

Assistant's Angle: *Got Golf?*

By NATE USELDING
Dellwood Hills Golf Club



Off the tree, bounce off the cart path, over the bunker, land on the fringe and roll-up to the hole...nothing but the bottom of the cup. What's your next shot? That was me when I was a kid, a high handicap, high risk shot maker enjoying the course with my friends. Now, with an appreciation of the game, I am a bogey golfer and would love to be a good golfer but I don't play or practice enough to be one. I want to though. Playing golf is one of my hobbies I just don't set aside enough time to play on a regular basis.

The game of golf is the most important part of our profession and for many of us it is why we became interested in this field. Now that it is our job, sometimes we solely look at it this way and lose sight of how the game is played. We only look at it from the maintenance perspective and not the golfers. I play with a persimmon wood off the tee and with one of the first sets of oversized irons. These clubs date back to many years ago and I question if I am enjoying the game of today's standards to the way golf should be played. With all the new technology, golf courses are being played differently then they were fifteen years ago. The game is now more enjoyable to all abilities of players because of technology and I want to have the same experience. Why, because I need to understand the game of golf the way our members are playing it. It would allow me to play the same game they are and feel first hand what may be concerning them.

As a golf course manager we see our course and perform management practices to it everyday, but how often do we play the game of golf? I think it is very important for us to play golf. Not only at our own course, but also at others because it opens your eyes up to a whole different perspective. We are creatures of habit and follow certain "maintenance paths" all day

long on the course. By playing golf you have to go where your ball goes and if you are like me, your ball doesn't always go where you want it. The great thing about the game is your ball never lies in the same spot twice, giving you a different look with each swing. It forces us to see the course differently than you normally would as a worker. Walking instead of riding makes a huge difference because you are moving at a much slower pace and get to see more "action."

into consideration when I rate the course. Let's start with the greens. Everyone cherishes their greens because golfers are more likely to remember the greens rather than the 12th tee box when their round is complete. How do they roll, how is their speed, and where is the pin located? Bad pin locations can really turn a round sour in the eyes of a golfer. The more you putt on your greens at different pin locations, the better you'll set the course up on a daily basis by having good pin locations. Green speeds are becoming an issue at many golf courses forcing us to maintain a consistent speed all year long. Different weather patterns have the ability to fluctuate the speeds from day to day, making it important we putt on our greens on a regular basis.

Learn the rules of golf and play by them. Last winter, I picked-up a copy of the rules and read them. I was amazed by how much I didn't know of the game and how I understood the rules differently. After talking to many average golfers, I realized I wasn't alone in how I perceived the rules. General knowledge of the game is important and it starts with the rules. We have the first hand in keeping the game honest and fair as we prepare the course for play each day.

Enjoy your course rather than having to work all day at it. Don't think of it as if you are going to work when you play, relax and have a good time. Invite your staff out to play and maybe have a mini outing with the clubhouse personnel. Your staff will have a better appreciation for the course if they play it along with you. Best of all, golf is free! We hold a benefit most employees would love to have, we just don't take advantage of it. Get out there and play a round of golf and see your course from a whole new perspective.

"Enjoy your course rather than having to work all day at it. Don't think of it as if you are going to work when you play, relax and have a good time. Get out there and play a round of golf and see your course from a whole new perspective."

For instance, when I play golf at our course, I will play from a different set of tees for each round. Sure, I normally don't play from the forward tees or the tips, but I like to experience and feel the whole course from all angles. It is like a fresh set of eyes when I am out there playing because I am not looking at the golf course as a worker anymore, I am seeing it as a golfer. Playing off different tee boxes puts you in real situations and in areas you normally would not play from. Maybe you spot crabgrass growing on the tee and now you know tomorrow to send a guy out to take care of it. Noticing issues before members notice them keeps you another step ahead in the game. I would rather experience and notice the flaws of the course before any member came to me about their concerns.

How do you feel the course plays? The feel factor is how you would categorize the course by the way it plays. Is it soft and wet, fast and dry, or perfect? I take in all areas, greens, tees, fairways, and rough