advance of his various moves, and he must have sufficient knowledge to answer capably questions asked of him by the Board and the members.

Two experiments illustrate the importance of publicity.

For many years our greens had thinned out badly in the summer. Our superintendent then was of the old school which was reluctant to pay much attention to the agronomists, the agricultural departments or the USGA Green Section. He felt that these theorists could not improve on his wide experience. In spite of my efforts this attitude continued and so did our troubles. Finally, I found it necessary to find a new superintendent, who discovered that our greens were so heavily compacted that nothing short of violent treatment could improve the situation. He concluded that mere tining would not be sufficient unless we tined with very heavy forks. To this end he built a heavy instrument capable of puncturing the green with very large holes. Before the program started, we illustrated the problem to our Board and to a good many members who were present.

We showed, with bricks taken out of the green, how compact the soil was and, with bricks made with suitable soil, how supple the soil should be. Consequently, when the work began, the members had been fully warned, were conversant with the problem and were willing to endure the temporary inconvenience.

A contrary experience occurred when we decided several years ago that we should experiment with five or six of our fairways by chemical burning and reseeded. I asked a reluctant Board to permit the experiment, but no publicity was given to it. After the application of the chemicals, these fairways were denuded of grass and the Chairman came in for a tremendous amount of condemnation. The members were going to take special delight in replacing him at a coming election. Fortunately, before the election occurred, our watering system and a favorable season made these fairways so far superior to the others that the members forgot their determination to relieve the Chairman of his job and re-elected him by almost a unanimous vote. The condemnation and criticism could have been avoided by means of adequate publicity.

#### **Informing the Membership**

Another publicity expedient was to have a dinner meeting at which a grass program was presented to the membership in order to acquaint them with the problems. At this meeting the Chairman gave a little talk about the grass plant, the function of the leaves and the roots, soil conditions and fertilization and then turned the meeting over to the superintendent for a question period. Most members having lawns were highly pleased and they had become acquainted with the course problems.

A serious problem with the Chairman is closing the golf course when weather conditions demand. In our district our greens sometimes suffer heavily unless this is done. Here the Chairman must assume the responsibility, upon the advice of the superintendent, and he must not waver in his determination.

The Chairman must insist that the super-

intendent has only one boss, not 300, and any criticisms or suggestions must come to the Chairman, not to the superintendent.

Another difference which has been resolved is the desire of the low-handicapped man to lengthen the holes or tighten the greens with bunkers and the desire of the 100 shooters either to leave the course as is or make it easier. This has been resolved by eliminating all bunkers that merely penalize the 100 shooter and installing bunkers at the greens which penalize a bold shot gone wrong. If a scratch player wants to attempt to reach a green on his second shot, a bunker requires a shot to be perfect. But the 100 shooter, who is satisfied to reach the green in three or four, is not handicapped particularly by the tight green.

A conscientious Chairman must be mindful of the fact that he and the superintendent must exert every effort to provide the best possible course for the pleasure and pride of the membership. But he has learned from experience that most members are somewhat myopic. The average member is interested only in the immediate. He finds it difficult to understand, for example, why we should spoil a beautiful green, and his game in the early spring, by brushing and topdressing. Naturally he knows nothing of the consequence of matting, and therefore it means nothing to him. He is thinking in terms of today's play, not the many tomorrows.

The Chairman must support the super-

intendent in his programs when they are known to be beneficial, even though they risk the displeasure of members. Like the surgeon who may amputate a leg to save the patient, the Chairman and the superintendent must be willing, however reluctantly, to displease and be criticized and spoil a few days play, rather than multiply the bad days of the future.

#### **No Appeasement**

For the superintendent and Chairman to do a good job and succeed in giving the most pleasure to the members, they must not be appeasers in order to postpone criticism. They must not be thin skinned and permit the jibes and taunts of a few or even many of the members to get under their skins and tempt them to entertain the idea of throwing in the towel.

Acting from a genuine motive—to do everything to build better turf for the members' enjoyment—the superintendent and Chairman must pursue their efforts, willing rather to be replaced than to let possible criticism induce them to avoid a necessary, if annoying, practice.

It must not be inferred from the above observation that constructive criticism and suggestions should not be welcomed. Indeed, they should be invited. In our interest and absorption in our work we often neglect many details of grooming the course, or some detail or inconvenience, and a suggestion or criticism of a member may be a welcome reminder.

## **The Turfgrass Research Program at Texas A. & M.**

**by MARVIN H. FERGUSON**

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**T**HE FIRST Texas turfgrass conference was held in 1947. An enthusiastic group attended and during the conference the Texas Turfgrass Association was formed. The purposes of this Association were to foster and support research on turf problems of importance in the state.

Since the founding of the Association much progress has been made in the development of turf-management informa-

tion. A research program was inaugurated by Texas A. & M. College immediately following the first turf conference. The early efforts were on a relatively small scale, because there was a scarcity of funds for support of the work. Accumulation of a large number of different types of bermudagrass which were known to exist in the turf areas of the state was considered to be a matter of primary importance. The