To Tee Or Not To Tee — That Is The Question!

By Joel D. Jackson

To tee it up or not to tee it up, that is the question —
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer the
Slings and arrows of insects and irate golfers,
Or to take up your clubs despite a sea of troubles
And by playing golf end them. To play, to enjoy
The game; and by enjoy we say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That golf course maintenance is heir to daily;
’tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To par, to birdie —
to eagle, perchance to ace, ay there’s the rub,
For in those scores of golf what dreams may come.
When we have shuffled off this duffer’s coil,
Must give us pause; there’s the respect
That makes calamity of so high a handicap.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of
double and triple bogeys.
The sandbagger’s wrong, the honest player’s contumely...
...To grunt and sweat at golf after a busy day
But that the dread of something after work
The irrigation leak, the unmowed rough
From whose bourn no traveller returns; puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear the ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make golfers of us all,
and the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied over with the pale cast of true course conditions
And projects from the greens committee
With this regard their priorities turn away
And lose the name of action. Soft you now
The fair putting surfaces — 9.5 on the stimpeter,
Be all my putts remembered.

Like Hamlet, my golf game is also a tragedy. One of my
own making, to be sure, but a result of my priorities. The
answer to the question “Should a superintendent play
golf?” The answer is YES. To the question “Must a super-
intendent play golf?” The answer is I DON’T KNOW. I
think it is rare to find a person who can keep a golf course
in top condition, and respond to problems with the play-
ing conditions if he doesn’t experience them first hand.
Such individuals do exist and they are successful, how-
ever, they are rare.

By playing his golf course the superintendent is offered a
much more detailed look at the true playing conditions
than can be assimilated on a “ride thru” filled with the
many distractions that make up our hectic days. The
priorities that we set for our maintenance staff may be
based on sound agronomic principles, but they may not
fully consider the needs of the golfers who play the
course. We need to keep the golfers’ priorities in mind or
we may be answering some unpleasant questions from
our employers. By playing more we can appreciate the
needs of the “consumers” or members.

Another primary benefit from playing more golf is that
the superintendent can strengthen his ability to com-
municate to his members and employers, by talking the
same language and comparing results on the course. The
golfing superintendent is brought closer to the interna-
tional family of golfers, and he can better appreciate the
accomplishments of professional and amateur alike if he
has shared the “rub of the green.” I have been fortunate
to visit Augusta and behold the near perfection of that
emerald jewel in golf’s crown, and I played Pebble Beach
in 1982 right after the U.S. Open and found the spot
where Tom Watson made his “Miracle Chip” on the 17th
hole. These things wouldn’t mean as much if I didn’t play
golf.

The superintendent who plays golf, regardless of skill
level, has an additional tool in his management arsenal to
help him keep his course in better “playing” condition
and enhance his professional image. We should all try to
improve our skill level to maximize the enjoyment of the
game when we play, and to become more discerning
about the actual conditions of our courses.

As the role of the golf course superintendent changes
and he is asked to do more for his club because of his
talents, versatility, and professionalism, he risks losing
some of the intimate contact with the course that made
him successful in the first place. By playing the course,
he can maintain that contact hopefully with the under-
standing and support of his club.

Good golfing to you all!