



Within the Leather

by David Kazmierczak, CGCS

Anybody who knows me knows I am a football fanatic.

Come fall, for good or bad, I become consumed by the game. Whether its high school, college or pro ball, I simply cannot get enough of all that is football, and I know that I am not alone. But why? Why am I so obsessed by football?

It has been said that football mirrors life. The game is a parallel of many aspects of the ebbs and flows of everyday existence if broken down and analyzed in that way. I'm not sure about all that, but as I wrote this column with the game on, I started thinking about the parallels to our lovely profession and here is what I came up with.

First off is the obvious fact that football is the ultimate team sport. It takes 11 guys a side, working together in every detail of play to be successful. If there is even one player acting alone of not following the scheme, offense, defense or special teams, the whole system breaks down and success is unachievable.

Now think about your crew at the golf course. If you have one guy not showing up to work, not doing what he needs to do in the field, not following instructions the entire operation overall will not be able to achieve the ultimate goal of the best golf course it can be. Get a couple bad apples on the crew and it can turn into a real mess!

Football is played during every season, and in every kind of weather. It is played on grass, or a grass-like surface. There is a smell to a football field that if you have played the game you know very, very well. The field, practice or game, is like a second home. The guys you play with on your team become your brothers of sorts. Like family.

Now think about your golf course. I have been outside in every kind of weather there is working on a golf course. Wind, hail, snow, sleet, heat, humidity, it doesn't matter. You still have a job to do and together with your crew, you get it done. Just like football. The course and its surroundings are your home away from home. Your assistants and your crew become your friends, your brothers (and sisters) of a sort.

The hierarchy of a football team is exactly that of a golf course. It is

said that all football head coaches are hired to be fired. It's just a matter of how long it takes. While that isn't exactly true of golf course superintendents, thankfully, there are definite similarities. There are a certain number of football teams. There are a certain number of golf courses. Each has only one head guy. The head guy has (normally) two assistants or main coordinators. The underlings want to be the head guy, but have to wait for a position to open. It takes extreme cohesion for the management team of both to run a successful operation, and it takes long hours of hard work to pull it off.

I think the greatest similarity of the two, however, is the fact that both football and golf are sports, and they are sports that are followed or played so passionately by so many people. Because of that, most people think they have a firm grasp of the complexities of running a golf course, because they play, or how a team should be run, because they watch football. That's where the trouble begins.

The truth is, as we in the superintendent business know, there is a heck of a lot that goes into running a successful operation at a golf course that the average golfer will never be privy too or often understand. This is exactly the same as football.

As I watch the local team struggle I am quick to offer my two cents as to what the problem is, what should be done, and pump my chest out in exclaiming that they are awful and here is what should be done. Really? How is that any different than some random golfer or a member that complains about this or that on the golf course but has no clue as to the why or how the conditions are what they are?

I hear opinions from just about everybody when it comes to the golf course. I hear just about everybody offer opinions on their football team; same thing. It is a good thing because that means that person is engaged and cares about either the golf course or the football team in question. But the next time you rip your squad's coach for a decision or call for the quarterback's head, think twice about your own situation. I think you will find quite a similarity.

Now, to be sure, a football coach is probably making more money than the average course superintendent, and functions in a greater spotlight, but if you break it down, they are just like us. Football is just like golf course management. Maybe that's why I'm so attracted to both. If you enjoy the game, enjoy the season.