

Grass Greener on the Other Side?

What makes the grass greener on the other side?

To the seasoned golf course superintendent, the variables for such a situation are incalculable. Weather, budgets, timing, budgets, luck, budgets. And, oh yes, budgets.

What brings about the mere mention of club members looking to greener pastures -- in most cases going no farther than their living rooms -- is the reverse influx of televised golf on the whole course conditioning picture.

The television scene beams into Augusta and the site of the famed Masters Tournament. There the viewer sees the manicured, finished product at its glowing best. The Augusta National Golf Course serves as a monument to tender care. Its fairways are made of broadloom, it appears. Its greens are as "smooth as a baby's ear" -- as the TV commercial goes. Tees are immaculate. Roughs are cut back as if tapered by a hair stylist. In a word, the course is perfect.

Now, the scene switches to the viewer's home course and, naturally, the grass on the other side of the fence, (six or seven states to the other side) is greener. And the viewer, who happens to be a member, wonders out loud: "Why can't we have a course like Augusta National?"

All right, sir. It's possible. First of all, you would have to transport the Georgia spring to New England -- no small feat in itself. Now, you must complement the present working force of your own course with 20 to 30 men. Next, you throw in twenty or thirty thousand dollars for materials and special equipment. And, there you have it . . . Augusta National on wheels!

Oh, oh. There was a forget-me-not omitted up there. In order to have the manpower of a television course supplied with a most important additive -- time, you close down your course for two weeks. That's to make for perfect grooming conditions. Workers don't have time to wait for golfers on their merry rounds. They, not the members, must have the grounds to themselves.

Such a situation among members has been on the upswing over the past several years. The popularity of the weekend golf tournament beamed into the golfer's den or rec room has given the member a chance to exaggerate his expectations about the condition of his own course. "It happens every spring in Augusta, why not here?" This is becoming the first sign of spring and the club member . . . in the eyes of the course superintendent.

And, just as ridiculous a thought as bringing Augusta National closer to home, is the fact that the average budget in the New England golfing environs hasn't increased in the last five years.

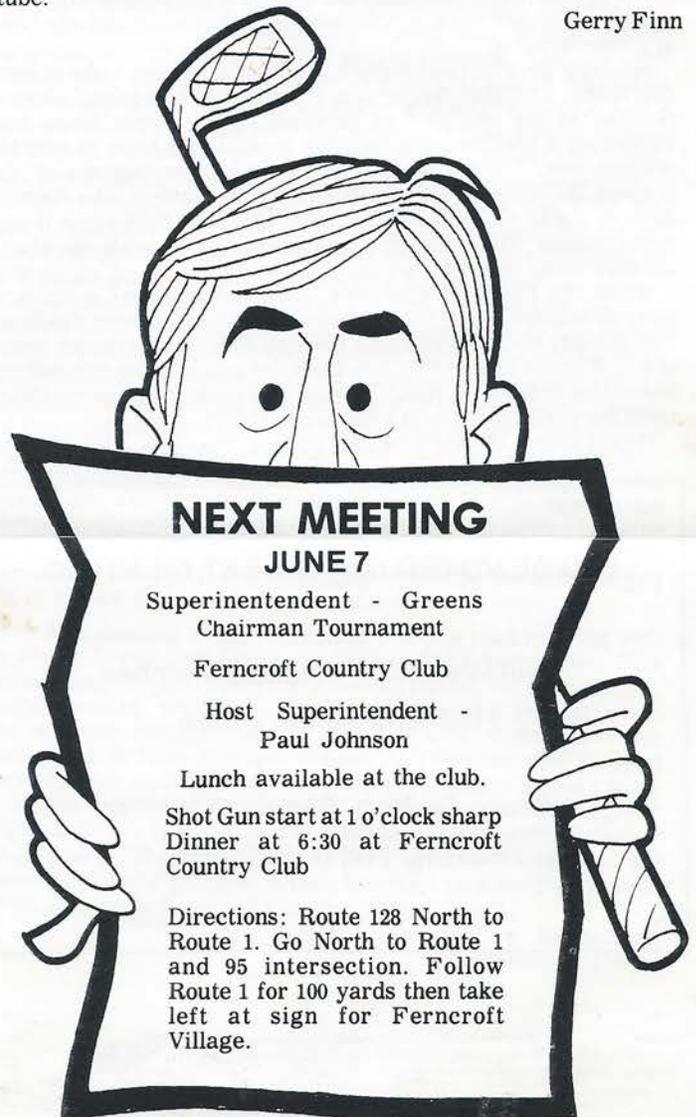
While the member takes the super to task for not providing him the penthouse conditions of Augusta National, he is all for holding the line on budgets and suggesting cutbacks in manpower, not to mention a moratorium on the purchase of new and better equipment.

"It may sound like we're a bunch of cry babies," one super told after being exposed to the TV course routine. "But, I feel the club member must be made aware of the behind-the-scenes picture at the courses where televised tour tournaments are held. I'd be willing to bet my reputation . . . and my job . . . that I could produce the same kind of playing conditions if I had the constant flow of weather and money which goes into the priming of Augusta National."

To be candid about the whole thing, club members should look away from the TV screen and return to reality. This is New England, the dawn of spring on the calendar and -- for the most part -- a tight money situation when it comes to financing maintenance programs. It is not possible to have an Augusta National in Newton, Longmeadow or anywhere else in this locale.

Sure, the grass is greener on the other side. And the water is bluer and warmer in Miami in December. As far as we are concerned, Augusta National is for enjoying, but only through the TV tube.

Gerry Finn



NEXT MEETING
JUNE 7

Superintendent - Greens
Chairman Tournament
Ferncroft Country Club

Host Superintendent -
Paul Johnson

Lunch available at the club.

Shot Gun start at 1 o'clock sharp
Dinner at 6:30 at Ferncroft
Country Club

Directions: Route 128 North to
Route 1. Go North to Route 1
and 95 intersection. Follow
Route 1 for 100 yards then take
left at sign for Ferncroft
Village.

Max and the March Madness

The day--or rather the night of infamy in Max Mierzwa's life struck a crushing blow to the Chicopee Country Club. The date was March 16 and Max can bring it to a precise countdown of 11: 27 p.m.

At that hour a fire of mysterious origin did a complete wipeout job on the maintenance building at the municipal layout--rated as one of the best of its kind in New England. Nothing was saved ...equipment, materials, Max's valuable maintenance records and some personal items that can't be replaced.

Mierzwa, who has been the superintendent at Chicopee since its inception, tells that the heat from the blaze was so intense it warped steel beams and columns.

"The whole thing is all the more harder to take because of its suspicious nature," Max remarks. "We had two space heaters in the building and two propane gas tanks outside. The heaters were checked and had no leaks. And the gas tanks were untouched. So, you can put two and two together and come out with arson."

Compounding the disaster has been a delay in settlement with the insurance company protecting the building. "I've been going through so much red tape over this I'm dizzy," Max spiels. "The cause of the fire is one thing holding up a settlement. And then there's the paper work in determining depreciation and what not. It's discouraging."

Mierzwa says the fire set back the opening of the course at least two weeks. But, more important, it has placed him in an awkward position in his conditioning program. "You never know how important a maintenance building is until you have to operate without one," Max reveals. "I am using two trailers at the present. But they hardly are the answer. We have to take starting devices out of all machinery at night and even take some things home with us. The situation is a gold mine for vandals. So, that's another thing to worry about."

While the factor of operating under a municipal setup is a natural setback when such a catastrophe occurs, Max discloses that the city of Chicopee came through with an emergency grant of \$ 11,000 that helped him rise from the ashes. "The city fathers have to be praised for that," Mierzwa remarks. "It was rough for them because the city is in a financial bind."

Rough wasn't the word for Max's state. "It was impossible", he

cracks. "But I took my four permanent workers aside, had a conference with an exchange of ideas on how to tackle the problem and we rolled up our sleeves to get things moving."

Coming to Max's aid were the Toro and Jacobsen people. "I have to say both have been great in this crisis," Mierzwa explains. "They have been lending me equipment right along. But storage is the biggest headache. Those two trailers can hold just so much."

Consequently Mierzwa has had to whip Chicopee into shape with half the ordinary equipment. "Instead of two fairway units, we had to work with one," he tells. "And it was like that all the way down the line. I'm really hurting because of the lack of a maintenance building."

Despite the adverse working conditions, Mierzwa has managed to come up with another banner opening of the Chicopee layout. "I must be blessed," he manages a laugh. "But I think we might be in as good shape this year as we ever have been at this time of the season. I only hope I can survive under these conditions the rest of the year. And it looks as though I'll have to be with the settlement delay and all. I'm only glad that no one was hurt in the fire. You can replace all the other things. But a human life, that's something out of your hands."

So, Mierzwa toils on after a shocking experience. "Rub of the green," he grins. And a bad rub at that, Max. You certainly have some long putts coming after this!

Gerry Finn

TO BE VOTED ON AT NEXT MEETING

Neil Wendell, Assistant Member
Highland Country Club

Bruce Carlson, Regular Member
Heather Hill Golf Course



Paul Johnson is our host for the June meeting. Paul started working on golf courses at Whaling City in New Bedford where he grew up. He graduated from the 2 year program at Stockbridge School of Agriculture in 1965. Paul then worked at White Cliffs for 5 years and in the fall of 1970 came to Ferncroft Country Club. This Robert Trent Jones designed course is considered one of the finest courses in New England. This is the third time in the last four years Paul has been our host which shows you how popular Ferncroft Country Club is with the association. Paul serves our association as a Trustee on the Board of Directors. Make plans to attend, this promises to be an enjoyable day for all.

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NEWSLETTER NOTES

This column will be used for the purpose of communication between the members of Golf Course Superintendents Association of New England, Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, and the golfing public. It can be of benefit to all through the exchange of ideas and experiences. It is here for you to express yourself on your thoughts and ideas. In doing this, out of necessity, there will be conflicting opinions. However, through discussion solutions can be drawn that will be in the best interest of the members, the associations, and the game of golf. Any letter with the request, will be printed without the name and address of the writer. Contents of this column do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editor or the Newsletter Committee. So whether you're a superintendent, club official, commercial salesman, or a member of the golfing public, let us here from you. Respond to Newsletter Editor, 145 Dedham St., Canton, Mass. 02021.

We welcome to our association 3 new associate members. They are Gerald Richardson from Maynard Country Club, Elmiro Silva from Belmont Country Club, and Stephan Koziak from Oxford Country Club. Hope to see all of you at future meetings.

Would like to pass on our respects to the family of Dan Keefe who died several weeks ago. Mr. Keefe was Golf Professional at Eastward Ho on Cape Cod. Mr. Keefe was very well known in the golfing circles of New England and a friend of the superintendent.

Received a card from Jim Fitzroy who was in the hospital recovering from injuries he received in an automobile accident. Jim left Quincy Hospital April 23 and will be spending some time at home. He hopes to start work on a part time basis very shortly.

I have received a letter from Fred Grau of The Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council and W. Scott Lamb, Executive Secretary of the Oregon Seed Council who would like to pass on an appreciation of thanks to Gerry Finn who wrote an article in the April Newsletter entitled "The Bad Seed Decision". The article was about the arbitrary phase-out of open-field burning in Oregon. They would like to remind you to drop a letter to Governor Straub, State Capitol, Salem, Oregon 97303 explaining he is destroying a very vital industry not only of Oregon, but of the world.

There was discussion at the last meeting about making a new classification for membership in our association for the person who is a superintendent now, but does not have the total number of years as a superintendent and/or number of years of education. As the bylaws now read a regular member must be a superin-

tendent for at least 5 years. An associate member must be a superintendent for at least 3 years. A superintendent having a Bachelor of Science degree in Agrostology, Agronomy, Plant Pathology shall be eligible to become an associate member. A superintendent having an associate degree in turf management will receive 2 years work experience credit towards an associate membership. A new classification would eliminate the waiting period for these people. A number of people feel we not only need new members, but should open our doors to people who are employed as superintendents. In the long run it would be of benefit to our profession . . . There was discussion on the Superintendent-Pro tournament. If the super is not a member of the Golf Course Superintendents' Association of New England he must present a handicap card from his club or association. If a card is not presented he will have to play from scratch. . . Dr. Troll and Robert Carrow, Ass't. Professor from Stockbridge attended the last meeting. They are planning to have booths at the turf conference next year. Dr. Troll also noted that 32 students attained jobs this year upon graduating from Stockbridge. That says a lot for the reputation Stockbridge has in our profession and the work Dr. Troll and Professor Carrow do with the students. Also a reminder that the U. of Mass. Field Day will be held on Wednesday, July 28, with a rain date on Thursday, July 29.

For those of you who did not attend the last meeting at Hampden Country Club where Bob Johnston was the host superintendent, missed another great time. Even though the weather could have been better, everyone had a good time 'hashing overall the problems.' This was our first visit to Hampden Country Club and everyone was very impressed with the golf course. The lunch that was served was outstanding! The golf was limited to just 9 holes for most, due to the rain. Some of the fellows stayed around and played the other 9 in the evening. Brian Cowan, golf chairman, made the right decision calling the tournament after 9 holes due to the weather. The results of the tournament was a tie between 3 teams. There were so many winners it would take too much room to list them all. We certainly hope Bob will invite us back again when the weather is more cooperative.

Some thoughts while watching the Pro tournaments on T.V. Seems a lot of the new pros play exceptionally slow. The major theme of the Mass. Golf Association this year is to speed up play. This subject also draws a lot of concern across the United States. I think both sides, the pro and the member of the golfing public, need to improve their attitudes toward this matter. Naturally, a great number of golfers pick up their mannerisms from watching all that money and not he, the member of the golfing public. Then again, the pro must realize the influence he has on the member of the golfing public. If there is any way he can help the game of golf, which provides him his living, he should be more than willing to help. Today, slow play is hurting the game of golf and everyone has to help correct the problem.

The July meeting at Agawam Hunt will be a joint meeting with the Rhode Island Golf Course Superintendents Association. This is something new and everyone is looking forward to the occasion. At this meeting, we will be honoring two charter members and one 50 year member of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of New England. James McCormack and Howard Farrant were charter members when the organization was formed in 1924. It was then called Greenkeepers Club of New England. Elmer Fuller joined in 1926 and now has been a member for 50 years. These 3 gentlemen will be honored at the July meeting, so make plans to attend. It should be a very good time for all. See you at Ferncroft Country Club on June 7.

Larry Bunn
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