

Should Superintendents Play Golf?

By Mark Jarrell

The simple and obvious answer is "yes." I'll bet that every article in this issue agrees with that. It just makes sense that the person charged with the care of a golf course would be better able to make decisions concerning its preparation and maintenance if he can look at it from the perspective of one who plays the game.

If you don't play the game, the members of your club may think of you and your program with the same condescending disdain that Frank Gifford and O.J. Simpson have for Howard Cosell. It seems that in any sport, however erroneously, an expert player is often considered an authority in all aspects of that sport. How many times does your Golf Pro get asked questions concerning course maintenance when the guy doesn't know an armadillo? The astute Superintendent with a solid golf game can use this to his advantage to strengthen his position.

Unfortunately, many Superintendents fail to put this in its proper perspective. There is a balance to be struck that many either cannot or will not recognize, or just choose to ignore. The price for doing so could be your job.

Although you may consider playing golf an inalienable right or a guaranteed non-negotiable benefit, for your own best interests, you should think of it as a facet of your public relations effort. A careful evaluation of your particular situation and a little common sense will set you on the right course. Your tendencies may be to play too little or too much; what you need to do is test the waters to determine what frequency of play will enhance your position as Golf Course Superintendent at your club.

Many Superintendents originally chose this profession because of a love for the game and the opportunity it presents to play. There is nothing wrong with this. In many cases, and it could be a majority of the cases, you will find that it really doesn't matter to the powers that be

how often you play. What matters is how well you do your job. The point is that you just shouldn't take it for granted, even if you do feel that you're doing an outstanding job.

Be sensitive to changes in your club's officers and key management personnel, such as the Head Pro and Club Manager. New personalities may view your playing schedule (or lack of it) in a totally different light than their predecessors. Be especially careful about entering competitions at your own club where there is a possibility that you may win a prize or trophy ahead of a dues-paying member. As petty as it might seem, there is often resentment from some members simply because you are enjoying privileges that they are paying for. The same applies to the playing privileges at other clubs through your involvement with the local or state Superintendent association — members of your club, co-workers, and, yes, even your own staff, often resent your golf outings during regular working hours (no matter that you still put in 50 hours a week to their 40). If there are problems on the course while you are "off playing golf," your concern and dedication become suspect. They are also jealous of the fact that you are invited to play, without charge, at very exclusive clubs that won't let them in the front door no matter what they're willing to pay. Sometimes discretion is the better part of valor.

One final observation before concluding. Over the years I've often heard it said that the best Superintendents are the better golfers. In every case these statements were made by a good Superintendent who played pretty good golf. While I agree that some of our very finest Superintendents are excellent golfers, for every one I can name, there is an equally accomplished Superintendent that hardly knows how to hold a club. Our profession is so diverse that no one can claim mastery of all the areas of expertise their job demands. Looking at it in that regard, just where does the ability to break 80 fit in?

Some of our touring snobs would do well to keep that in mind when and if they do a critical self-evaluation of their abilities as a Golf Course Superintendent. ■

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