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DÉJÀ VU

These days, I'm a very happy camper serving as a columnist for *Golf Course Industry* because the staff lets me write whatever the hell I want (which, just between you and me, is an enormous mistake). That said, it's no secret that about nine years ago, I helped launch another magazine in this strange little business.

In the early days of that other magazine – whether consciously or unconsciously – we ran quite a few editorials and articles that managed to royally piss off various readers. Superintendents were mad. The associations were irritated. Course builders were furious. Architects were bugged. Assistant golf professionals were apoplectic (apparently, they weren't wild about being referred to as glorified shirt folders).

In short, we were equal opportunity annoyers. Everybody was chapped. Readers wrote e-mails, letters and even called (I received interesting, presumably alcohol-fueled voice-mails late at night). Subscriptions were cancelled and boycotts were threatened.

Man, it was fun. I adored every minute of it. Each nasty letter or anonymous call meant people were reading and that we'd engaged them in a way no other publication ever had in those days.

That's why I felt a lovely sense of déjà vu during the past month or so when I started getting e-mails and calls from superintendents who took issue with the image on the cover of this magazine's January issue. To refresh your memory, the cover picture featured the general manager and the superintendent of a noted country club that had renovated its practice range recently. In the photo, the g.m. stood far front, wearing a spiffy blazer and tie, while the superintendent was in the background dressed as a ... well, as a superintendent.

The complaints all centered on the fact the g.m. was prominent while the superintendent was – to quote one letter-writer – a “tiny dot in the distance.” A well-known superintendent wrote that the image had “set

us back 20 years.” Another, a past president of GCSAA, said it was in poor taste. Several mentioned the lousy timing of the photo considering the first joint GCSAA/CMAA conference was on the horizon. Subscription cancellations were promised, and there was much harrumphing.

Complaints are like cockroaches; for every one you get, there are probably a hundred more you don't see. I'm sure there were many more readers who thought the photo stunk, but didn't write or call. Maybe you're one of them. If so, here's my opinion about the matter:

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(Editor's Note: Before you read this, please remember Pat Jones is a renowned idiot and legendary loose cannon. His opinions are his alone. He isn't an employee of GCI, just a hired ink-stained wretch whose keyboard fingers often move faster than his brain. This is, by no means, the official view of GCI or any other sane publication. Thank you for your attention. We now return you to the gibberish he passes off as a column.)

- It's one picture depicting one story. Get over it. Part of the emergence of the superintendent as the key manager at a golf facility should be that your skin gets a little thicker. When you react so dramatically to a perceived slight, it harkens back to the old days when I heard so many superintendents say that “Caddyshack” set the profession back decades. Puh-leeze. Your image is your own – it's not something dictated or influenced by any movie or magazine.

- The story was about the business decision that led this club (and several others)

to renovate. The question for the club was, “Will we attract and retain more members if we make a major investment to remodel our practice facility?” That financial issue, like it or not, fell into the purview of the g.m. in this particular situation. Yes, the superintendent did the work and did it well. If the story had been about the agronomic and construction specifics of the project, the superintendent obviously would have been the centerpiece. But that wasn't the case, and the g.m. was featured more prominently in the article.

- GCI – then GCN – isn't focused exclusively on serving the needs and interests of the superintendent. The modern reality of the golf business is that, within the team decision-making concept, every manager has a role in helping the facility succeed. The mission of this magazine, as I understand it, is to provide useful information to each of those managers. Yes, the majority of our articles are aimed at superintendents, but we also provide business perspectives on management, marketing, finance and other issues that impact everyone on the team.

- Imagine if the positions of the two individuals on the cover were reversed. Do you think club managers would have grabbed pitchforks and torches and stormed GCI's headquarters demanding blood because the superintendent was too prominent in the story? I'm obviously being facetious, but the point is superintendents have been historically hypersensitive to “slights” like this (see “Caddyshack” above). In fact, here's what Mike Mongiello, the superintendent depicted on the cover, had to say: “I don't find the picture degrading to me nor do I assume it was intended to misrepresent the role of a golf course superintendent.” There's a cat who's comfortable in his own skin.

Stories and cover images like this will continue to appear in GCI from time to time. If that means getting the occasional nasty letter or being buttonholed by an unhappy reader at a meeting, then so be it. As Yogi Berra once said, “It's déjà vu all over again.” And, in my humble opinion, that's a good thing. **GCI**