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FRONT COVER

Marsh Course, no. 6 (left) and Marsh Course, no. 2 at Ivanhoe Club in central Lake County, site of the MAGCS/ITF combined meeting this May 23rd.
(Photo by Golf Shots Unlimited, Inc., Castle Rock, Colorado, 303-814-3586)

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The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS), founded December 24, 1926, is a professional organization whose goals include preservation and dissemination of scientific and practical knowledge pertaining to golf turf maintenance.

We endeavor to increase efficiency and economic performance while improving and enhancing the individual and collective prestige of the members.

The MAGCS member is also an environmental steward. We strive to uphold and enhance our surroundings by promoting flora and fauna in every facet in a manner that is beneficial to the general public now and in the future.



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ON COURSE WITH THE PRESIDENT

Phil Zeinert, CGCS Elgin Country Club

Strengthening Our Alliances

The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents is allied with many fellow industry associations. The superintendent-member associations include the Chicagoland Association of Golf Course Superintendents, the Northwestern Illinois GCSA and the Central Illinois GCSA. We also work with the Turf Equipment Technicians Association, the Chicago District Golf Association, the Green Industry, Illinois Junior Golf Association, The First Tee, the Midwest Sod Council, the Illinois PGA, USGA Mid-Continent Region and the Illinois Golf Hall of Fame.

The MAGCS has forged and nurtured alliances with many fellow golf industry associations, among them other local GCSAA chapters, the CDGA, the IJGA, the IPGA and TETA.

One of the organizations with which we work most closely is the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation. This month's golf meeting is a combined meeting with the ITF. Tom Prichard will be hosting the joint venture at the Ivanhoe Club in central Lake County, IL. Everyone is encouraged to attend the event on May 23 at a great venue for a great cause—raising monies for the ITF.

The ITF was founded in 1959 and raises funds to help support turfgrass research and education in Illinois. The dollars generated from the combined meetings help support research at the University of Illinois and Southern Illinois University. The monies also have been used to help establish a permanent turf pathologist position at the U of I and for undergraduate scholarships for turf students. I encourage all MAGCS members to participate in the ITF functions. You can find further information at www.illinoisturfgrassfoundation.org or by contacting our shared executive director, Luke Cella, at 630-243-9483.

At this year's Masters at Augusta National, the GCSAA executive members met with executive members from the USGA to further bolster what is already a strong relationship. I know many superintendents and their golf clubs have utilized the Turf Advisory Service with outstanding results. And those people who were able to attend the CDGA/USGA Green Seminar at Medinah this past March were able to benefit enormously from Paul Vermeulen's presentation. Paul has always spoken passionately in regards to improving the superintendent's communication with committees, chairmen and members.

The Turf Equipment Technicians Association serves our area mechanics with informational and networking opportunities. The youth of today seem to have a lack of interest in getting involved in golf course mechanics—we're just not as cool as NASCAR and create little buzz. However, Russell Stachlewitz at Kishwaukee College in Malta, IL, tells us about their turf tech program. Please encourage anyone you know that shows interest in equipment repair and management to consider the program at Kishwaukee.

And finally, if you did not get a chance to read the article "The Shape of Things to Come" by Cathy Miles Ralston that ran in last month's magazine, please do so. This article is an overview of a strategic plan in the works. The mission statement is online and this is a great place to comment and offer feedback. Remember that this plan is in the works and can only become a solid membership-owned plan with your input.



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The Assistants' Beat

Going into the second year of my term as the MAGCS class C advisor, I am proud of what the Committee has accomplished. Those who attended the annual Assistant Superintendent Winter Workshop in February enjoyed listening to Pat Jones of Flagstick Strategic Consulting cover the topic of communication and the future of the turf industry. The afternoon was rounded off with presentations by assistants relating some personal experiences showing creative ways to improve communication with employees and present oneself professionally. The event was a great success, and I am confident the attendees gained some valuable information that they can use in their careers. I am looking for ideas for topics for next year's workshop, so please let me know if there is some issue you think we should cover.

... we have moved the class C championship to Monday, June 13, to be played in conjunction with the Dom Grotti competition at Phillips Park G.C.

Another terrific event started last year for assistants was the MAGCS Class C Golf Championship. Assistants played at Glen Flora Country Club for the honor of taking home the "cup-cutter" trophy. The event will continue this year with a minor change. Instead of combining it with the MAGCS scholarship fundraiser golf event, we have moved the class C championship to Monday, June 13, to be played in conjunction with the Dom Grotti competition at Phillips Park G.C. The MAGCS assistant superintendent who cards the lowest gross score will take home the "cup-cutter" trophy with his name and score engraved on the cup. So plan to play where you could feasibly go home with two trophies: the Dom Grotti and the "cup-cutter."

I am also looking to resurrect an event that was launched a number of years ago before the class C advisor position was ever created: assistants' "Shop Talk." In speaking with fellow assistants, I have discovered that some feel we have become too formal with our events, and that a number of assistants greatly enjoyed the informal "Shop Talk" gatherings we used to hold. Therefore, I am planning to have two "Shop Talk" events this year. Hopefully, long before you read this, you heard about and were able to attend our first "Shop Talk," hosted by Scott White on April 12 at The Links at Carillon. This promised to be an outstanding opportunity to network with other assistants amidst a relaxed atmosphere to talk. Any assistant superintendents (including non-MAGCS members) are welcome to attend "Shop Talk," so call a friend from down the road and come hang out with us. I apologize that we do not have a date or place scheduled for the fall at this time, but keep your eyes and ears open for details on the autumn edition of "Shop Talk."

Another new project on which I am working is a "Big Brother" type of program. This would be a voluntary program, in which an assistant moving into a superintendent role could sign on with a veteran superintendent for support in his or her new role. My hope for this program is that it will create a reliable, supportive networking environment for the rookie superintendent, facilitating a smooth transition into the new and challenging role. I am presently putting together the structure of this program and welcome any comments or suggestions.

Much of what I have been able to accomplish is due to the support of many people. My Committee has done a great job with every project I have

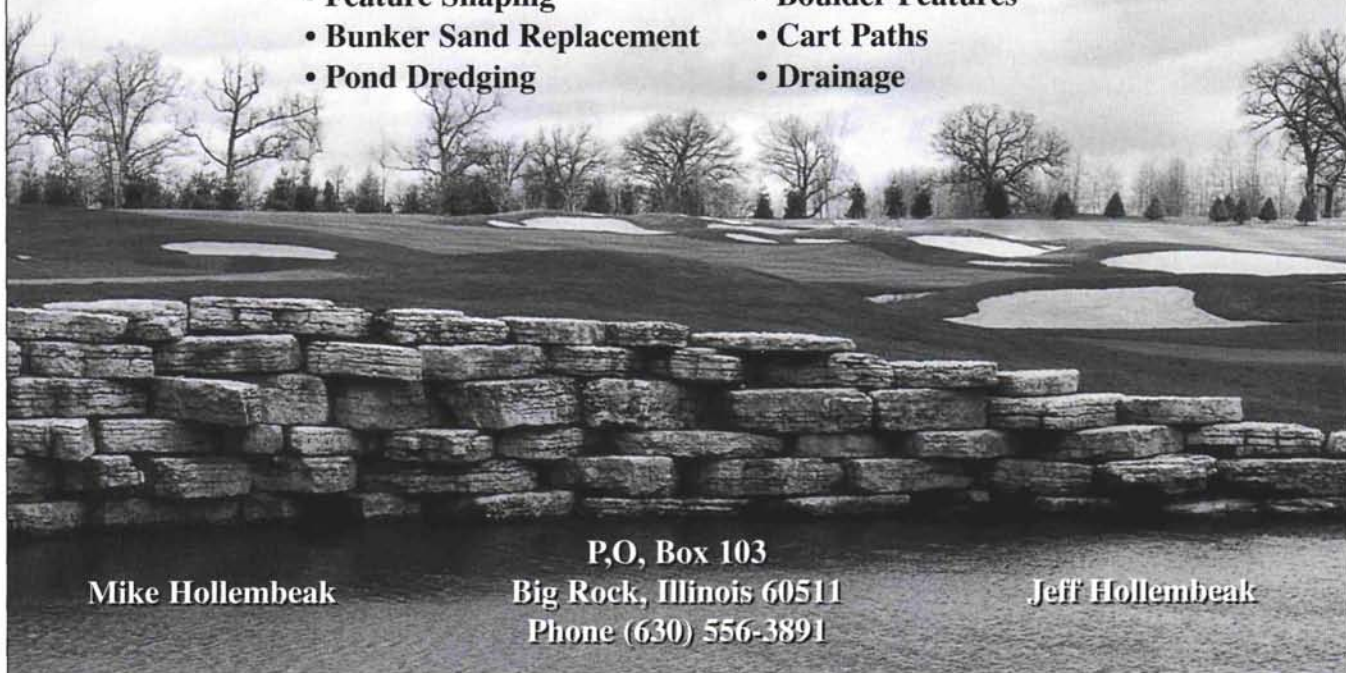
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The Golf Paradox

"Today's great experience will be tomorrow's expectation."

When did golf become an industry?

Years ago golf was a game, a simple pastime. Technology, maintenance, golf course design, television contracts, apparel, real estate and print media all have had a profound influence on the game. Each has altered the industry, transformed the industry and changed the game. Club manufacturers and the PGA Tour have had the most influence. Their decisions have had widely felt implications, and the game is now playing "catch-up" to club technology and maintenance expectations.

Unreasonable expectations for maintenance standards, service and play have drastically changed the face of the game over the past 30 years . . . Expectations grow beyond reason while the industry suffers and the average player is losing out.

What's the result? The industry is now driving the game. Unreasonable expectations for maintenance standards, service and play have drastically changed the face of the game over the past 30 years. Club manufacturers suggest that average golfers can play the same equipment as the professionals and therefore play as well. PGA Tour drives average 300 yards or more. This is the single-most-important issue facing golf today. Weekend golfers see this and expect similar results. Ask any average golfer what his average driving distance is and his reply will likely be a lie.

Maybe more importantly, the Tour shows golf courses with immaculate conditions and spectacular manmade features (e.g., waterfalls, streambeds, retaining walls and rock outcroppings), establishing costly expectations for the new golf courses. Expectations grow beyond reason while the industry suffers and the average player is losing out. The soul of the game has been stripped bare and there is little left of the nuisance, thought, strategy, companionship, or the simple beauty of the game. Can we rationalize the trend toward a bigger, more expensive and prestigious golf industry? And what are the ramifications of getting bigger, more complex, or more "industrialized?"

We may as well build 1,000 TPC courses with all the same hazards in the same locations with the same length and an island green, so we can mindlessly dial in a yardage. Owners are compelled to build golf courses that stretch to 7,600 yards to compete with the neighboring 7,400-yard monster. I read the other day that by the end of the decade, the PGA will have an event at an 8,000-yard course. Great. More land is needed, wider fairways and more earthwork are also necessary. Just what this game needs . . . tougher play expectations with water hazards, deeper bunkers and faster greens.

Any industry changes and morphs and directs its resources to meet the market need. But understand that the larger the industry, the more scrutiny will be necessary. Scrutiny invites calibration and calibration provokes standardization. Is the golf industry ready for standardization?

Can Golf Be Standardized? [Sanitized?]

The game of golf and golf course architecture are now governed by numbers. Everything is measured or standardized: everything from slope, course ratings, stars, yardages, ball-spin rates, fairway acreages, score, affordability, awards, rounds, percolation rates, gpm, dilution rates, Stimpmeters, handicaps, etc. You cannot exist in this industry without a basic understanding of these issues.

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This is the great dilemma. How do we accurately determine the positive attributes of the game while the standards become more definitive? What makes a great golf course? Is it the beauty? Is it the maintenance? The length? Shot values? Walkability? Resistance to scoring? Or the intangible "enjoyment factor?" As much as the course critics have tried, numbers can't measure the game of golf or golf courses! So, we end up valuing the "product branding" over the game itself.

The problem is that the dialogue about the game has been reduced to these issues, rather than focused on the game itself. How can standards begin to measure something that uses few principles to calculate the greatness of a golf course or the pleasure of a round with friends or family?

All golfers want a fun and beautiful challenge. But we aren't providing a fun challenge anymore. We have designed to create challenge and difficulty rather than accommodate playability. We have designed length to accommodate par rather than designing risk/reward to accommodate strategy. We have constructed golf courses to meet an aesthetic . . . to market the "look" rather than to "meet the market."

The Golf Paradox

I've explored the root causes of our current industry crisis and I have come to the conclusion that one culprit of the game can be traced to the father of modern golf course architecture, Robert Trent Jones, Sr., specifically a quote about an architect's role to "protect par." His simple, small and seemingly straightforward quote has prompted a genetic change in the game. Golf is now about protecting par with yardage, difficulty, more daunting, more picturesque and even "more fair." Yardages increase, technology responds, maintenance budgets soar, expectations expand.

Need evidence? Look at the changes to Augusta National, a great golf course by any standard. Augusta National was a great match-play golf course. Any golfer could win with shot-making; with an understanding of the golf course; with strategy and

imagination; with solid approaches and deft putting. Golden Age architects like MacKenzie, Ross and Tillinghast used these principles when they designed a golf course. Let the golfer's imagination dictate play. But by lengthening the course, the officials at Augusta played right into the hands of the stronger and longer players.

Longer golf courses with higher maintenance standards and higher fees are causing the game to lose. So here's the bottom line. Is golf growing? No, it's worse . . . **Golfers are choosing not to play** because: Golf is too hard. Golf is too expensive. Golf takes too much time. To keep up, courses spend more money to update a facility, usually by making it tougher, longer or more demanding . . . fees or memberships rise and golfers opt out.

Can the industry grow (or even survive) without golfers? Obviously not. This industry has to grow to survive, and that means encouraging golfers to try, learn and play more golf. This won't happen given the current expectations and perceptions of golf and golfers.

The Solution

Golf courses should be designed, constructed and rated based upon the ability to encourage/enjoy match play. This was the game as invented. Reviewing and playing a golf course based upon one simple criterion, its ability to demand intriguing match-play events, is somewhat radical and simultaneously effortless.

Donald Ross' elaborate and subtle designs were meant for match play. He rarely made reference to par . . . match play was fundamental for golfers' ability and architectural creativity. The following is an excerpt from *Form Over Function*.

" . . . If a course with the quality of Pinehurst #2 were built today, one that had great shot values and design features but little fizz or flashy eye appeal, would it be well-received by golfers and writers and resort owners? The expectations people have today for instant visual impact, the 'wow' factor, suggest to me those days are gone."

So, the solution won't be found

(continued on page 11)



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