



In Bounds: Change and Flexibility

By JOHN "JACK" MACKENZIE, CGCS
North Oaks Golf Club

George joined me on my way to work today, George Gershwin and his Rhapsody in Blue that is. Yesterday it was John, Paul, Ringo and another George and tomorrow it may be Cher or even Garth. Recently my attitude regarding audible entertainment changed, and change is good.

For many years I had been a talk show junkie. Sure I had my D.J.s from Rush to Kim Commando and even a bit of Don "the good neighbor" every now and then. However, Joe Soucheray, the Mayor of Garage Logic regularly held my ear in the afternoons prattling about a variety of topics. That is until his radio station won the bid for the Minnesota Twins programming and changed to a sports oriented format.

Ouch, how dare they interrupt my day, my life, with new programming just so their "other" audience could get more sports? Change damn it, change! My life, my conservative, etched in stone manner of living was coming to a halt just because a huge corporate business wanted more sports, more patrons and more revenue. The audacity! Then again it is their company and capitalism is what makes the world turn.

But oh heavens to Betsy, what was I going to do? On a whim I flipped my arm rest nook cover up and beheld a wide variety of music aching to be heard. Frank Zappa, Roger Whitaker, Mozart, Elton John, The Beach Boys and The Indigo Girls beckoned me to tune them in. Dolly Parton crooned in my cab that day and thus began my new mission, listen to every CD I owned, even the marginal ones picked up at "discount" prices because I was once a long-term card carrying member of multiple music clubs. No longer was I tied to the thoughtless meanderings about life's idiosyncrasies re-construed and pontificated by just another talking head. Change from regurgitated news (typically bad news at that because good news doesn't

gain listener shares) to a format of music has inspired and encouraged free thought within me. Change is good, very good. Even on the golf course.

A once staunch proponent of half-and-

"I love my job and am thankful that even though I have had a couple of tough years, my membership stuck with me. So if they want a water cooler on every tee, fantastic. Or perhaps the addition of a senior set of tees, let's go for it."

half mowing, so classic and beautiful in its simplicity, my membership swayed my thoughts through mandating a stripped cut. This change came even after lengthy discussion about wear and tear on equipment, contamination of our new first cut low-mow bluegrass with Poa seeds from the fairway and the additional time necessary to complete the task ahead of play. As the one ultimately accountable for my club's agronomy, budget and equipment purchases – I was acting in a responsible manner.

The mowing design, however, really didn't matter to me as long as we kept ahead of play and provided a consistently great product. And although some felt my hesitation to cross-cut the fairways was due to a retentive issue, change came quite quickly as soon as the club initiated a new mowing pattern.

Change is good. The fairways do look great. It is too soon to tell if there is contamination and the effect that wear and tear will have upon the equipment, but the visual impact is quite different and appealing to many. From my perspective I am okay with the new style and I damn well better be. Because you know what? **IT IS NOT MY GOLF COURSE!**

There, I said it. As much as I love the grounds into which I have invested 23

years of labor, ultimately it isn't mine. My members own the club and I am an employee who, after articulating the finer points of turf management, must bow to their wishes and requests. Can I change? You betcha, and with a smile on my face. Again, it isn't my course.

I love my job and am thankful that even though I have had a couple of tough years, my membership stuck with me. So if they want a water cooler on every tee, fantastic. Or perhaps the addition of a senior set of tees, let's go for it. Even the decision

of bunker rakes inside or outside of the bunkers is left to the discretion of the players through committee action for me to implement. Painting the soil in the cup sets? I'm right on top of it. None of these changes is worth fighting a battle over.

Especially if that war would potentially end up with a fatality, me. We all know of a time or two that superintendent bullheadedness has sent a basical-

ly good guy packing. Agronomics often has nothing to do with our job. It boils down to politics and who is in charge.

In my early years I was at a club where the general manager was told by the club president to fire the food and beverage manager due to a personal tiff. The GM refused on the grounds that the said employee was an asset to the club and the President's accusations were inaccurate and not based upon the individual's job performance. The GM's contract, due shortly to be renewed, was not. The F&B manager was retired at the same time. Not too fun to watch, but I learned a lesson.

So what battle would I fight? There isn't one. The State of Minnesota has a law that allows employers to fire employees at will and without any provocation. I am employed by the membership and will bend to its ways. My success as superintendent will be measured by how well I embrace change and my flexibility related to the demands of my membership.

Tomorrow my son Tyler and I will share the cab to work. It is his turn to choose the music. Hmmm, who will it be? Weird Al Yankovic, Thirty Seconds To Mars or Eminem. Change is good...right?