Former GCSAA president speaks out on proposed bylaw changes

There was some thought, on my part, to just let the new bylaws slide by without expressing my opinion. However, after hearing from a number of my friends from around the country, I have decided to express my thoughts on this matter.

As many of you know, during my presidency of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, proposed bylaws were brought to the membership and were overridden. This could well be the case again this month. The membership should question any and all changes, especially changes that are announced in Golf Course Management, a magazine, which seems to be one-sided.

Do you really believe they (staff or the board of directors) could not find at least one member who would question these proposed changes? I know of you who read the article in this magazine understand how they have tried to mesmerize us. If the association is able to put out information and still continue to try to make changes, it makes one wonder what our voice will be in the future. A number of times Bob Williams — the enterprising president of the GCSA in the late 1960s — has said to me, “Is the tail wagging the dog?”

During my term as president, we tried to change the bylaws to give the board the power to set the fee for dues. That bylaw proposal was defeated, with only a small percentage of delegates in favor of the change. The bylaw changes did not occur, and probably was for the better.

Even if you trust people running the association at present, what about future boards? The more power you give a governing body, the less power we have in our own hands. We support the association with our dues, which is only a small percentage of a budget. Most of us realize this already.

The golf courses with the most purchasing power are the main support of the association. Just think of that status quo for a moment. We, the superintendents of these golf courses, are the ones the association needs to make the whole organization work. Let us try to come together, to discuss and explain our futuristic ideas. Then give the delegates the opportunity to give their ideas in return. This might be a method of accountability. Will you be able to say that your one vote? NOT! Just maybe the next statement will be, “Read my lips — no more increases in dues.”

The one vote is another issue. We have that one vote in our local chapters. This, you might say, is our electoral college. The chapter delegates are typically your most interested people in your local chapter, usually responsible and dedicated. Have they failed us in the past? My opinion is, they have done a fine job.

Are they telling us that the directors on the board are incompetent? Some of us might question the directors’ thinking, but we also realize they are doing a good job. Remember, they are part-time administrators. The delegate method of voting has worked in the past, and would probably continue to work in the future.

Surely the fiber of our association again I repeat, “Our Association” — is the camaraderie that has developed between delegates. This is what makes an association something you want to be a member of now, and hopefully in the future.

The Golf Course Superintendents Association is another good example of “association fiber.” Reflect back and remember the conferences that the membership involved with. Remember only the ones that you had the best time at, and enjoyed the most. The hospitality rooms are also another piece of fiber.

Will all this be eliminated by the new election process? These fibers are all part of the “association fabric” that we currently enjoy.

Let us not forget, we all know that the two-thirds majority to amend the bylaws, let the directors do their job selling their ideas to the membership, instead of mandating them.

The delegates should start meeting at the conference to discuss the future of the association and make suggestions in the form of motions to the GCSAA board. This was done in the past, and should be considered again. The Past Presidents Council (that was started by Bob Williams and twodozirands as an advisory group) was recently dissolved by the board of directors.

The council still exists but meets merely as a social group. The delegates and the Past Presidents Council should also be included in the decision-making process.

Remember: Bill Roberts said, “Any feat of decision-making being concentrated in the hands of too few is unfounded. The membership retains final authority over direction of association affairs through the election process.”

In your dreams!!

The purpose for which the association was formed was “to provide for and enhance the recognition of the golf course superintendent as a professional.” As professionals, we need to take a close look at the proposed bylaws, make a correct decision, and then proceed with caution.

In spite of some difficult problems over the years, the association has had many accomplishments. If you would like to discuss any of this, give me a call (708) 358-7030 and let’s talk. Otherwise, see you all in Anaheim.

Mike Bavier, CGCS, is head superintendent at Inverness Golf Club, Palatine, Ill. He is past president of the GCSA. The following column has been reprinted from the editorial section of the organization. It originally appeared in Heart of America newsletter.

Letters

ANOTHER BYLAW OPINION

Editor’s note: The following letter has been reprinted with permission from the author. It originally appeared in Through the Green, published by the Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association.

To the Editor:

I recently wrote to President Roberts and requested a copy of the by-law changes to be presented at Anaheim or a copy of the by-law changes put to a vote by the members. I did not receive either document, but did receive a “Future Directions” pamphlet. As I review the pamphlet, I have further questions.

• On the vote of members: The change would not only take away Delegate Vote, but also Proxy Vote. If most people vote by mail there would be no chance for discussing the issues as we now have had in the past.

• On classification — If changed, not only will the Board set new classifications, but will have the right to add requirements for classification. In the past, changes needed can’t be communicated well enough to get two-thirds of the members to know it is a better way, then it might not be successful. I believe we need some changes in classification of memberships needed and necessary, but should come through the approval of present members.

• On the nominating election Committee — Who knows what the procedure will be? Usually if a change is proposed, the new way of doing things is presented for inspection and review, not just doing away with the old.

• On the Field Staffing Program — I continue to believe a trial period is better than an all out program, especially when, according to the pamphlet, this Field Staffing Program will require a $40 to $50 PER YEAR dues increase. No wonder the Board wants the right to set dues. Wouldn’t it be nice if we superintendents could develop our budget and then tell the members of the club what their dues will be for the year?

• And about the subject of cost — Why not pay $57 for a copy of Conference Proceedings and $20 for an Employee Manual? What has happened to SERVICE to the members.

The following letter has been reprinted with permission from the author. It originally appeared in Golf Course Management.

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Golf Course Management

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January 1993
EXPANDING ON FREAM'S COMMENT

To the editor:

I couldn't agree more with a statement made by Dr. Mike Hurdzan in an editorial in the October 1992 edition of Golf Course News. Yes, I agree completely that the USGA Green Section is biased and, I'm sure that the clubs and courses we serve would have it no other way.

In 1968 the Green Section published a small booklet entitled Building Golf Holes for Good turf Management. It contained many little tips to use during construction to help ensure the long-term success of the turf once the construction job was done. Though it has been out of print for at least a dozen years, we still receive many requests for this publication.

All of our Green Section agronomists have extensive hands-on construction experience, but we know from visiting more than 1,800 golf courses each year that much of the construction work we've seen has ignored the long-term maintenance needs of the turf.

We also know better than anyone, about the price paid by golf course superintendents and course officials who have tried to deal with growing grass on lousy profiles. The golf course pays big bucks to get itself out of the mess, golfers are RECORDING UPDATES ON THE QUEEN OF GREENS, and courses are maintained, and too often the superintendent pays with his job.

THREE CHEERS FOR HURDZAN

To the editor:

Three cheers for Michael Hurdzan taking a direct stand on the USGA and the TRACS program.

The key elements golf superintendents and green committees miss when they deal with the USGA, are:

1. The expense and exposing yourself to “own trenches” knowledge mentioned by Hurdzan is non-existent.

2. The USGA is simply a money-raising group that attracts donations from a naive American public.

The victim is the young inexperienced superintendent who is risking a career by listening to unproven opinion.

I might be going out on a limb, but I feel that the junior golfers who have gone through some of these installations, have much more of a grasp on green construction methods and the upkeep of those greens than the USGA.

What the USGA wants the public to believe is that qualified design and construction techniques are non-existent. What they should really do before they embarrass themselves further is check people's credentials. It looks to me that Hurdzan has some excellent credentials.

Tom Bridle
Vice President
TecTonic, Inc.
Longmont, Colo.

Bylaw changes? If it ain't broke...

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5. Field Staffing

I must admit that I am somewhat at a loss as to the justification for implementing this program. While I realize that there are many individuals maintaining golf courses in the United States who are not members of our association, I would not consider the majority of these people golf course superintendents. The idea that these field staff personnel will be funded partially by the recruiting of new members seems to be a very iffy proposition at best. Additionally, I am more concerned with the quality members in our association than I am with increasing our membership and dues base.

The setting up of seminars, workshops, conferences, training seminars and speaking engagements around the country already has been accomplished through the efforts of local chapters and our existing GSAA staff. I don't see how a field staff person will significantly add to the already excellent programs available to our members.

In conclusion, I do not doubt for one second that the proposals made by the members of the Board of Directors of GSAA in expanding their influence with the USGA, in golf facility would bring.

In my opinion, it is quite possible that the efforts of the USGA on the golf course construction success.

The best way to achieve this is to promote the idea that the Green Section is biased against golf construction methods that are based on unreviewed or dubious scientific evidence, have not been field tested over a reasonable period of time, rely on “miracle” amendments of which little is known, require unnecessarily high use of fertilizer and water, are not published and available in the public domain, or are based on techniques that have consistently produced mediocre to poor results, such as the on-site rototilling of amendments into the surface of sand-bagged greens.

Yes, the Green Section is biased, and I'm sure that the clubs and courses we serve would have it no other way.

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Tom Bridle
Vice President
TecTonic, Inc.
Longmont, Colo.

The Green Section’s proposed TRACS program (Turf Renovation And Construction Services) was conceived with the idea of educating superintendents, owners and course officials about how the dos and don’ts of golf course construction will affect the long-term maintenance of the turf on their courses.

This is absolutely in the realm of Green Section expertise. Based upon the tremendous favorable response we received about the TRACS program, it seems that superintendents and course officials agree.

However, to reach more people than could possibly be reached with a TRACS program, we have decided to write an expanded version of Building Golf Holes for Good Turf Management. It will be this manual’s way to help golf courses enjoy the best possible turf for the dollars they spend on construction.

Many golf course architects and builders are dedicated to doing their best for their clients. We would welcome their input, including other examples and tips that they feel would make together our manual of tips for construction success.

James T. Snow
President
United States Golf Association

Green Section

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January 1993