



June, 1980



Golf Course Superintendents Association OF NEW ENGLAND, INC.

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Successful Sound-out Session

Although he was somewhat disappointed with the amount of membership input, New England Golf Course Superintendents Association president Ron Kirkman thought last month's by-laws tuneup session at Westover Golf Club was worthwhile and revealing.

The meeting turned into a sound-out period, directed at acquainting NEGCSA members with proposed changes in the association's by-laws. After a 13-year stay with the present guidelines, it appears the time is ripe to make a few alterations.

Some of the changes are simply a matter of semantics. Certain definitions are being restated in clearer and more precise language. And some references are being eliminated so as to streamline the revised set of by-laws.

Members are reminded that voting on any and all changes will take place during the association's July meeting at Mt. Pleasant Country Club in Boylston. "And we won't make an attempt to rush things there," Kirkman advised. "We want to give the membership enough time to think about and study the new proposals. And, when we get to Mt. Pleasant, we will entertain further discussion on them. There'll be no railroad job here."

Probably the most critical of changes pertains to the five-year waiting period before a new member receives full privileges. Presently, a member must be employed as a superintendent in charge of a golf course for at least five years before he becomes fully-franchised (the right to vote and hold association office). The new by-law would reduce that period of time to one year.

Strangely, the Westover confab churned little in way of positive or negative reaction to this drastic change. "I'm not sure why there wasn't any flak here," Kirkman wondered.

"Maybe it was a reflection on the group which showed at Westover. By the time we get to vote on it, there could be some different faces in the crowd. I expect there will be a fight over it. At any rate, I would think it wouldn't go unchallenged."

As a matter of fact, the new suggestion did cause response from the Westover gathering but only in a section that says the member shall be a member of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

One member thought it unfair to include the requirement of joining the national because of the varying financial arrangements superintendents set up with their employers. "I would guess that half of the members belonging to the national do so because their dues are paid by their clubs," he advanced. "That brings the requirement into a shady place because it involves the member's ability to pay national dues. I realize most clubs do pick up the tab. What I would like to know is how many supers would join the national if they had to pay the dues, themselves?"

There was rebuttal to that comment, too. Another member thought the requirement helped the profession gain a show of unity and strength. "We should support the national association since it is a reflection of our concern and interest in our profession," he stated. "Besides, there are a number of benefits derived from being a member of the GCSAA. I don't see how we can have one without the other."

Kirkman was enthused with that particular part of the discussion period. "I thought both sides brought up good points," he said. "I have to be neutral, although I do have an opinion. However, this association is for the members. It should be by the members, too. That's why I would like to get as many viewpoints as possible before the vote."

Outside of the differing outlooks on the national's effect on the New England and other regional associations, most of the Westover group appeared to be in agreement with the changes and the timing of them.

"If anything, this is an educational process in itself," Kirkman added. "I think that we should take a look at the by-laws from time to time and become familiar with them. I only hope more members are present when we take the vote. The more involvement, the more assurance we'll have that any change is for the good of the entire membership."

Gerry Finn

NEXT MEETING

**Super Chairman Tournament
Cohasset C.C.**

June 12, 1980

Host Supt. Art Washburn

**Shotgun 1:00 pm
Dinner After Golf**

Directions:

From route 3 take route 228 and cross route 3A club is on the fifth street on the right. Lambert St.

Congratulations to:

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Voted in as members last meeting.

Ay, there's the rub

by WILLIAM S. BREWER, JR.
Northeastern Agronomist, USGA Green Section

"THOSE WHO DO NOT remember the past are condemned to repeat it." George Santayana said this — or something like it — but he left out one vital element. He didn't mention responsibility! Only as we feel personally responsible are we moved to at least attempt to direct events which become history. In any successful venture, plenty of people are willing to take credit — at the end — for whatever may have been achieved. How many of them, though, had their necks stuck out from the beginning when the outcome was still in question?

The history of any enterprise, whether it fails or succeeds, may sometimes even turn on luck. A golf course, for example, may be blessed with particularly favorable weather that greatly moderates or erases the effects of some serious mistakes. So pin a medal on the weatherman! The astute golf course superintendent knows wherein the determining bit of credit lies.

What we are all interested in achieving, however, is such consistency in conditioning that the course will hold together even in a season with adverse weather. Probably every good golf course superintendent realizes how thoroughly nature can stack the deck, and not a one of them would willingly gamble that next year will bring about such happy circumstances that the golf course under his care will thrive in spite of deficiencies in the resources for providing that care. Yet club officials, owners, and administrators consistently seem to misread the situation.

Almost always the superintendent is held to be ultimately responsible for everything bad that happens on or to his golf course. Without meaning to take away at all from the superintendent's rightful degree of accountability for his golf course, club officials must recognize and assume their own share of responsibility — before the fact — for the events to come in the history of their golf courses. They are the policymakers; it is they who set the limitations of resource and authority. Often it is front office actions either taken, postponed, or overlooked that have, in the end, forced an unhappy decision to make a change. Only a college football coach seems to have chosen a more precarious career than a golf course superintendent.

For a simplified example, consider a golf course hiring a new superintendent

early in fall to maintain greens, tees, collars and fairways that were predominantly annual bluegrass. That winter the course suffered extensive winter turf damage. Very early in the spring, when the time was right for overseeding damaged greens and such, it was also discovered that the irrigation system required some \$30,000 worth of work to make it effectively operational. That expenditure was not authorized until June, well past the time of critical need. The course subsequently experienced a most disappointing season. The superintendent was fired. The policymakers had succeeded once again in failing to take the responsibility to act when the time was appropriate. They succeeded once again to misplace the blame for the consequences of their mistakes.

Something roughly equivalent to this sad scenario is played out at many golf courses each year, and it will very likely be repeated at most of them through several cycles until new leadership arrives with a proper perception of how things function in any undertaking that involves a chain-of-command. The field general is granted a certain amount of authority, and he must assume an equivalent amount of responsibility. However, to at least the extent that the front office places restrictions (financial and otherwise) upon the field general, it retains ultimate responsibility (acknowledged or not) for the outcome as well. The field general may or may not be guilty of failing to make the most effective use of those powers and resources which are given to him, but to hold him solely responsible is a mistake that is all too easily made by those at the top.

Other than pointing to additional obvious instances where front office mistakes significantly contributed to disastrous golf course conditions, which were then made to reflect only upon the golf course superintendent, is there any evidence that this sort of misunderstanding of organizational responsibilities is widespread in the management of golf courses? Yes, if certain inferences be granted, some compelling statistics support a contention that top management must "get its act together" and accept its rightful responsibility for golf course conditions if it expects consistency from its field generals.

Would it be reasonable to assume that, as a group, the top 100 golf courses, as ranked in the November, 1979, *Golf*

Digest, represent excellence in conditioning as well as in challenging design? Certainly. What is interesting to know in this context is that a club from this group is over six times more likely to avail itself of the consultative assistance of the USGA Green Section's Turf Advisory Service than a course selected at random from among all the nation's golf facilities.

There may be a number of factors involved in explaining these data, but coincidence has nothing to do with it. It would even seem a not-unwarranted conclusion to find in this a more enlightened concern with course conditioning among the nation's premier golf facilities. Why else pay even so modest a fee as \$200 for an annual tour of the course and a follow-up written report by an agency whose only mission is precisely to foster more consistently fine playing conditions? The management of these facilities is not afraid, in other words, of what an impartial but critical eye may see. They prefer to be made aware of such existing or potential problems as may be found in time for corrective action to be taken, rather than to remain blissfully ignorant of troublesome situations that may be developing and which, if not addressed early, will very likely become costly to deal with once the effects have become compounded to the point where deteriorating golf conditions are unmistakable even to the casual observer.

There is a further point that begs to be cleared up. Club officials occasionally seem to be surprised that some of the very same points raised by the Green Section have already been presented to them by their superintendent. A degree of skepticism in the face of problematic news is to be anticipated, but it should also be comforting to find such instances of confirmation. Remember that both the golf course superintendent and the green section agronomist have expertise in the same field and are dedicated to achieving the same ends. It is true that they each bring a different perspective to the situation — because of the differing nature of their jobs and of their professional backgrounds — but it is by far the more desirable situation to have these orientations mesh smoothly and for this relationship to be harnessed by the responsible top management, forming a kind of triumvirate with respect to setting a course for the future.

The photographs illustrate one of the

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problems which seems to be getting more out-of-hand: the employment each year of a high percentage of inexperienced people on golf course crews and the resultant increase in mistakes. Although this is generally perceived as a funding problem, it is more likely a question of policy and the allocation of funds. Given a fair chance, no superintendent in his right mind would want a preponderance of new workers every year, particularly if his permitted workforce was also smaller than in the past. But this is being forced upon him at an alarming number of courses. We know of at least two instances last season

when not only was the entire crew new, but also it was the superintendent's first year as a superintendent. Anyone who fails to appreciate the difficulties inherent in this sort of situation is simply out of touch with reality.

The point which would be well taken from this argument is simple: it is necessary for a golf facility to employ a good golf course superintendent, but that alone is not sufficient to ensure a good long-term result. There needs also to be a top management that is aware of problems and responds to the fundamentally important requirements of the golf course.

from USGA Greens Section "RECORD"

To be voted on next meeting
Richard Duggan
Maynard C.C.

Joint meeting
Managers and Supt.
June 9, 1980
Metacomet C.C.

May Tournament Results
1st gross T. Ohlson
2nd gross B. Carlton
3rd gross K. Mooradian
4th gross A. Parchecky

1st net B. Mucciarone
2nd net R. Kirkman
3rd net G. Luccinni
4th net E. Wiacek

Spring's Dilly-dally Effects

Now, that we're into June nights and the comforting warmth that they lend to the growing process, this story might be outdated by time and the intricacies of publishing just once a month. However, that was a peculiar spring which just passed us by, leaving a bad taste in many a golf course superintendent's mouth.

"Spring just dilly-dallied along as far as I'm concerned," one burnt-eared super moaned. "It wasn't until the middle of May that we had anything close to a warm night. I'd say we had to be two to three weeks behind our regular weather pattern in New England."

Because of the tardiness, plus the old uneducated golfer syndrome, several superintendents took some unfair shots concerning the condition of their courses. "I don't know what the reason is," our harassed super questioned. "But, I had more complaints about greens being hard and without color by people who forgot that winter doesn't just change into summer overnight. There has to be an in-between."

There was, all right, and it did nothing to speed up the conditioning process. "The soil just remained cold too darned long," our man remarked. "I couldn't do anything about that. In the meantime, my greens didn't respond to any kind of treatment."

"My members couldn't understand the situation. Although, I have to say that only a handful actually thought it was my doing. Anyway, I had to explain to them how our winter produced just enough snow to keep the greens under its cooling effect longer than I wished."

Country club golfers, those in the affluent sector, often are spoiled by the opportunity to spend time in the South when Northern courses are being belted by the weather. Many set their own transition standard which is zilch. They expect to step off a Florida course, step on a plane, arrive at the old home club and pick up their putting stroke on the same kind of greens they just left.

Actually, they're about three months off schedule. "The

biggest noise I encountered came on our greens," the super continued. "That's when I had to go through the routine of explaining how the snow first disappears from the rough, then the fairways, the tees and, finally, the greens. That's the way it's been happening around my course every year. Consequently, our greens are always the last to take shape."

Some of the comments collected from an informal gathering of supers at last month's NEGCSAA meeting at Westover Field spread some indifferent light on the subject.

The most cutting remark on early-season conditioning was heard by a super ("no names, please") who really takes pride in his efforts to give members the best possible playing conditions.

"This certain person should have known better," was the opener. "He knew that the course had been under heavy traffic all winter because of the snowless period and unusual pleasant temperatures. Yet, he insisted that our greens were the bumpiest he'd ever seen them. I wouldn't mind, but he was one of the people who caused the bumps by being part of that winter assault on the greens."

That's right, golfers. Bumpy greens are the scars of winter play. "Our membership is one of those that never knows when to quit," the super revealed. "I don't fault that. However, if members insist on playing the course when it is laid bare to possible damage, they should be willing to pay the price. Oh, the greens do get back to normal but the recovery time is dictated by the amount of winter play. The sooner the members realize this, the sooner they'll understand that greens must be treated with care...and respect."

So, because of a deceiving winter and an uninformed golfing few, some of our superintendents were under the gun this spring in a premature attack on their professional reputations. Hopefully, in the future, the complainers will check their calendars and their logistics.

Gerry Finn

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