

One Superintendent's Perspective

By **JAKE SCHMITZ**
Olympic Hills Golf Club

Olympic Hills Golf Club is located in Eden Prairie. The course opened in 1970 as a 'men only' club. Five or six years later, the doors were opened to everyone regardless of gender. The course is a Charles Maddox design that features large, undulated greens.

I am currently in my 11th year in the business as a full-time employee, along with five seasons during high school and college. I have been the superintendent at Olympic Hills for the past four years. Prior to that, I was an assistant at The Minikahda Club in Minneapolis and also spent time as an assistant at a private club outside of Philadelphia, PA.

Course maintenance got in my blood in high school. I enjoyed the fast pace of the job and the improvement aspect of the course that I worked on. Following graduation from college, I started out selling insurance and financial products, and realized that was not my calling. My brother, Matt, was the interim superintendent at Milwaukee Country Club at that time, and he asked me to move back to Milwaukee to work with him. Shortly thereafter, a formal turf education at Penn State followed, and it has been a great ride for me ever since.

I still stay in close contact with my first boss, Scott Schaller, who is an exceptional Superintendent at North Shore Golf Club in Menasha, WI. Scott is extremely talented at all aspects of golf course maintenance, and I fed off of his passion and drive for

making golf courses better.

Pat Sisk at Milwaukee Country Club, and Jim Loke at Bent Creek Country Club in Pennsylvania were also excellent teachers. They allowed for sound decision making as long as I communicated with them properly.

Locally, Superintendent Jeff Johnson was instrumental in guiding me to my current position. Jeff allowed me to network with a number of people at The Minikahda Club, which really helped my communication skills and prepared me for working with a new membership.

What has been the highest point in your career?

Getting my first superintendent's job at Olympic Hills.

What has been your lowest point?

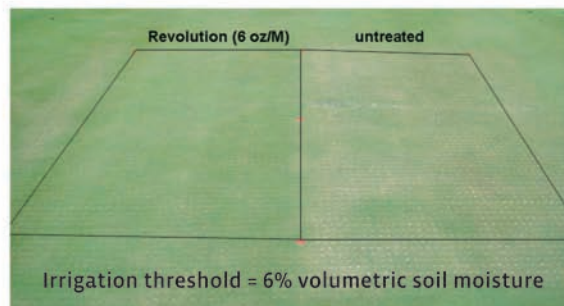
Suffering through a lot of winter damage in 2009. This was my first bout with winter kill as a superintendent, and it hit me pretty hard. There is a huge difference dealing with it as the team

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Superintendent Insight -

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leader as compared to dealing with winter kill in a supporting role.

Are your greatest challenges political, agronomic or managerial?

It seems we are always trying to keep our neighbors happy as we maintain the golf course. Special requests are numerous, and we do our best to stay honest with them and let them know that we are their neighbor as well. At any of the other courses I have ever worked on, I never had to deal with homes that sat right on the property, so this can be a challenge. I have met some very nice people along the way as well.

What is the most difficult disease to manage on your course and how do you?

We have been very fortunate in that disease pressure has not been overbearing for us over the course of the last couple of years. Changes to our maintenance practices seem to be playing a role. Limited nitrogen and ferrous sulphate applications seem to have had an impact. We also have switched all our mowing equipment from wiley rollers to smoothies, and the turf has responded very well.

Is it hard to find good help in your area of the state?

I have a tremendous staff. Some of my lead guys have brought friends and relatives with them, and it has made for a very good team. I am very fortunate to be working with these individuals.

Do you have a dog on your crew?

Mattie, the pheasant dog and now goose chaser. Mattie is a female English Setter that I got from Erin McManus at Medina CC. What a great dog!

Where will the industry be in 10 years?

Course maintenance will continue to improve, but the tools that we use right now in terms of plant protectants, herbicides and insecticides will be highly regulated. Water use will be drastically reduced as well. However, course conditioning will stay consistent because superintendents are an extremely resilient and talented group of individuals, and we will figure out how to adapt.

Where would you like to be in 10 years?

Personally, I will be following my kids' activities and enjoying the outdoors in Minnesota. Professionally, advancement is always a good thing. Hopefully, I will still be advancing the golfing experience at Olympic Hills.

What is your perspective of our state association and what would you change?

Our association is the envy of our neighbors to the east and west, and I think very highly of the individuals who continue to guide our association. An association is only as strong as its membership, so involvement and participation is key to strengthening and growing the MGCSA.

Name your dream foursome. Who would you like to spend time with golfing?

I would actually play a five-some with my Mom and Dad, and my brother and sister. They all understand what it takes to manage a golf course and rarely does a complaint ever arise!

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