

As It Lies Who is Number One?

By Jim Walker

Being number one in a lot of things in this world is very important: Number-one-ranked player in the world, World Series champs, Super Bowl champs, NBA champs, NCAA



champs in football and basketball — all can have life-changing ramifications. The list goes on and on.

There are exceptions, however, to being number one. It is not cool to be the first one to arrive at a party, or the first one to leave. It is not polite to be the first one finished with a meal at the dinner table, an act which can draw looks and whispers from others dining with you. There may be more delicate situations in which a man might not want to finish first, but I digress.

All of this leads me to a discussion of being the number-one person to tee off each morning at my golf course. I know many people like early tee times so they can finish and have a good deal of the day remaining

for other activities like having a nap on the sofa accompanied by the soft murmur of the television. I also like to get out early on a golf course if it is going to be a crowded, slow-moving affair. My wife on the other hand thinks an early tee time is anything prior to 10 a.m.

My golf course has a long-standing tradition that the first 10 tee times are given to the first 10 people who arrive at the course each morning. No one knows how long this policy has been in effect. Not one player or employee knows when it started or why.

When I arrived five years ago, I discussed the concept of doing away with this goofy situation with my assistant and many of the greyhounds who comprised this group. My idea was to let people reserve these times in a more civilized manner like on the phone or in person. It was not something I considered long because the hangman's noose was quickly thrown over a large limb of an oak tree adjacent to the putting green. Being a perceptive person and having gone further in school than Jethro Bodine, I knew that the rope was for me and the tradition was not to be trifled with.

Having been dealt a hand of lemons, I decided to make lemonade. Since I failed in my attempt to change tradition, I paid very close attention to the ins and outs, whys and wherefores, and studied the psychological profiles of the greyhounds. Keeping score for these people seems to be measured in how fast they play,

not how well they played.

But, let me begin at the beginning of the day, which for these people begins at 4:30 a.m. That's correct. I know because I am at the course before 4:30 a.m. each day because we host 70,000 rounds a year, and every piece of equipment with wheels on it also is equipped with lights. Mowing greens, tees, fairways, roughs, slopes, and even spraying projects are done "under the lights." My crew reports between 4 and 5 a.m. each day, and everybody hits the ground running.

If we don't stay ahead of the first group, we'll get buried in players and not be able to mow anything.

And there's another phenomenon at Greynolds Park: early bird joggers and cyclists. People run and bike in the dark. They also wear very dark clothes so they are difficult to see and that keeps you on your toes as you enter the park each morning before your first wake-up cup of coffee.

The other day I arrived at 4:10 a.m. and Tin Cup Jr. "aka" Sneaky Pete was already in the parking lot. How the heck he got in is a mystery because I use the back gate, and the security guard doesn't open the front gate until 4:30 a.m. When I inquired, the early bird said he left his car there overnight and entered through one of the pedestrian gates which are never locked.

Half of these people are millionaires who should be members at one of several nice private clubs in

the area and could have civilized tee times. We have a former owner of a trash-hauling company in New York, a nice Italian gentleman. In the winter we have the largest importer and exporter of chocolate in Canada, yes, all of Canada. There's a retired hairdresser and owner of several upscale salons in Connecticut, and a retired jockey and thoroughbred trainer from Saratoga, who retired before age 50. I could go on and on, but I think you get the picture.

These people are in the parking lot before the milk is delivered and last call is made at the local watering holes. What in the name of God do they do for the rest of the day? I'm telling you, shouting matches have occurred over who was first, third or sixth on any particular day, since this is all done on the honor system.

Evidently none of the previous managers felt this Greek drama in three acts was worth monitoring. Can you imagine? What do you do at work? Well, I monitor the first ten cars in the parking lot so they don't kill each other. Keeping track of who is number one at Greynolds Park is a dirty job, but somebody has to do it.

In my 30 plus years of running golf courses, this is the most bizarre behavior I have ever seen. Maybe you have some goofy goings-on at your course too. If so, I would like to hear from you. Just remember, all the guys I'm talking about are retired, so they don't have anything else to do each day except go home.

GREEN SIDE UP



Joel Jackson, CGCS

Rules of the Game

By Joel Jackson, CGCS

I'm not talking about knowing the USGA Rules of Golf verbatim, like Rule 36 — immovable hazards. Although knowing that rule did allow Tiger Woods to have the gallery move a

boulder for him in the Phoenix Open a few years ago. I'm talking about some common-sense rules to avoid obstacles in our career path.

The Human Condition

Tirades, tantrums and termi-

nations are not substitutes for training, coaching, discipline and self control. Treat others as you would have them treat you — including suppliers — and do it with respect.

One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel, and we're all in the barrel.

Always give credit to others: the crew for doing the work, a peer for providing problem-solving information, the green chairman for spearheading the approval for a project, a supplier for

making a special delivery, volunteers for helping with ACSP projects. You will be seen as unselfish and a true manager and facilitator.

Dress for Success

Working superintendents don't have to wear blue jeans and a Copenhagen cap to a local chapter meeting. A polo shirt, sport coat and Dockers from Sears are perfectly fine attire when visiting another course's clubhouse as a guest.

The curse of Casual Friday is that it is now Casual Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc. Wearing shorts and boat shoes at work doesn't mean you can't grow healthy turfgrass, provide excellent playing conditions or manage a multi-million dollar asset. After all, a fishing guide is trained professional too. It's OK to jump in the hole and fix the leak if you have to. Just don't go to the clubhouse looking like a ditch digger or a fishing guide — you are the superintendent.

Communicate or Abdicate

Don't let the rumor mill do your talking. Tell the truth and tell it often to everyone on the staff from the pro shop, valet parker and waitress in the restaurant. Then tell your boss, committee chairman, the influential golfers and even the "squeaky wheels." If you don't spread the facts, someone will offer to fill the void with their opinions.

Example: "With the cloudy, rainy weather the greens are a little thin right now. I've raised the height of cut, which is recommended by the USGA Green Section as a first response to thinning. I've sent out soil samples to check for nematode levels and soil pathogens. I'm going to solid-tine aerify and lightly topdress and fertilize them also. If they don't perk up, I'd like to have Bill Smith and Tom Jones, the superintendents at Posh Hills CC and the Platinum Club, come over and take a look and see if I've missed something. It would really help if the sun would come out."

Don't miss the chance to post announcements in the clubhouse or write an article for the club newsletter. You don't have to be a novelist. There are boiler plate articles you can copy from GCSAA and others to spread the word about what's going on in your department and on the course. Just remember to tell who, what, why, when and how and you'll be fine.

Business Savvy

Run your operation like a business, not a bottomless money pit. Don't covet the newest bells and whistles without showing the cost and benefit of everything... from purchasing new equipment to using new products. Have a plan in hand, not your hand out every year for more dollars. The devil is in the details. If you were the owner, wouldn't you want to know where every dime was going? Be creative in finding ways to lower costs, like reducing out-of-play turf areas and multi-tasking employees.

Continuing education

If you aren't learning something new, you are falling behind. The best scenario is being able to go to conferences, seminars and chapter meetings. Regardless of the formal education, the networking is worth the effort. Being around other superintendents always raised my spirits and my intelligence on growing good turf. After you go to a conference or even a local meeting, write a short report or note to your boss and tell him something you learned that will help you do your job. They might get the idea that it's good for you to go to these things.

Public Relations

It's harder for a club to fire a nice, friendly and positive person who is seen often and participates in club functions or at least shows his or her face around the course.

"Good morning Mr. Smith. How are you hitting them? I know you often bring guests out to the course. I just wanted to let you know we will be doing our spring aerification next week.

"Hello Ms. Jones. Did you see the new butterfly garden on No. 6? We just joined the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System and we are working on becoming certified. Would you like to serve on our Resource Committee?

Health and Fitness - You Are What You Eat

Coffee, donuts, soda, burgers and fries or cereal, fruit, juice and salad?

You don't have to deny yourself treats. Just consider variety and moderation in all things, especially alcohol at your club and local chapter functions. Find a way to exercise. It relieves stress and keeps you around for your family.

Perceptions

It may look like a barn. It may smell like a barn. But in reality, it is the turf management operations center. A broom, a blower and a couple of gallons of paint may be all the tools you need to make your shop look organized and efficient. Sloppy is as sloppy does from clutter to record-keeping.

Mix/load and/or equipment-wash areas that drain directly into ditches, creeks and wetlands look exactly like what they are, pollution generators. Pour some concrete. Recycle the rinsate. It isn't rocket science. It's called stewardship and gives the perception that you and your club care about the environment.

Ethics

Resist the temptation to respond to comments or questions about another superintendent's golf course condition, practices or even problems when asked. You may or may not know all the facts. Usually you don't and their comments are often uneducated hearsay. Don't agree to make a visit to that course if they invite you without calling that superintendent first. It looks real bad if the other superintendent gets fired, and you end up somehow involved in that operation.

Don't get caught in clandestine poaching of your neighbor's employees. Good equipment managers and technicians are in demand. It's a free country and everyone has a right to seek the best deal they can get. However, the industry is too small and your reputation is at stake if you don't give your professional peers at least a heads-up on pending negotiations. He may not like it but at least it wasn't done on the sly.

Follow these rules and stay in the game. The score you earn here is more than just a number.

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