

UNITED STATES GOLF ASSOCIATION GREEN SECTION

NORTHEASTERN OFFICE

College of Agriculture

Rutgers University

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY



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NORTHEASTERN DIRECTOR

NORTHEASTERN TURFLETTER

Vol. I No. 4

October 1954

A RECORD-BREAKING DECADE

The past decade has brought to us many new records. Every day the headlines carry news of some new record broken. The field of sports has contributed its share -- swimmers are out-doing past records in distance and speed; the four-minute mile has become a reality; golfers are scoring better than in the past; baseball records have consistently fallen; and basketball scores have soared to new heights.

In keeping with the pace it is pleasing to note in another field of golf, without headlines or fanfare, that almost without exception golf courses have accommodated record-breaking crowds over each of the past several seasons.

No attempt is being made here to list the reasons why this is so -- certainly there are several contributing factors -- but the point that is important is that many courses that accommodated from 50 to 100 golfers a week prior to ten years ago now accommodate that much play on a "slow" day. It is not uncommon over weekends to have 300 to 500 golfers "whaling away" at the turf.

What effect has this increase in play had on the turfgrasses? Despite this phenomenon, golf courses as a whole have consistently improved this past decade. The golf course superintendent, his green committee, and turf research workers, just fastened their belts another notch, and tackled the problems as they arose.

This is truly an amazing transition when one considers (and I don't know whether this is fact or fiction) that one noted golf course architect, now gone to his reward, once said that the golf courses were built to accommodate a maximum of 250 rounds of golf a week. If that be true, this is a far cry from the 30,000 rounds (plus) of golf played on some courses in the Northeastern region in one year. Sixty thousand feet is more than just a hat-full -- it is the equivalent of two infantry divisions equipped! These are the same golf courses -- they haven't been completely rebuilt to accommodate the increased play -- so how is this possible?

In keeping with the pace, the superintendent has met the challenge with a determination to train "his athlete" as carefully as any other athlete trains for his record-breaking feats. The superintendent has streamlined his program of maintenance and management; worked out some of the answers with other superintendents;

followed research closely; employed new techniques; picked up machinery that did the job more efficiently; introduced improved grasses; learned to get the most out of the fungicides, insecticides and herbicides applied; improved on watering technique; applied fertilizers judiciously; and generally improved all phases of his program.

In addition, many superintendents have programmed or completed major projects in the re-construction of some of the trouble areas, such as "postage stamp" tees, troublesome greens, and poorly-drained areas -- to mention a few. It should be borne in mind that these projects, plus the regular maintenance and management schedules, must be completed between foursomes, so to speak. Under today's heavy play this is somewhat comparable to a day's flight schedule at La Guardia Field. So don't be quick to fault the superintendent or his green committee if things seem slightly amiss; before you "blow your top" count 60,000 feet!

ALGAE

The heavy rains that accompanied Hurricane "Carol" and "Edna," along with the unusual amount of rainfall that we have had in some sections of the Northeastern region during August and September, have increased the occurrence of algae on putting greens. When soils under greens get to the point where they are soggy there is danger of algae formation. Algae is not a fungus disease; it is thick growth of single-celled plants. These plants are first green in color but as the soils dry they dry, turn black, and form a crust over the surface. This crust can be dangerous as it may shut off the movement of air and water in the soils.

Algae usually occurs on putting greens more so than on other turf areas because greens are watered regularly. When heavy rains occur it upsets the balance and the greens become soggy, the turf thins, and algae begins to form. Usually the first and thickest algae formation is observed on poorly-drained greens.

To minimize trouble from algae, dust hydrated lime at the rate of one pound to each thousand square feet. More than one treatment usually is necessary. Also, extra dressings of fertilizer usually are necessary to compensate for the leaching of nutrients under wet conditions. Under severe conditions, it is sometimes necessary to re-seed or re-sod affected areas. If re-seeded, a complete scarification of the affected area is first necessary in order to break up the crust formed by algae.

DISC SPIKER HELPFUL

Normally during July and August, superintendents hesitate to aerate greens unless trouble of some kind develops. Their hesitancy to aerate during that period stems mainly from the standpoint of player objection. Superintendent Tom Festo, of the Wee Burn Country Club, Darien, Conn., gets around this objection and does the necessary job with a disc spiker in July and August. For the past several years, Tom has used this spiker on his South German bentgrass greens to very good advantage -- isolated dry spots very rarely develop on his greens.

The disc spiker units were purchased and mounted in place of a reel on a power mower for propulsion. Apparently the disc spikers break through the compaction layer which normally develops as a result of heavy play, use of power mowers, etc.

The use of a disc spiker necessitates no insecticide follow-up treatment, nor special watering technique as aeration does during July and August. Used as a supplement to a good program of aeration, disc spiking at Wee Burn has worked out very well.

WINTER PLAY ON GREENS

In the Northeast the question of the feasibility of playing on regular greens during the winter months often "pops up."

When greens are frozen solid it is safe to play them. However, traffic over frozen grass bruises the blades, and footprints show thereafter for some time. Usually the grass outgrows this injury.

When the soils beneath greens are completely thawed it is also supposed to be safe to play them, although the lubricating action of the moisture tends to cement soil particles and undoubtedly adds to compaction troubles during the next season.

Where the real trouble occurs is when the top inch is thawed and the soil beneath is frozen. Playing at that time usually causes severe compaction to set into the upper soil layer. The turf becomes a mass of footprints, and the greens become very bumpy. Injury of this nature is difficult to overcome and the damage may well take many years to rectify. Unfortunately, the condition that brings about this type of injury can occur at any time. The greens may be safe to play at one time of the day but enough thawing may take place during the day to make conditions right for severe injury. Temporary greens for winter play insure better greens during the regular golfing season.

CONTRACT FOR DUAL CONTACT

Lee Kowalski, of the Bellevue Country Club, Syracuse, New York, is one superintendent who has no trouble in keeping his "golf edge." His contract stipulates that he must play the course once a week. Whose idea was this? -- The green committee chairman's! Certainly an important part of the overall picture is the way the turf plays. H'm, nice contract!

SOME FERTILIZE WITH A CYCLONE SEEDER

The cyclone seeder distributes granular fertilizers quickly and uniformly. Several superintendents use it to distribute granular fertilizers over greens. The cyclone seeder fans a swath of approximately nine feet and is an easy way to apply granular fertilizers. Superintendent Harry Meusel, of the Yale Golf Course, New Haven, Conn., uses this technique on his massive putting greens -- some of which measure almost 20,000 square feet.

Northeastern Turfletter

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