

WINTER 2023

100 Years

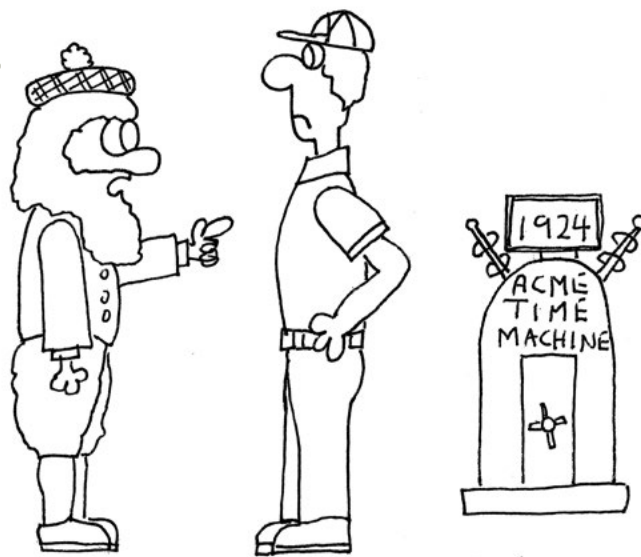
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Way back in 1924, The Ontario Golf Superintendents' Association was founded. It was known at the time, as the Golf Green Keepers Association of Ontario. They soon realized that the name of their fledgling association was a bit of a tongue twister – “How many golf green keepers does it take to keep a golf green, green”? Referring to it by its Acronym (which was all the rage at the time) didn't help much either, as the moniker “GGKAO” is a bit of a mouthful too. So shortly thereafter, the organization took on the present handle, and we've been arguing about where the apostrophe should go ever since.

To put this into perspective, the GCSAA wasn't formed until a full two years later, and the OGSA was present at that inaugural meeting in September 1926, where we were welcomed as charter members. It was no surprise, as golf was considerably more established in Ontario in the years leading up to WW1, than it was in the United States (albeit primarily as private clubs) – but that was about to change.

Both countries sent a shocking percentage of their youth to fight in “The Great War,” where many young men and women were exposed to the game for the first time – and when they returned, the demand for public golf was ubiquitous. Courses were popping up all over, and every town in Ontario worth its salt was laying out some links. Returning soldiers brought home a love of the game with them, along with war brides and the Spanish Flu.

I've spent a great deal of time over the past few weeks, pouring through old issues of the Canadian Golfer. The magazine was a truly remarkable publication, which chronicled the early history of Canadian Golf in real



I assume that after a century, you've been able to convince golfers to repair ball marks and replace divots... right?

time (all issues have been digitized and are available on the Golf Canada website). It's always an interesting read, but specifically, I was looking for references to the founding of our association and perused every issue from 1924. I now have a much deeper understanding of the golfing world which germinated the OGSA.

Back to the post war boom. In the United States, 800 golf courses were opened between the spring of 1923, and the spring of 1924. By way of contrast, there were only 400 courses in Canada at the time, but nearly half of those didn't exist in 1914. The roaring 20s oversaw a North American golf boom, never to be repeated. There were only five Thompson brothers, so Ontario was running short on golf professionals, clubhouse managers, and obviously, superintendents. Associations to promote golf maintenance as a career, and the education of those who were interested, could fill an obvious need – and the OGSA was born.

In 1924, the Federal Government announced a program to fund agricultural extension services through the nation's agriculture schools, to support the agronomy needs of golf courses. The Ontario Agricultural College (now a part of the University of Guelph

(and my alma mater)) began to offer winter education to Ontario 'Green Keepers.' The Dominion Seed Company, embarked on what was at the time, the world's largest study of turfgrass breeds on golf courses. The study concluded that bentgrass would create the best putting surface in the Ontario climate, but since it was impossible to collect and sell bentgrass seed at the time, the Dominion Seed Company advised that we'd best use other types of seed that they could sell.

And yes, I did find it - in the August 1924 edition of the Canadian Golfer. Mr. C. L. Knuth, Manager of the Weston Golf Club was pleased to announce that he had received “a very enthusiastic letter from the Golf Green-Keepers Association of England,” who pledged their full assistance in the establishment of a similar organization in Canada. Further - that “Several of the Toronto Green-Keepers approached have promised to support such an Association.” Last - that the USGA, “which has a very viral Green Committee” was strongly in favour of the idea, which explains why they did it themselves two years later.

The rest, as they say, is history. The OGSA has been committed to education, support, advocacy, and the promotion of the golf course superintendent as a career for 100 years. I've been a member for nearly a third of that, spent 12 years on the Board, and have been penning Turf or Consequences since 1997. I'm proud of this profession, I'm proud of this organization, and I still love the game of golf as much as the folks in those black and white pictures from the 1920s. Imagine what we'll be doing in another 100 years. ■