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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 armyworm from 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 duespaying 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, ves, 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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By Joel D. Jackson

To tee it up or not to tee it up, that is the question — Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the Slings and arrows of insects and irate golfers, Or to take up your clubs despite a sea of troubles And by playing golf end them. To play, to enjoy The game; and by enjoy we say we end The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks That golf course maintenance is heir to daily; 'tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wished. To par, to birdie to eagle, perchance to ace, ay there's the rub, For in those scores of golf what dreams may come. When we have shuffled off this duffer's coil, Must give us pause; there's the respect That makes calamity of so high a handicap. For who would bear the whips and scorns of double and triple bogeys.

The sandbagger's wrong, the honest player's contumely... ...To grunt and sweat at golf after a busy day But that the dread of something after work The irrigation leak, the unmowed rough From whose bourn no traveller returns; puzzles the will And makes us rather bear the ills we have Than fly to others that we know not of? Thus conscience does make golfers of us all, and the native hue of resolution Is sicklied over with the pale cast of true course conditions And projects from the greens committee With this regard their priorities turn awry And lose the name of action. Soft you now The fair putting surfaces — 9.5 on the stimpmeter, Be all my putts remembered.

Like Hamlet, my golf game is also a tragedy. One of my own making, to be sure, but a result of my priorities. The answer to the question "Should a superintendent play golf?" The answer is YES. To the question "Must a superintendent play golf?" The answer is I DON'T KNOW. I think it is rare to find a person who can keep a golf course in top condition, and respond to problems with the playing conditions if he doesn't experience them first hand. Such individuals do exist and they are successful, however, they are rare. By playing his golf course the superintendent is offered a much more detailed look at the true playing conditions than can be assimilated on a "ride thru" filled with the many distractions that make up our hectic days. The priorities that we set for our maintenance staff may be based on sound agronomic principles, but they may not fully consider the needs of the golfers who play the course. We need to keep the golfers' priorities in mind or we may be answering some unpleasant questions from our employers. By playing more we can appreciate the needs of the "consumers" or members.

Another primary benefit from playing more golf is that the superintendent can strengthen his ability to communicate to his members and employers, by talking the same language and comparing results on the course. The golfing superintendent is brought closer to the international family of golfers, and he can better appreciate the accomplishments of professional and amateur alike if he has shared the "rub of the green." I have been fortunate to visit Augusta and behold the near perfection of that emerald jewel in golf's crown, and I played Pebble Beach in 1982 right after the U.S. Open and found the spot where Tom Watson made his "Miracle Chip" on the 17th hole. These things wouldn't mean as much if I didn't play golf.

The superintendent who plays golf, regardless of skill level, has an additional tool in his management arsenal to help him keep his course in better "playing" condition and enhance his professional image. We should all try to improve our skill level to maximize the enjoyment of the game when we play, and to become more discerning about the actual conditions of our courses.

As the role of the golf course superintendent changes and he is asked to do more for his club because of his talents, versatility, and professionalism, he risks losing some of the intimate contact with the course that made him successful in the first place. By playing the course, he can maintain that contact hopefully with the understanding and support of his club.

Good golfing to you all!



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PLAYING THE GAME IS PART OF THE JOB

By Norman E. Carmouche

Are there any great chefs who don't eat? How many great artists do you know of who are blind? Would a deaf person make a great musician?

The Gator

Growls

How then can a superintendent be great if he doesn't play golf?

Of course there are exceptions to every rule; look at Beethoven. He managed to compose while deaf. Likewise, there are a few excellent superintendents who don't play golf. The point here is that the exceptions are few.

I started playing golf the summer after I graduated from high school. It was just something to do. Within a week I was hooked.

I am a golf course superintendent because of my participation in the game of golf. In fact, most of my success in life can be attributed to the game.

For me, golf mirrors life. There are never-ending peaks and valleys, only you control your destiny, and you can't blame success or failure on anyone but yourself.

Many years ago when I was searching for a college major every profession in the world came up. Doctor, lawyer, architect, teacher, business, even golf pro. I floundered around for eight years in pre-med, architecture, and finally finished as a teacher.

I landed a job at my old high school and immediately started a golf team, becoming the first golf coach. My team won their district the first year and was state runner-up the second year. I guess a little bit of my enthusiasm for the game rubbed off.

As a teacher I got to play almost every day and that was great; but teaching wasn't rewarding enough for me and I began looking for something else. I actually considered becoming a teaching pro when a counselor showed me a brochure from Lake City Community College.

Seventeen years later I am a very happy, successful golf course superintendent and never once have I looked back and second-guessed my decision to go to Lake City. When the question is asked whether or not a superintendent should play golf, I have only one answer.

IF A SUPERINTENDENT WANTS SUCCESS IN THIS BUSINESS, HE MUST PLAY GOLF!

If a superintendent wants success in this business he must play golf. Certainly there are a few successful superintendents who never play. There are a few successful basketball and football coaches who never played their respective games. But they are few.

How can a golf course superintendent get his course ready for championship play if he doesn't know what it takes to make a course play at its best? How can a superintendent begin to talk intelligently to a greens committee about course playing conditions without playing the game?

Playing golf with members helps to promote a good working environment for the superintendent. I don't suggest a superintendent get involved in a money game with his members, but he should on occasion play with his greens chairman and other club officials.

The Everglades Chapter has started a new annual tournament in which the superintendent plays in a foursome with his greens chairman, club president or owner, and either the club manager or another club officer. After a day out on the course with these people you really learn to appreciate one another.

Playing golf is, or should be, a part of the superintendent's job. Without the game there would be no job and superintendents owe it to themselves to promote the game.

You may not have to play to be a golf course superintendent, but you do have to play to be a great golf course superintendent.

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Freeze Protection For The Landscape

Inevitably, at least once or twice each winter we in south Florida are threatened by freezing temperatures. The winter of 1985-86 was relatively mild with a very limited amount of freeze damage occurring in mid-January. The winter of 1984-85 will not soon be forgotten because of the devastating nature of the freezing temperatures. Unfortunately, up to now the winter of 1986-87 has shown similarities to 1984-85. Temperatures have remained above normal throughout the fall and early winter causing plants which would normally be dormant to continue active growth. As you might expect an actively growing plant is more susceptible to freeze damage than a plant which is dormant. There is really not much we can do to induce dormancy, particularly with subtropical plants. Therefore, we need to consider what can be done to protect these plants from freezing temperatures.

WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE FREEZE.

Probably more can be done in the weeks and months before the freeze than can be done the day of the freeze. Here are some factors you might consider when attempting to have your landscapes as cold hardy as possible.

- 1) Proper site selection. Plant cold sensitive plants in more protected locations where frost is less likely. Use hardy plants in low areas and windy open locations.
- 2) Avoid excessive late season pruning. Heavy pruning may cause a new flush of growth which will be more cold sensitive.
- 3) Properly fertilize in the fall. Use an even analysis fertilizer for fall fertilization. Avoid the use of excessively high levels of nitrogen which will encourage late season flushes, however, provide adequate nutrition. A healthy well fertilized plant is more likely to survive than one which is poorly nourished.

WHAT TO DO THE DAY OF THE FREEZE.

1) Covering plants. An effective method of protecting hedges and low to medium size shrubs is by covering the plant completely to ground level before the freeze. The preferred materials are fabric or newspaper, plastic should only be used as a matter of last resort. It is important to tent the cover and avoid touching as much of the foliage as possible. Any foliage in contact with the cover will be frozen. Coverings should be removed as soon as possible the day after the freeze in order to avoid heat and moisture build-up which could be damaging.

2) Watering plants. Two types of watering need to be considered in freeze protection. It is advisable to thoroughly moisten the soil around landscape plants a day or two prior to the freeze. A moist soil will hold more heat and warm surrounding plants more than dry soil.

Watering during freezing temperatures is a rather risky method of freeze protection and should be well understood before being undertaken. Once a sprinkler system is turned on in an area during a freeze, it must remain on until the temperature is above freezing and all ice is melted from plants. Adequate water must be applied during this period and any wind will probably yield this method of protection useless. It is important to consider the consequences of watering before turning on the sprinklers.

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE FREEZE.

- 1) Watering plants. It is important that moisture is maintained in plants after freezing temperatures. Dessication of foliage may occur if plants become too dry.
- 2) Pruning damaged plants. Wait as long as possible to prune freeze damaged plants. If possible, allow the plant to flush before pruning then prune out any dead wood. When it is necessary to prune shortly after the freeze, scrape the bark to determine whether a stem is dead or alive. If the stem is dead, the cambium which is normally green will be turning brown and water soaked. Trim no more than is necessary.

Maybe if we are lucky, you won't be covering plants or pruning dead limbs this winter. But, if so, it's better to know what to do if it's needed. ■



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