

# Why Your Course Superintendent is Your Silent Playing Partner

by JERRY LEMONS, CGCS

**E**arly in the morning, while the air is still calm and fresh, the dew still covering every blade of grass, and before the sun begins to peek from the horizon, a new day is beginning for the golf course superintendent. It is the golf course superintendent who knows that soon after the sun has risen, golfers will cover the course that he and his staff have meticulously groomed. The golf course superintendent is behind every golf round played. It is the superintendent who "lives" with his course to insure that the conditions will be the best that they can be, whether for that important tournament or for the "Tuesday afternoon ladies," the golf course superintendent's work reflects upon every round played.

The golf course superintendent has always been a vital part of the game of golf. Old Tom Morris, who was one of the most profound greenskeepers (taken from keeper of the green), not only was a superior golfer, but spent over forty years of his life during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, maintaining some of golf's most historic courses including Prestwick and St. Andrews. Old Tom's dedication to the game and to the importance of golf course maintenance began an era of professional golf course maintenance that has exploded with golf itself.

Although most golfers are familiar with the role of the golf professional, they should realize that the golf course superintendent is responsible for the care, playability and quality of the golf course, not the golf professional. The golf course superintendent's role has emerged from what used to be a "simple grass cutter" to a manager of a fine quality turfgrass. The reasons are quite evident. Golf course management has changed dramatically in the last two decades because the golfer is willing to pay for the quality of a golf course he wants. Fast greens, plush fairways and manicured turf are not just standards for major tournaments anymore. Golfers demand these conditions daily, and it is the golf course superintendent's expertise which makes these conditions possible.

Who is the golf course superintendent and what does he actually do?

As the demand for excellent golf course conditions have increased, so have the

demands on the knowledgeability of the golf course superintendent. Today's golf course superintendents are highly trained professionals, educated to prepare golf courses for today's golfer. The superintendent's desires are not unlike the golfers; to develop and maintain in a golf course the very best quality humanly possible.

Today's golf course superintendents are college educated. Local, regional and national seminars keep them informed and up-to-date on today's innovative ideas on golf course maintenance procedures.

## **THE GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA IS THE GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENT'S LINK TO EDUCATION AND THE NEWEST RESEARCH.**

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, based in Lawrence, Kansas, is the golf course superintendent's link to education and the newest research available. Not only does the association boast one of the largest national conferences and shows in the nation, the GCSAA also has several regional conferences to keep the superintendents up-to-date. The GCSAA also recognizes superintendents through a certification program. A certified golf course superintendent has been tested and proven through experience and education that they are highly qualified professionals.

The continued growth of the golf course superintendent's position is easily traced from year to year. Looking back 20 years and observing the condition of the courses and even in the design of courses compared to today's, it is apparent that the demand of today's golfer, on a daily basis, is similar to what the "pros asked for them." This has ignited a need for better management skills, better equipment, improved grass varieties and more efficient chemicals. The superintendent must put all of this together to provide the golfers with the ideal golfing conditions he has come to expect. Sometimes operating on shoestrings, without ideal conditions! More often than not, it is the superintendent who falls victim to the unpredictable and sometimes impossible

and suddenly his job is in jeopardy.

The golf course superintendent is always confronted by new problems such as "black layer", pythium, sand layering, chemical burn, and not enough or too much rainfall at the wrong time. By the way, have you seen some of the new designs in golf courses that have huge mounds and sloping greens that only the goats of St. Andrews could stand on much less be carefully manicured and maintained by mortal man??

Jack Kidwell, a longtime golf course architect, past superintendent and past golf professional, once said, "We can design the best golf course in the world, have the very finest building materials, but leave out the most important ingredient, a golf course superintendent who understands how the course is to be maintained, and the golf course will not be successful."

The superintendent has learned how to manage his course by living with it. All golf courses are different and must be treated as such. Even greens on the same golf course will need different management techniques. Ask the superintendent on any given course, and he will tell you of his "problem greens" whether the greens be new or old.

The golf course superintendent is not only involved in the game of golf, he is also often responsible for the tennis, pool and clubhouse grounds. The budgets that the superintendent must manage are reflected on the quality of course that he is expected to maintain. Many golf course budgets exceed one half a million dollars and some are in excess of one million. It is the superintendent and his staff that brightens up the entrance of the club, adds the extra color to the clubhouse grounds, and cares for the trees and shrubs that are unreplaceable in a single lifetime.

So it is the golf course superintendent who is dedicated to the game of golf and to the course that he is responsible for. Tom Watson once said, "In this day and age, a golf course superintendent has to be an educated scientist, agronomist, economist and a good people manager. If you put all this together, with a love for a piece of earth, then you've got a good golf course superintendent."

— EXECUTIVE GOLFER 