



You—Your Golf Course—and The Turfgrass Consultant

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There is an old English proverb which goes:

If I give you a penny and you give me a penny—neither of us will be any richer. But if you give me an idea and I give you an idea—then we are both richer!

And so consulting had this meager beginning.

Where did we come from? How did turfgrass management evolve? History can be an interesting and helpful study.

Happily for us there are more and more people in this world who love to play golf. The National Golf Foundation tells us there are over 16 million golfers in the U.S. today.

It seems it all started over 800 years ago at a major sea trading port in Scotland. In the 12th Century, St. Andrews was a trade center visited by ships from throughout that part of the world. The Dutch traders found the green linksland between harbor and town ideally suited for a popular ball and stick game from the Netherlands they called "het Kolven." The sandy coastal soils, the smooth wind-blown, rolling terrain and the soft, springy turf sustained by howling gales and gentle rains produced the green links. Natural too, were the pits of sand where sheep huddled for shelter, later to become hazards in the evolving game of "goff."

Through the centuries the game cast its spell over these people, their land and eventually over the earth. The game persisted from the 12th Century and, by the 1700s, townfolk of St. Andrews simply called the narrow strip of land leading from town to the harbor "The Green." The course was known in this way for generations. They would tee up with a handful of sand, hopefully drive the leather-wrapped feather ball to a spot they called the "fair green" all the while keeping it out of the surrounding heather and mass of entanglements. Once on the fair green, the next target was the "play green," a roughly prepared area with an equally roughly prepared hole in it. In early goff, the winner was determined by the number of holes he won in a contest, not the total number of strokes taken during the round. Whether it be by 5 or 15 was of minor concern, just as long as he won the hole.

Now, this is 1976 and we in the United States are celebrating our 200th birthday. But it was in 1754 that the Society of St. Andrews Golfers (later to become the Royal and Ancient Golf Club) was formed. The Old Course at St. Andrews has always belonged—and still does—to the citizens of St. Andrews. However, the Society of St. Andrews Golfers in 1754 sought special playing privileges there. We would probably call them "starting times"

today. In return for this privilege an agreement was worked out with the town fathers to pay for the maintenance of the Old Course. This is a very interesting historical point. It seems the Society was actually concerned with the care and maintenance of the turf on the Old Course in 1754 while it was not until 1892 (138 years later) that it assumed responsibility for The Rules of Golf.

By the end of the 1700s the first greenkeepers came into being. Not unlike today they were charged with making things better for the golfer. In fact, from the records of the Aberdeen Golf Links in 1820, we find the club agreed to pay Alexander Monroe £4 a year (approximately \$15) for "taking charge of the links and providing accommodations for the member's boxes." Monroe was also to pay particular attention to keeping the holes in good order. In 1822, two years later, Monroe's salary was reduced to £3 a year!

Long before there was golf on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, the Society of St. Andrews Golfers decided to rebuild some of their old greens. This was in 1832! Just think, in the United States in 1832 Andrew Jackson was re-elected as President. In this same era, Maine became a state in 1820; the Erie Canal was completed in 1825; and Texas declared its independence from Mexico in 1836. At St. Andrews, they were busy rebuilding and enlarging their "old greens." The enormous and famous "double greens" as we know them today were being built in 1832.

And so the care of "The Green" had its beginning. The early golf professionals frequently became greenkeepers. Even in those days, neither job was known for its security. Old Tom Morris, still considered the grand old man of golf and four times winner of the British Open, became greenkeeper of St. Andrews in 1865 and continued until 1904. He had two rules for his turf maintenance program:

- 1) "Mare Sound, Honeyman," was his cry for his assistant, Honeyman, to apply evermore

topdressing of sharp sand to the greens, tees and fairways. Tom Morris said it was needed "to maintain the character of the grass."

- 2) His second rule was, "Nay Sunday Play. The golf course needs a rest even if the golfers don't."

And to this day—there is Nay Sunday Play on The Old Course. As a tribute to Old Tom Morris, the first patented hole cutter was developed by one Charles Anderson and presented to him in 1869.

Golf was now sinking its roots in our country and around the world. The first turf garden in America was established at Manchester, Conn., in 1885 and the first turfgrass research was recorded in 1895 at Kingston, R.I. Grazing sheep were still being used in the early 1900s for mowing and nurturing the green cover of golf courses. Although the lawn mower was invented in the 1830's, it was slow to be accepted. It was much less expensive to mow the grass with sheep.

Now two explosions lay just ahead for golf in America. The first occurred in 1913 when an unknown Francis Ouimet, a 20-year-old caddie, beat the world's greatest golfers of the day, Englishmen Vardon and Ray. This was at the U.S. Open Championship at The Country Club, Brookline, Mass. The popularity of the game soared.

About the same time, agricultural science had budded and was about to bloom. The USGA, organized in 1894, supported publication of a new book in 1917 called, "Turf for Golf Courses" written by Drs. Piper and Oakley of the United States Department of Agriculture. These men were not only scientists, but golfers as well.

The Green Section of the USGA was formed in November, 1920, and gained support from green chairmen and green keepers alike. It is difficult for us today to imagine or understand the complaints of the golfer even 40 years ago! Disease was the big grass killer of those days, and Dr. John Monteith,

One of the double greens at St. Andrews, rebuilt in 1832, is visited by the author.





At St. Andrews, the linksland between harbor and town became known as "The Green."

then Director of the Green Section, developed the first effective fungicides for their control. Many of his findings are still in use today. The march of science made possible new machinery, new grasses, new chemical fertilizers, weed controls, insecticides, improved soil mixes, irrigation and drainage designs, etc. All followed in blazing succession from the early 1920's on.

Today the golf course superintendent receives more advice than he can possibly handle. All 500 club members know more about growing grass on the course than he does. The club manager, the golf professional, the salesmen, his wife, the conferences, the university, the Green Section—every one is in the game! But a wise man once said, "Advice is only as good as its source," and that immediately eliminates a lot of people.

Turfgrass consultants are a product of today's technology and golfer demands. There is a need to share and exchange information along all those interested in professional turfgrass management. The truism, "No one has all the answers" is more applicable today than ever before.

The Green Section was the first turfgrass consulting service, and today, it remains the only agency devoted solely to golf course turf, its playing conditions and its management. Herb Graffis, of *Golldom*, has said, "The USGA's Green Section is the biggest bargain any sports organization—amateur or professional—gives its players and the public."

Today, private consultants are slowly but surely coming onto the scene. Florida is probably the most active ground for the private consultant. He is usually a retired golf course superintendent, a golf professional or, increasingly, a commercial representative. Some private consultants come from uni-

versity life. Active as well as retired university people have found the practice an interesting and rewarding career.

The Extension Service offered by State Universities is another source of consultation assistance. County Agricultural Agents are available in most counties throughout the country and can offer information in many scientific turfgrass management areas.

I'd like to pose a few very tough questions and follow them with some very tough answers:

- (1) *Question:* With so many specialists available from all sources today, why should a club spend money for a consultant?

Answer: We think we may have already answered part of this question: i.e., "Good advice is only as good as its source." Many specialists are available today not only from State Universities but also from commercial firms, turf products salesmen, trade journals and scientific magazines. This is all to the good. Indeed, the more factual information one has, the better he will perform. In this regard, the USGA Green Section has two things going for it; 1) It has factual turf management information and experience for golf and, 2) It has no axes to grind.

- (2) *Question:* What should you expect from a consultant; at least from a USGA Green Section Consultant?

Answer: you should expect to have assistance and support for a better golf course. You should expect to be kept up to date on research and program review. After all, two heads are better than one. You should expect honesty, new ideas, openness, unbiased recommendations, support, understanding

and fairness, encouragement and professionalism. You should not expect to be second-guessed, embarrassed or to receive phony praise. Honest praise, Yes! Manufactured praise—No!

- (3) *Question:* What can a superintendent do when a consultant is called in without his approval?

Answer: The first thing I would do would be to ask myself, "How did this situation develop in the first place?" The answer often lies in the fact that something has gone wrong with turf management operations. At times a superior feels the need for additional information or possibly different results on the golf course. He is looking for a new approach, another evaluation perhaps and the wise superintendent will use the situation to his ultimate benefit.

Remember, a consultant is not after the superintendent's job. He is not interested in holding the superintendent's salary down. The consultant's success and effectiveness comes only from helping the superintendent do the best possible job under his conditions.

- (4) *Question:* How can a superintendent most effectively use a consultant?

Answer: It is the golf course superintendent who controls the effectiveness of the consultant. Without the superintendent's interest and good intentions, the consultant can only fail. The superintendent must be dissatisfied with mediocrity and have a desire to move ahead and produce the best possible golf course with the funds available. The superintendent should be the leader and know what problems are the most important ones and

have his own plans for corrective action. Then, he should expect the consultant to comment, offer his experiences and suggestions and what he has seen others accomplish in this regard.

There is nothing more defeating for a consultant than to visit a course and have the superintendent say, "Well, what do you want to see today?" With the superintendent's leadership, he can effectively use the consultant to gain his objectives in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

- (5) *Question:* Do you really need a consultant?

Answer: It depends on what you mean by "need." If you are talking about basic needs, such as survival, all anyone really needs is food, fiber and shelter, but in the normal run of things, a good consultant can be one of the most valuable professional tools in the superintendent's arsenal. He can be a positive force. He can be used effectively in innumerable ways in order to achieve objectives and goals. He can help the superintendent become more valuable to his club by contributing to his program.

Like golf cars, turfgrass consultants are now a fact of life and part of golf. They grow in numbers with each passing year. Some are good, some are bad, some have ulterior motives, some do not, some are effective while others fail. But consultants seem to be here to stay, and it is the wise man who will use them to his advantage.

Tom Mascaro said it best when he said: "There is no way, in this life, for you and me to make all the possible mistakes by ourselves. If we are smart, we will learn from the mistakes as well as the successes of others."

A "wee bunker" on the Old Course.

