



In Bounds

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Throughout the years and at various functions both family and business, I am often asked what it is like to be a golf course superintendent. Beyond the agronomic skills of growing grass and maintaining golf course accessories, I used to describe myself as a classic painter from the Impressionist period. An artist who used bright color and great texture to enhance the simplicity of a scene, my canvas was the design created by Stanley Thompson, my paint the grasses, trees and flowers.

It was a terribly arrogant atrocity to align myself with the masters such as Monet, Van Gogh and Renoir. For in reality I am a leader of a troop of artists, each trained to perform specific important tasks. My league is charged with producing the most beautiful and playable piece of golf property possible. I really wasn't the painter, but rather the guy who mixed the paint.

A couple of years ago I expanded my musical horizons and began attending local performances of the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. Besides broadening my cultural perspective I went to watch my brother-in-law Bill Schrickel, the lead conductor, enunciate with deliberate fashion the cues necessary to elicit harmony from a group of musicians.

His dramatic overtures persuaded distinct sounds from individual players. In and of themselves, the music would be fine, but in a group without a leader it would be a true cacophony of disastrous proportions. However, with repetitive practice and the prodding of a conductor well versed in the art of visual manipulation and musical management, a delightful and consistently grand orchestral event is always accomplished.

Not unlike a conductor, I too manage individuals to the fullest of their capabilities and in harmony to produce a golf course. Some of my staff are well versed in bunker grooming, but upon a green mower they would be disastrous. Several members are faster than the rest and must be tempered. And others are slower and must be encouraged.

On a day to day basis we practice our chores in preparation of the "big events" of the season. The Women's Guest Day, the

Men's Three-Day Invitational and the Club Championships. During these occasions we perform in concert to produce a synchronization of pleasure, both visual and physical. I am a conductor of a well rehearsed orchestra. However, even the most practiced consortium must have a contingent plan for the unforeseen challenges.

And thus I am not unlike an astronaut.

Recently I viewed, for the umpteenth time, the movie Apollo Thirteen. As always I was thrilled by the adventure, warmed by the conclusion and impressed by the lengths to which the astronauts and their peers went to, to save the mission. Their well laid out plans, detailed to exacting precision, were thrown out the window when disaster struck.

However, by applying themselves to the individual tests at hand, they were able to succeed. It was an individual goal, to return safely to earth, yet undeterminable by any one alone. It required a group of professionals up to the task, motivated by a leader capable of making decisions based upon team recommendations.

Hmmm, does this sound familiar? Many times I have laid out plans weeks in advance in preparation for a golf event. The bunker edges are manicured; the greens smoothed and slickened, the wastebaskets Armored and bathrooms power cleaned. All of this effort for naught, for too often on the day of the event something happens; Mother Nature dishes up a storm that washes all the bunkers away, environmental condi-

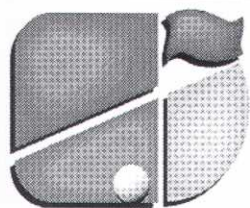
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tions become optimal for a Pythium outbreak, a six inch main line blows a coupling or the event is changed from tee times to a shotgun. **Holy Moly Rocky, call in the conductagrononaut!**

In times of crisis a golf course manager must be able to orchestrate team talented individuals to perform beyond their abilities for the duration of an event. The superintendent must appreciate everyone's skills and apply them where they will do the most good, or impact the project with the greatest result. And after the calamity, and typically success of an event, everyone again goes back to practicing golf course maintenance.

In times of leisure, day to day operations educate the turf management staff as to their individual strengths and weaknesses. The mundane prepares them to be a working machine ready to charge, at the whim of the superintendent or during a battle with the elements.

Today when I am asked what it is like to be a golf course superintendent I am proud to announce that in truth I am really a conductagrononaut. In conjunction with applying my agronomic skills, I lead my team of turf professionals through a rigorous drill of training in preparation for the climatic events alongside of and into which we must sail like a schooner abreast a hurricane, racing to deliver the goods, a wonderful golf experience. - JM



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