

EVENTS

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

18-20 Oklahoma Turfgrass Conference, Tulsa Convention Center, Tulsa, OK. Contact: Michael Kenna, Oklahoma State University, 360 Agriculture Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 624-5414.

DECEMBER

2-3 Alabama Grounds Manager's Certification Program, Bessemer State Technical College, Bessemer, AL. Contact: Fred Kapp, Bessemer State Technical College, PO Box 308, Bessemer, AL 35021, (205) 428-6391.

7-10 Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show '87, Ohio Center, Columbus, OH. Contact: Ohio Turfgrass Foundation, 2021 Coffey Rd., Columbus, OH 43210, 614-292-2601.

7-10 New Jersey Turfgrass Expo '87, Resorts International Hotel, Atlantic City, NJ. Contact: Dr. Henry Indyk, Soils and Crops Dept., P.O. Box 231, Cook College, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, (201) 932-9453.

14-16 Texas Turfgrass Association Conference and Show, Hyatt Regency and Albert Thomas Convention Center, Houston, TX. Contact: Shirley Duple, TTA, 1003 Howe, College Station, TX 77840, (409) 693-1656.

16-18 Desert Turfgrass Conference and Trade Show, Las Vegas. Contact: Bob Morris, Nevada Cooperative Extension, ST&P Building, 953 E. Sahara, Las Vegas, NV 89104, (702) 731-3130.

JANUARY

6-8 North Carolina Turfgrass Conference and Exhibit, Winston-Salem, NC. Contact: J.M. DiPaola, Box 7620, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, 27695

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

A PLEASANT DIVERSION



My first recollection of turf was not on a baseball diamond, football field, golf course or park. It was the short-cut bent-grass on the bowling green at Spalding Inn in Whitefield, NH. I recall sitting on the bank beside the green for hours as my uncle bowled.

I had no idea why everyone was dressed in white or why they'd roll these odd-shaped balls to one end of the green, just to roll them back a few minutes later. I just knew that if I asked too many questions or caused a disturbance, my uncle, who was headmaster of a private boys school in Boston, would apply discipline promptly. So my brother and I would quietly look for toads

hiding in their burrows underneath the hedge surrounding the green.

My uncle wasn't rich, but he was always invited to bowl in the summer or curl during the winter with the well-to-do parents of his students. They could afford the month-long stay at the Inn four hours northwest of Boston by car or train. They had "old money" as my mother would say.

The Inn and the bowling green have stuck in my memory all these years as sort of a pleasant diversion from the typical suburban life most of us live today. So when I started to work on the story in this issue on lawn bowling and croquet, old memories came back to mind. I wondered if these genteel sports were still the exclusive privilege of the wealthy, or whether time and the growth of affluence in this country had brought new popularity to them.

What I found was that these sports are growing as fast as new greens can be built at resorts, country clubs and parks. They are within reach of everyone who can afford a country club membership, a week at a resort or a winter in the Sunbelt. That is significantly more people than just 30 years ago—millions more.

I also discovered that croquet and bowling green maintenance is a full-time job for one "greenskeeper." It takes specialized equipment and a fairly good understanding of soils and turf care. You don't just take a relatively flat spot and mow the turf down to its crowns. Expertise is required and that level of expertise is beyond that found in volunteers or club members. In other words, bowling and croquet greens require professional maintenance.

My conclusion is that there is tremendous potential for sports turf managers to promote these two sports, once unavailable to the general public, to a much larger group of people. In the space of two tennis courts, you can provide the users of your facility with the same pleasant diversion that was once available only to a few at Inns and private estates. Only you can build or maintain these greens as they need to be. In the long run, that makes you more valuable to your employer, whether that is a greens committee, park district or hotel.

It's also quite apparent that public park systems have to justify the expense of providing high-maintenance turf for any type of sport. Until and unless specialty sports have the support of the taxpayer, clubs are going to have to pay the bill for both construction and maintenance of greens. You can't build these kinds of facilities and let them deteriorate for lack of maintenance dollars.

The recreation industry has changed tremendously in the past three decades. Americans are constantly looking for new sports to try. They are also willing to pay for these sports if the price is made clear up front. The best thing the sports turf manager can do is let his management know about these sports and to give them accurate estimates of both construction and maintenance costs. You might be surprised, they just might say, "Go ahead, we'll back you all the way."

It's not unrealistic to think that one day you might be dressed in white, bowling on a fine-cut green with your nephew watching from the edge of the green. Your expertise, not your money, will make it possible.

Bruce Shank