

Are You Riding the Pine?

Applying Hockey's Lessons Towards a Successful Career in Golf

As an assistant superintendent, you may be "riding the pine," waiting for your breakthrough opportunity in a highly competitive industry. Or you may have attained superintendent status already but need to reenergize your career. An MAGCS member who went from "player to sprayer," hockey to greenkeeping, shares his unique vision for accomplishing goals and achieving success—a vision developed from personal experience and the experiences of successful golf course superintendents.



As a 16-year-old member of the Lakeland Jets (Lakeland, MI) of the North American Hockey League (NAHL), the author looks down the ice for a breakout pass.

"Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success." Stephen A. Brennan

This article is about success, a complex subject to say the least. It's an outcome reached by any one of many avenues, but what exactly is success? How do you go about achieving success? What are the steps necessary for success? Is success hard to achieve? How do you measure success?

Certainly, one person's idea of success differs from the next guy's. Definitions include:

- Satisfactory completion of something.
- Gaining of wealth and fame.
- Favorable termination.
- Attainment of goals.

It was my senior year in college, late March, and our hockey team, the Niagara University Purple Eagles, had just returned from the Frozen Four Division I NCAA Tournament. We had a successful year but unfortunately, our return was without a national championship. North Dakota University, who eventually went on to win it all, took the game out from underneath us as the last few minutes in the third period ticked down. Niagara was a new team to the NCAA, only four years old, and yet we had already succeeded in making it to the national championship. As a team, we achieved this success by eliminating such elite programs as the University of Michigan, Western Michigan, Boston University, Colorado College, University of New Hampshire, St. Lawrence University, Yale and Princeton. We accomplished our success as a team by setting stringent goals. We established short- and long-term goals for every season, every opponent and every player's individual performance. We

(continued on page 8)

studied motivational tapes and books, kept journals of our goals and achievements, and met frequently with successful athletes and business leaders. We evaluated and reevaluated our status through player meetings and player-coach conferences. We learned to take any opportunity available to enhance our drive for the greater goal. We knew that meeting our goals would mean success!

Our defeat at the Final Four left us feeling deflated, as if our hard work, preparation and planning had gone to waste. As a college senior, it was hard for me to accept that the opportunity of winning a collegiate national championship would never present itself again. However, the reality was that the four years in Niagara Falls had not only prepared us as a team to compete with anyone on an icy surface, but had also mentally trained and primed us for the life that awaited us outside school in the real world. Little did we realize that we were all becoming champions in life!



Playing NCAA Division 1 hockey as a member of the Niagara University Purple Eagles, Maksymiu flies down the ice, passing a defenseman, to get an open break.

Setting Goals

One similarity between hockey and the golf industry is that both feature seasonal operations or play. Hence, both hockey and golf give us the opportunity for planning during an off-season. Set goals! A goal: an aim or objective, purpose, a mark to meet in a race. Similarly, a superintendent should create a vision from goals. The superintendent's goals may be derived from a scheduled meeting with the general manager or

greens committee chairman regarding improvements needed or what the clientele seeks to accomplish. The goals germinated at this meeting should be a good mix of short- and long-term.

As the hustle and bustle of the golf season gets on its way, it is easy to get turned around and lose focus on your objectives. It is sometimes easy to confuse your main objectives or *goals* with your daily routine of *tasks*. Although tasks are more mundane, they are important; they are integral in achieving goals. Organize between your left and right ear, allowing both your goals and tasks to work for you in structuring your day. Writing down on an ordinary piece of paper the goals you want to achieve each day is simple and hardly time-consuming. As simple as it seems to remember a few objectives, documentation will lessen the likelihood of error. With golfers at the gate lined up like horses at the racetrack, waiting for the "pop" of the gun to see who can be first to get in a round,

Hollembeak Construction, Inc.

Golf Course Construction and Remodeling

"We believe in a quality job and take pride in our finished product."

- New Construction
- Feature Shaping
- Bunker Sand Replacement
- Pond Dredging
- Pond Construction
- Boulder Features
- Cart Paths
- Drainage

Mike Hollembeak

P.O. Box 103
Big Rock, Illinois 60511
Phone (630) 556-3891

Jeff Hollembeak

what superintendent really has time for early-morning brainstorming? Jot down that list before the race starts. The grounds department needs to be prepared for and focused on its tasks throughout the morning and afternoon, assuring their clients a fulfilling and pleasurable experience of golf each and every day and achieving the goals set forth.

As members of a Division 1 college hockey team, we convened at the end of each season to plan for the next. We then followed up at the beginning of each season to evaluate our off-season progress and prepare for the upcoming year. Based on our schedule, we gathered each month to determine our goals and status for our upcoming opponents. Our seasonal and game goals were determined by the available resources. Both individually and as a team, we would view game tape, break down the opponent's strategy and create our own strategic goals. Hours prior to each game we had a team meal where we reviewed our goals for that game. Closer to game time and preceding



Maksymiu—wearing the uniform of the South Carolina Sting Rays (ECHL)—bears down at practice, improving his skills for game time.

warm ups, we would once again evaluate our game tasks such as:

- Shots on net—for and against;
- +/- (goals for and goals against);
- Hits of the night (best body checks);
- Penalties/power plays;
- Offensive/defensive control; and
- Motivational quote of the game.


For us, this approach was the recipe for success within four years of our program's inception. We learned that setting a timeframe in which to reach your goals is paramount. Other lessons we can apply as superintendents include distinguishing between personal and professional goals. Set dates for each goal, being exact about the day you want that goal to have been met. Doing so will help you avoid any conflicts with other goals you have set forth in that time period, thereby giving you a better overall picture of priority. Goals need to be realistic, meaning they are reasonably achievable. Avoid the self-destructive practice of setting goals out of reach with what you have in your arsenal. Conversely, setting goals too low will not challenge or motivate you to reach your potential.

Beyond the Final Four

One week after our return from the NCAA finals, I received an 8:00 a.m. phone call, awakening me to catch the first plane out of Niagara Falls destined for Charleston, South

(continued on page 10)

A Continuing Tradition of Quality
in Golf Course Renovation
Restoration and New
Construction



**the
bruce
company**
OF WISCONSIN, INC.

[608] 836-7041
FAX: [608] 831-4236

WWW.BRUCEGOLF.COM

Carolina. Although my classes for the day started at 10:00 a.m., I put my education on hold and at 9:30 a.m. I was riding in first class on American Airlines. I was leaving school and friends behind, only four weeks before graduation. Playing professional hockey was a goal and dream of mine since I was a little boy, and nothing at this point was going to stop me. I was finally on my way to play my first professional East Coast Hockey League game in front of 10,000 screaming fans for the South Carolina Sting Rays. The Sting Rays were the ECHL affiliate to the National Hockey League's Buffalo Sabres. The Sting Rays were fighting for position in the Eastern Conference of the Southern Division, trying to clinch a playoff spot.

Three games were all that remained of the Stingrays' season, two against the Greenville Growl and one against the Augusta Lynx. Experiencing high tension and butterflies throughout my body, I stepped onto the ice as a pro for the first time. As I



This is Maksymiu during his tenure with the South Carolina Sting Rays (ECHL) in the moment just before scoring the winning goal against the Augusta Lynx to make the playoffs.

glanced toward the far end of the ice to get a look at who I'd be up against, the Greenville team looked like giants. These grizzly players were mostly seasoned veterans, growing full playoff beards, with the scarred look of time, experience and determination on their faces. These players had seen it all and I was intimidated, a rookie fresh from the sheltered

world of collegiate athletics. However, the games went well as we split the series with Greenville. I had one assist in the first game.

The final regular-season game to determine who would make the playoffs was next. We were tired from playing two games in two days, and two nights of restless sleep on the team bus. As far as we were concerned, this game was for our lives. The game against Augusta was fast-paced, hard-hitting, with lots of penalties. With rookie status, and not much experience in the team's power play, I only touched the ice once during the game, helping to successfully kill a penalty. The game ended in a 1-1 tie. The ECHL didn't play overtime, but instead used the method of a "shoot out" to determine the game's winner. A "shoot out" is when a player from each team gets one free shot on the goalie to score. As I "rode the pine" watching eight straight players attempt to score, I caught myself wondering if I would get a chance to win the game. All the preparation



Nels J. Johnson Tree Experts, Inc.
Since 1930

A Tradition of Excellence.
More than 70 years of complete, dependable and economical trees service for residential homes, municipalities, schools, industrial areas, parks and over 125 golf courses.

847-475-1877
fax - 847-475-0037
www.nelsjohnsontree.com

throughout college, setting goals for myself, staying determined and focused, visualizing all game situations, reading and reacting to those moments over and over in my head, were going to help me if I were to get an opportunity to succeed.

The moment of truth came. I was called off the pine, and all the veterans were howling, "Rookie, rookie!" At this point, I already knew I was going to score. I had taken all the necessary steps to get to this level and succeed. My goals were becoming a reality. I was focused, and my focus silenced the raucous stadium. The Augusta goaltender and I were all who stood on the ice. One of us was going home as a hero, and the playoff season stood on the balance of one goal. I was off; my mind was blank and my movements were on autopilot. As a direct result of proper planning, practice and visualization of game situations, it was like I'd been there before. As my body moved on its own toward the net, I could see the goalie getting closer and closer, shifting his body to match my move-



After scoring the goal, recalls Maksymiu, "I hug the goaltender as the rest of the team celebrates our victory over the Augusta Lynx, sending us into playoff contention."

ments. In one split moment, I made my move, faking a quick shot, and moving rapidly from left to right. With only inches to go, I maneuvered the puck from forehand to backhand, delivering a blistering backhand shot accurate enough to kill a fly. Coasting behind the net, body fully extended from reaching outward, I see the threads in the upper-righthand corner

(continued on page 12)

All the preparation throughout college, setting goals for myself, staying determined and focused, visualizing all game situations, reading and reacting to those moments over and over in my head, were going to help me if I were to get an opportunity to succeed.

Wild Goose Chase™

We think our new name says it all — it's what we do! With **Wild Goose Chase™** you'll receive the same great service and integrated solutions you did when we were *Migratory Bird Management*. Call Sue Hagberg, *President*, at **708.448.8878**. Remember, if we don't answer our phone it's because we're on another Wild Goose Chase! You may also visit our web site at www.wildgoosechasers.net. Or, e-mail us at mbmgoose@covad.net.

Wild Goose Chase™
Time To Fly!

Simplot PARTNERS™

Delivering Total Solutions

Programs Tailored to Fit What You Need

Contact Simplot Partners:
 Tim Keating (630) 514-8997
 Scot Spier (630) 546-0222
 A. J. Huey (630) 514-8745

5300 Katrine Avenue, Downers Grove, IL 60515
 Phone (630) 963-8787
www.simplotpartners.com

© 2002 J. R. Simplot Company. All rights reserved.

of the net protruding outward. Then it hits me, I SCORED! The puck entered the net, just slipping over the goalie's glove hand. The red lights went off, and the small mobs of hardcore Stingray fans were on their toes screaming.

I achieved the goal of making a statement professionally as our team achieved playoff status, and I experienced the sweet taste of success. A week away from graduation I returned to school, leaving the team during the playoffs. I had other goals to obtain, and one was my college degree. After graduation I had the opportunity to play pro hockey for three more years in the ECHL, United Hockey League (UHL) and American Hockey League (AHL).

Planning, Communication and Determination: The Road to Success

Setting short-term and long-term goals requires asking yourself where you see yourself tomorrow, at the end of the week, next week, month's end, year's end and three to five years from now. The latter questions can be overwhelming, especially the more time you put into thinking about them. In adjusting from one career to another, from player to sprayer, I discovered that the road to success and achieving team or individual goals entails many identical steps. These steps include organized,

... the road to success and achieving team or individual goals entails organized, collective planning, continuous and resourceful communication, and determination ...



As one of the Adirondack Ice Hawks (UHL), Maksymiu beats the defenseman for the Elmira Jackals to score a goal.

collective planning, continuous and resourceful communication, and the overall determination to carry out strategic objectives effectively and efficiently. Relay these steps and expectations down through the chain of governance: your management team, mechanics and technicians, and grounds crew. Take initiative and don't rely on others to develop goals for you.

The upkeep of a golf course or country club is not left solely up to just the superintendent. Ideally, the superintendent and assistant should form a team. Superintendents should be setting goals for themselves as well as team goals for their staff and facility. Assistant superintendents should develop their own short- and long-term goals, basing them on the team goals the superintendent has set forth. Encourage the mechanics, technicians and grounds crew to develop individual goals that dovetail with achieving the team goals. Goal-setting can be a collective effort entered into by the superintendent and his management team. A successfully goal-oriented superintendent will expect his management team and grounds crew to set their own objectives to achieve team goals. Documenting goals and objectives will assist in the evaluation and review process at year's end.

Make it a goal at the end of each season to sit down with your management team and develop a review process that evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of your grounds staff.

A successful management team will evaluate itself as a collective and as individuals. An experienced assistant may be included in the evaluation of the mechanics, technicians and grounds crew. As a team, work off the same page and work for the same outcome. A successful crew will have a sense of team accomplishment. Conversely, focus on individual efforts will accomplish less, rendering more formidable the obstacles you face from behavior problems, course conditions and project-management issues.

After establishing a strategic plan and goals for the year, communicate these to your grounds team effectively. Communication can be the best problem-solver there is, but many of us don't know how to go about it. Effectively communicating the goals and objectives provides the direction you and your facility will be heading in that season. Communication to your supervisor, coworkers, friends and family is critical to success and the ability to improve on the conditions in which you live and work. Miscommunication can actually inhibit the progress towards goals. Make it a habit to set goals and communicate them well. For a hockey team, communication is crucial, both on and off the ice. Hockey is the fastest game on earth, and knowing where your teammates are at all times takes involvement from everyone. Communication is such an important habit to develop that it deserves a reputation as one of the primary steppingstones to success.

"Life is about dealing with other people: those above us (our boss), those around us (our colleagues and friends), and those who look up to us (our employees and children). The art of communication is about how to make contact with each of these groups so that they can help you achieve your goals, and you, in turn, can help them achieve theirs." Rick Pitino, NBA

Success Is a Journey

When implementing team strategies, how does a superintendent measure their success, and know if success is achieved? The superintendent and grounds team always strive to pro-

duce a good product. One sound method of measuring success is determining what sort of inputs you are receiving based on your outputs for the season. Measure success by the overall assessment received from your membership or customers. Is the mutual consensus one of success as communicated during your meetings with your general manager or greens committee chairman? Quantify progression. Have improvements accomplished by your team made a distinct impact on your facility? If the improvements have been considered positive, and have been accomplished in the projected time-frame, you are succeeding.

A successful individual will also project a positive self-image to others. In golf, we work for many business-oriented people. These people hold high standards for themselves and others, and have pursued and attained a lifestyle that allows them to play golf on a regular basis. Educate yourself on your clientele by relating to them and their interests. Read the *Wall Street Journal* or *Fortune*, or simply pay attention to headlines. Achieve a positive perception from your members and administration by maintaining visibility and availability to them on a daily basis. Mingle occasionally in the grill room. Allow time to play golf with regulars or involve yourself in other endeavors that concern the people you work for. Make your boss look as successful as possible, as this will reflect positively on you.

I've been fortunate enough to have enjoyed a career in the game of hockey. This enabled me to share many great experiences, see a lot of places and contribute toward many team successes, including at the elite collegiate and professional levels. I would not have been blessed with the experience of pro hockey without the ability to set goals. Expect your road to success to be challenged by setbacks, roadblocks and injury. Determination is necessary to stay focused on goals and objectives.

Remember that the road to success can be a minefield; it never comes sugar-coated or with guarantees of longevity. As one of our local superintendents put it, "Goals that are not achieved are simply dreams." The

success of seasonal operations at a golf facility does not depend on the one "Super Golf Course Maintenance Man," but the involvement of the grounds staff, which is nurtured by the entire management team. The superintendent, who has set stringent goals for himself, crew and facility, is the leader of the management team. The assistant can be a powerful tandem player with the leader. It is the successful leader who creates a vision and motivates the team to complete objectives and achieve goals. "Success in life comes not from holding a good hand, but in playing a poor hand well." Denis Waitley and Rem L. Witt

References

Pitino, Rick. *Success Is a Choice*. New York: Broadway, 1997.

Riley, Pat. *The Winner Within*. New York: Riles & Co., 1993.

I would like to give special thanks to several superintendents for their input toward this article:

Bruce R. Williams – Los Angeles Country Club, California

Jon Jennings – Chicago Golf Club, Illinois

Joel Purpur – River Forest Country Club, Illinois

Erwin McKone – Briar Ridge Country Club, Indiana



The author reflects: "Coming from a hockey family, as a little boy I dreamed of playing professional hockey. Every night my brothers and I would play hockey on the backyard ice rink 'til dark, then we'd go inside to watch hockey night in Canada with our father."

MINI-EXCAVATORS

Kubota



**Kubota mini-excavators
available in 5 sizes to fit your job.**

MARTIN
IMPLEMENT

16400 S. 104th Avenue
Orland Park, IL 60467
(708) 349-8430