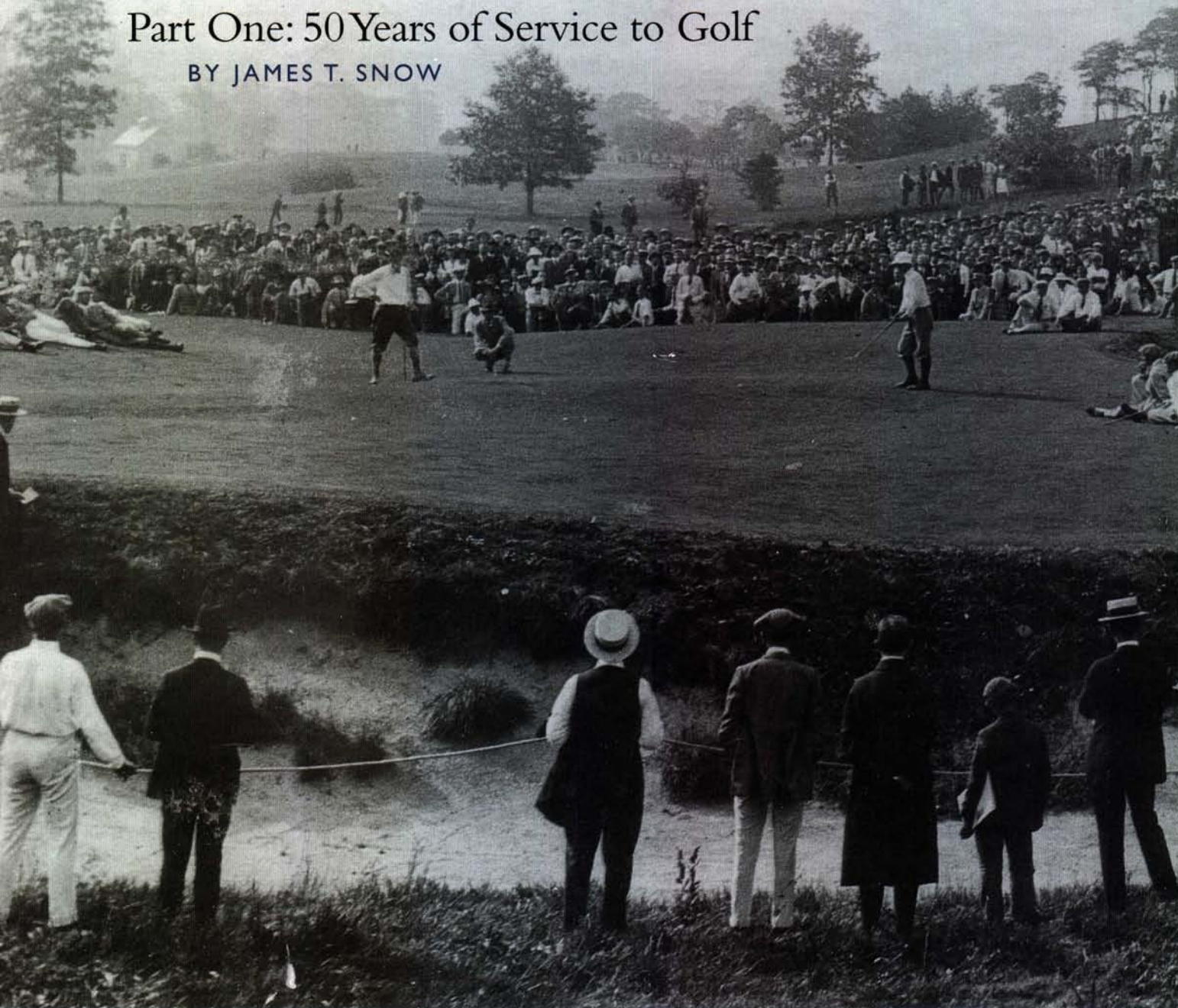


THE TURF ADVISORY SERVICE

Part One: 50 Years of Service to Golf

BY JAMES T. SNOW



Play during the 1920 U.S. Open Championship at the Inverness Club (Inverness, Ohio). E. J. Marshall, then chairman of the Green Committee, could not find impartial, authoritative agronomic information to help in their preparation efforts. His search led him to the USGA and the United States Department of Agriculture, who agreed to collaborate in the development of scientific information relating to golf course turf. The result was the formation of the USGA Green Section on November 30, 1920.

When the USGA Green Section's new Turf Advisory Service got off the ground in 1953, could the founders ever have imagined that it would celebrate its golden anniversary in much the same form and with much the same purpose? After all, for the previous 32 years, since its inception in 1921, the Green Section had been primarily a research organization, founded on a need to conduct research and distribute research findings that would help golf courses provide better turf for better golf. Could this new program succeed, or



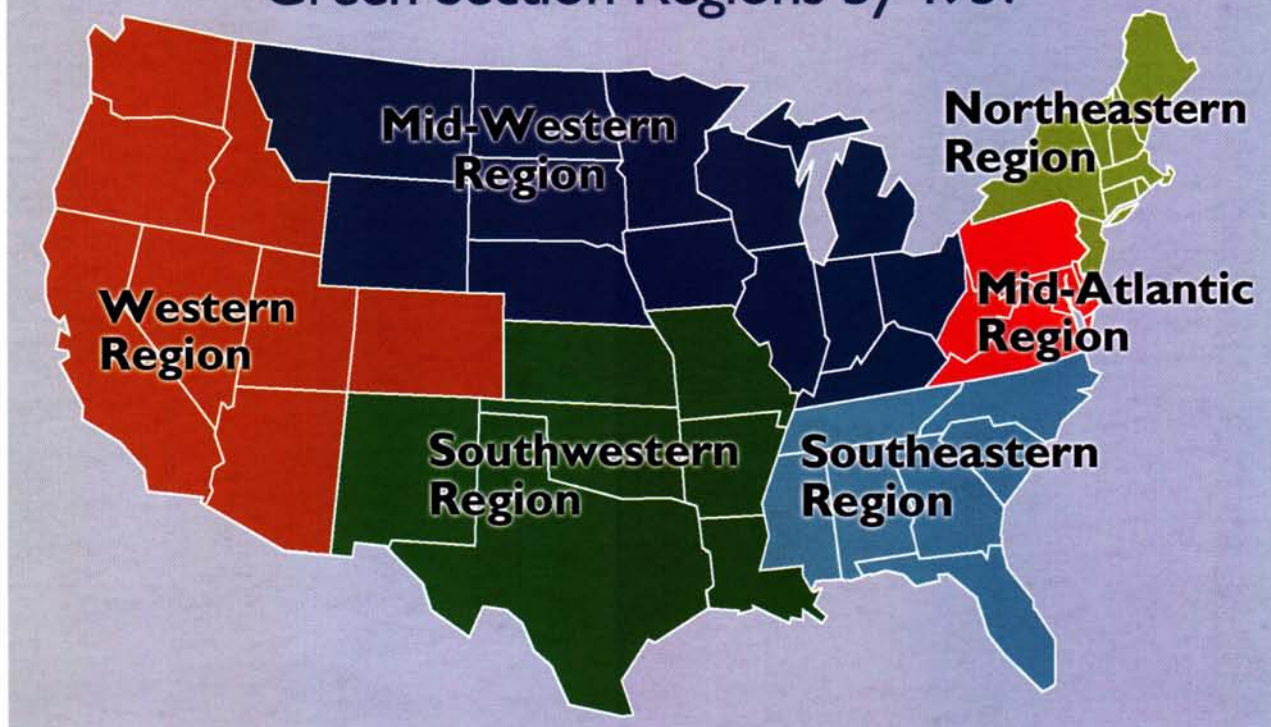
would the need for the Green Section fade slowly away?

THE TURF ADVISORY SERVICE — WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT WORKS

The Green Section's Turf Advisory Service (TAS) is a service to the game of golf provided by the United States Golf Association. The cornerstone of the program is the on-site visit to participating courses by an experienced agronomist, followed by a complete written report of his findings and recommendations. The visit usually includes a

tour of the golf course with the course superintendent and course officials, and many topics are discussed. Today there are 18 regional agronomists located in 13 offices throughout the country. Each agronomist is thoroughly familiar with golf course management problems and solutions in his local territory, and is able to share that information with participating courses. We often are asked about what a golf course can expect by participating in the program. The short answer is that each course has its own special needs and stands to benefit in its own unique

Green Section Regions by 1957



| | Year Established | First Regional Director |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Western Region | 1953 | Charlie Wilson |
| Southwestern Region | 1953 | Marvin Ferguson |
| Northeastern Region | 1954 | Al Radko |
| Southeastern Region | 1954 | B. P. Robinson |
| Mid-Atlantic Region | 1955 | Charlie Hallowell |
| Mid-Western Region | 1957 | Jim Holmes |

way. Nevertheless, the benefits generally fall into one or more of the following categories. With the help of the agronomist, the course can:

- Establish long-range plans and preventative maintenance programs to avoid future problems.
- Obtain objective, unbiased advice with no commercial ties.
- Benefit from a second set of eyes that sees the good and bad of more than 100 courses each year.
- Receive feedback from the agronomist, who serves as a sounding board for ideas from the golf course superintendent and the course officials alike.
- Receive help in solving problems at hand.
- Save money! Countless times a simple suggestion from the Green Section has saved many times the cost of the visit.
- Document problems and progress from year to year via the agronomist's written reports.

To obtain a visit from a Green Section agronomist, a fee is paid to the USGA and the visit is scheduled. The fee has increased over time, but it covers less than 50% of the cost of maintaining a staff to provide the service. The remainder is subsidized by the USGA. In 2002, more than 1,600 golf courses availed themselves of the service, and nearly 2,000 visits were made by our 18 regional agronomists. USGA agronomists also speak at hundreds of meetings and conferences each year and write countless articles for various industry publications, thereby spreading the word about good turf management to thousands of others responsible for providing the best possible playing conditions for their golfers. The TAS is truly a service to the game, helping golf courses everywhere provide *better turf for better golf*.

HOW THE TURF ADVISORY SERVICE EVOLVED

As it so happens, the concept of direct service to USGA member clubs by visiting agronomists had its roots in the 1920s and perhaps even earlier. Drs. Charles V. Piper and Russell A. Oakley, two USDA grass experts, became the first chairman and co-chairman, respectively, of the Green Section when it was established in November of 1920. Both were accomplished scientists and golfers, and both had consulted with golf courses



Marvin H. Ferguson, 1940-1951, 1953-1968*

Note: Dates in picture captions indicate years with the USGA. *Asterisk indicates years as Turf Advisory Service agronomist.



Charles Hallowell, 1955-1961*

many times before 1920. Dr. Piper assisted renowned golf course architect C. B. McDonald in 1908 when McDonald was trying to grow-in his new masterpiece, The National Golf Links of America, in eastern Long Island. Piper's fertilization recommendations were instrumental in getting grass to grow on the very sandy soil at this site.

Although the focus of their work was golf turf research during the 1920s, both Piper and Oakley and other USGA scientists of the era consulted with golf courses as time allowed, usually in conjunction with travel to meetings and conferences across the country. It was called the "Advisory Service" at that time, and the only charge connected with the service was the payment of expenses. Because of time constraints, the Green Section staff would visit only a few dozen courses each year, although the annual report of 1938 indicated that more than 150 visits were made in 24 states. When the United States entered WWII in 1942, the Pentagon was built on the site of the Green Section's turf plot area in Arlington, Va., and the office was moved to the new USDA headquarters in Beltsville, Md. Golf activity in general came to a slow crawl, and Green Section scientists joined the war effort as specialists in establishing grass landing strips for airplanes on the European front.

Dr. Fred Grau became the Green Section's director after the war ended in 1945, and his first step was to decentralize the research program. This involved conducting less research work at the turf plot area in Beltsville and instead distributing research dollars to turf experiment



James Holmes,
1957-1969*



James Latham,
1956-1960,*
1984-1994*

With more than 20 colleges and universities conducting turfgrass research, it became clear that putting this research information in the hands of practitioners was an important next step. In 1950 the USGA Executive Committee approved advisory visits for \$50 per day (\$100 for non-member clubs) plus expenses. However, the staff was small and busy, and had limited time to carry out many visits. Written reports were included in the service for the first time.

Dr. Grau had envisioned the Green Section coordinating turfgrass research throughout the country — not just golf turf research, but *all* turf research. In 1952, Charlie Wilson, a research

assistant at the Green Section's office in Beltsville, was sent to Davis, Ca., to set up a regional office to help coordinate research and education efforts in the West.

In the meantime, USGA Executive Director Joe Dey and Green Section Committee Chairman Richard S. Tufts were envisioning something quite different. They saw the need for a broad outreach program whereby Green Section agronomists would dedicate their time to on-site



From left: James "Monty" Moncrief, 1957-1982*; William Bengeyfield, 1954-1978,* 1982-1990; Alexander Radko, 1947-1981,* 1976-1981.

stations across the country. This made sense, since research results would be more pertinent when done on a local level, rather than trying to extrapolate results obtained thousands of miles away in a completely different climatic area. The program was very successful in helping to build good turfgrass management programs at land-grant institutions across the country, as witnessed by the following statistics: In 1945 there were fewer than 10 turf workers at 5 experiment stations; by 1951 there were more than 100 workers at more than 20 experiment stations.

consultations with USGA member clubs and courses, taking research results directly from the experiment stations and applying them to practical problems on a golf course level.

In announcing the new USGA Green Section Regional Turf Service in the February 1953 issue of the *USGA Journal and Turf Management*, Richard Tufts stated: "The emphasis heretofore has been on research, and a large body of knowledge has thus been discovered. Now the emphasis is being changed. Now, stress will be placed upon direct service to USGA member clubs and courses —



B. P. Robinson,
1954-1956*



T.T. (Tate) Taylor, 1956-1961*



Charles Wilson,
1950-1955*

in helping clubs, at the local level, with their own particular problems.”

The first step in getting the new program off the ground was to establish regional offices across the country. Because the reaction of golf courses to the program was uncertain, it was decided to start with a single region and then expand to other areas if demand for the service was strong enough. The Western Region was the first to become established, and Charlie Wilson became the first regional director, covering the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada,

Oregon, Utah, and Washington. A total of 96 courses subscribed to the service in the Western Region in 1953. This success spawned the establishment of an additional five offices throughout the country over the next several years.

So began a program that for 50 years has made untold contributions to the enjoyment of the game of golf through its work with individual golf courses, golf course superintendents, and course officials. Could the founding fathers of the Turf Advisory Service have foreseen the relevance and longevity of the program when they took that bold step in 1953? Perhaps not, but they saw a great need and placed their money on a program that continues to pay big dividends for the game of golf to this day. Not a bad investment!



JAMES T. SNOW is national director of the USGA Green Section.