



In Bounds

by Jack MacKenzie, CGCS

His words briefly echoed in my melon, “Head down, fall down”, just seconds before I watched the tip of the neon colored board cut cleanly into the back edge of the wake. With a startled shout, muffled by the assault of luke-warm water, my face was submerged quickly and harshly into

Big Marine Lake, my first attempt at wakeboarding ending in a sinus enema of horrific proportions.

It seems that the only good things in life found by keeping one’s ‘head down’ are agates on a country dirt road or the feel of a solidly hit golf shot. Yes, “head down, fall down”, are words that sum up many of the challenges we feel in our professional and personal lives. Perhaps the saying should be twisted into a more positive tang, “Head up, stay up”?

As a former Superintendent touring my previous courses, I often found myself focusing upon the smallest of things only to be reminded of the bigger picture when it hit me between my eyes. The blemish on hole two caused by ice damage too slow to recover, cross country ski tracks left across the sixteenth fairway and the tell tail signs of sliders on the hill in front of the eighteenth green seemed to capture and retain my attention.

It always seemed as spring progressed, the poa never greened up quickly enough, the summer staff never began work soon enough and the frost held tight too long in the cool mornings.

Early to work, and often wrapped up in the day, I didn’t take enough time to look at the whole picture from the player’s perspective as I was too engrossed in the smallest of nuances. Truth be told, the course seemed to always play pretty well for the month of April. Winter scares healed...patience, patience. Those trees, breaking buds and showing pretty blossoms sure did look great...the seasonal staff would be in soon to pick up the litter left from the gales of February. In hind sight the players were happy to be out and about stretching their legs. And wasn’t that the end game?

Funny how a new crew can do the strangest things...but even more amazing are the mind farts not uncommon in the returning staff, those who I always thought would know better after returning year upon year! Instead of seeing the challenges, perhaps a broader vision of latent potential should be observed. The idea of achieving the common goal of

going beyond your player's expectations and jointly shared disappointment when Mother Nature gives them a wedgie, brings about camaraderie that should be cherished by one and all. Capture those bigger moments rather than the perennial cart traffic mark near the fourth tee.

A new season allows for fresh opportunities between you and the clubhouse and golf shop staff. With a solid 'head up' take time to notice the changes that will have an impact upon your season ahead. Perhaps a little admiration of the soft goods will win a future favor. Complementing the menu could elicit a special snack and mentioning the professionalism of your locker room attendant may very well earn a shoeshine. Why scurry through the building with your mind on auto focus? 'Head up', look for the obvious and share a kind word of acknowledgement.

Is it an equilibrium thing or the fact that with your 'head up' you won't fall down as much on the lake, the ski slope or in life?

How about a 'head up' at home? While the course will take a large percent of your time and attention, it cannot become your focal point or there is a potential to fall down at your most important job, that of maintaining your family relationships. Indeed there will be times your turf requires great thought and angst. But look at the bigger picture and appreciate that turfgrass never made you laugh like you did at your kid's last birthday party. That pure bunker didn't bring the joy you felt when your wife announced she was pregnant. And in your heart, the attainment of a 13 on the stimpmeter during Men's Guest Day didn't provide the gratification of one more day fishing with your father especially after the close call last winter.

In my first marriage too often I spent my days 'head down' and after seven years, two kids and what I thought were good times, I fell down. That crash did give me pause for a change in posture. My 'head up' position has afforded me the clear vision of what is important...the totality of life and not the seemingly important teeniest of details which grew to distracting proportions.

Following my power sinus flush, complete with honking cough and the stinging, eye-weeping, sensation only experienced following the ingestion of water blasted up your nose and into your lungs, I replaced my feet into the awkward harness of the wakeboard. "HIT IT", I shouted. With renewed enthusiasm I was dragged around the lake in prime fashion.

Maybe not perfect, but with a 'head up' I was able to maintain my perspective and only went down comfortably on my own terms when my body was ready to take a break. Tired, yet extremely satisfied, my refined attitude allowed for an open-minded perspective and wholeness for I was living the complete experience with my head held high.