



# In Bounds

by Jack MacKenzie, CGCS

Funny, when I look back and remember the not to distant past, my mind drifts to “ownership” of objects and persons that were not mine. In fact, I came to covet many things as a superintendent.

I “owned” my golf courses, all of them, but especially those where I was top dog. I owned my seasonal staff, even though there were a few whom I really didn’t want. I owned my assistants, all of who dedicated themselves to growing grass with passion equal to mine. And I also took ownership of my mechanic, the guy in the background who was much more important to my job than I likely gave him credit for.

Now, on the other side on the industry now, I have come to fully appreciate how critical my mechanic really was to operations at all the courses I worked. As I sort through the equipment manager positions posted upon the MGCSA website, my heart goes out to those who are searching for that unique individual who plugs away managing a huge and diverse arsenal of

turf maintenance equipment.

Hydraulics, electronics, hydrostatics, fuel injectors, carburetors, diagnostic tools, presses, pullers, gear reducers, expanders, cylinders, valves, pistons, rods, crankshafts, brakes, hoses, axels, wiring harnesses, bed knives, reels and filters. Gang mowers, topdressers, aerators, gas and electric carts, small engines, large engines, triplexes, walk mowers, trailers, sweepers, blowers, line trimmers, chainsaws, pick up trucks, tractors, skid steer loaders, lifts, jacks and just a bit of agronomic knowledge to question the wisest superintendent from going overboard with odd requests.

You know the ones, “Hey, could you open that top dresser just a little bit more so we get great coverage? Could we change those hollow tines to solids? On second though how about quad tines instead? Be sure and lower the height of cut by .001 inch by tomorrow morning. Just open the throttle up a little bit more and our pressure should be just about perfect. How about a bit more sand? Could we lower it just another .001 inches? Did I mention I want to aerify and overseed the range tee this afternoon? You wouldn’t mind looking at Dr. Johnson’s mower would

you? What do you have planned for this weekend?"

Over the years not only did I have to learn how to manage senior operators, junior operators, gal operators, member kid's operators, Hispanic operators and intern operators, but so did my equipment managers. Their interactions were always on the receiving end... the receiving end of a broken piece of equipment that is. And unfortunately, many of the failures were due to my lack of judgment and encouraging the equipment be pushed further than it was intended to perform.

Then again, they were partially to blame because there wasn't anything they couldn't fix or figure out, and I relied upon that assurance.

Hey Bill, Roger, Pat, Rich, Dick, Jim and especially Bob, thank you for your amazing abilities in maintaining a fleet of assorted equipment, keeping your cool when addressing the staff for disassembling your fine work, managing my expectations by proposing realistic options to many of my radical requests, always having the tools necessary to match the player's demands, informing me of things I didn't want to know in a variety of ways with the end game of improving the operations of the club and above all that, thanks for being my

friends especially when I took you for granted. Only too often I am afraid.

Back in the 1970's when I began my climb in the industry, one full time mechanic was a luxury. Player expectations were nothing compared to today and a new piece of equipment came around once every three years or so. Blitzers, Nationals, triplexes (still new at the time), small staffs, hand clippers and a very limited number of Cushman's didn't really require a fully equipped shop much less a full time mechanic. Reels were rebuilt and ground once each year in the winter whether they needed it or not. Turf management machinery lasted longer because fewer hands operated it. Youthful staff was sent out in the morning with a hand clipper and rotary mower, sans cart, to trim the course.

The 80's saw a revolution in equipment and demands, both the players and mine. The hydraulic, lightweight mower market exploded along with line trimmers, refined aerators, top dressers and spraying equipment. No longer did clubs rely upon one Cushman with a variety of interchangeable work components. Dedicated machines became vogue. Full time mechanics were suddenly required to maintain a growing fleet of

specialized equipment. More often than not, these individuals came from the existing crew because they were “handy with equipment”.

Expectations continued to grow in the 1990’s and new millennium. Old ideas were new again. Water injection, light topdressing, rollers, double and triple cutting. Spray technology took leaps and bounds; growth regulators, spoon-feeding, a plethora of chemistries to be applied and more and more assumptions that the equipment manager could just “keep up” with the changing times.

Sadly, as I look back, I fear I didn’t keep up with the dynamics that player requirements placed upon the strongest cog in my wheelhouse, my equipment manager. New pole barns were built to house an ever growing fleet of equipment. Every staff member had a utility cart, we had a dozen line trimmers, seven walk mowers and three sprayers. But disgracefully, still only one mechanic to keep up with all of the changes.

Then the economy took a dive... but of course not expectations, and thus even more pressure came to bare upon my key staff. Eventually, I did get an additional seasonal assistant, an intern and my summer staff grew from 12 to 22 through the years. My equipment

manager got a floor lift. Better than nothing I suppose.

As I review the many equipment manager opportunities that have crossed my desk this year I wonder if perhaps this position is suffering “burn out”, not unlike other management positions often do at a golf course. Have wages and benefits kept up with the changing times? Should clubs consider employing full time or seasonal assistant equipment managers? Do EMs have the tools necessary to be productive especially in this every changing environment?

This year the MGCSA has been working hard on expanding the D or Equipment Manager Classification. Through this outreach effort I have come in contact with much different set of fine professionals with a completely different perspective on the industry. They love and take ownership of their machines just as you do of your course. They also have families, hobbies, needs and dreams just as you do.

It is easy for me to reflect upon some of my inadequacies as a manager when it came to my right hand wrench, unfortunately I am beyond doing anything about them. But it is never too late to give a big thanks to my “solids”, Bill, Roger, Pat, Rich, Dick, Jim and Bob. No, especially Bobby, MY equipment mechanic, thank you.