

PLEASE, DON'T CALL ME GREENSKEEPER!!

Golf course superintendents are educated, exceptionally hard-working, goal and result oriented individuals. They have pride in their work and deserve the best of their professional world. This article is a true reflection of dedication to their profession.

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Jimmy Ellison, the surprisingly young, surprisingly mod Bay Hill course superintendent, thinks of himself as much more than a greenskeeper. He thinks of his crew as much more than common laborers and he thinks Arnold Palmer's lush Bay Hill acres as much more than just another golf course. He believes, as a team, they are headed for greatness.

When you think "greenskeeper", you usually think of a wizened, little man with skin like an iguana's after spending countless summers beneath the sun with hands buried in the soil. A man whose work seems closer to Voodoo than science — who will tell you soon it's gonna rain 'cause his knee is actin' up. Ellison isn't like that.

- A small radio on his desk gives constant updates on the government weather reports. He listens to every change with the intensity of a broker hearing the latest stock market report.
- Any course that hosts a PGA Tour tournament wants to look its best. But when your course happens to be owned by Arnold Palmer, best isn't good enough. You've got to be better than the best. "I want a perfected golf course — all the time, of course, but especially for the tournament," said Ellison. "Not just a good course, but a great one — and Mr. Palmer wants the same thing.

"Our goal," said Ellison, "is to reach the day when people say, 'If you can't play Augusta, you must play Bay Hill.' Maintenance is very important to a great course," explained Ellison. "Take Disney — their course gives you a clean taste because they're so neat. But I think we're the best."

Ellison is the first to admit no golf course superintendent can do it alone. Behind every great superintendent, there is a great assistant superintendent. Behind Jimmy Ellison is Norm Wilson.

"We really have good men working for us," said Ellison. "They are far more than common laborers. They believe in what we're doing, too. They take pride in their work."

He is getting faster greens by having mixed 35 percent of Jamestown Fescue, a winter grass, with 65 percent of Pennfine. It is all highly technical and the ability to produce those lightning-fast greens comes from Ellison's training.

Jerry Greene
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