

Today, Wilson is still “working 80-hour weeks” but he has his own hands on the wheel as he looks to get ahead. That autonomy, and the flexibility and potential that come with it, are invaluable, he says. “My attitude is better and my wife is happier. My leaving golf had nothing to do with the industry, the people I worked for, or the facility where I worked. My decision was solely needs based. Personally, I wanted more in life and I’m not very patient. I have so much respect for the guys who are still in the industry waiting it out.”

One of those biding his time is Lydell Mack, assistant superintendent to Georgia GCSA director Rob Roy at The River Club in Buford. Mack graduated from Fairview College in Alberta, Canada in 2000. He and wife of five years, Laura, have a daughter, Olive, 3. Mack is 34 and admits he never thought he would still be an assistant superintendent this deep into his career. “My expectation coming out of college was that I would be a superintendent within five years,” he says. “That was probably naïve even in the market at that time. But I never expected it to turn out like it has.”

Mack has been at The River Club for eight years and his ambition is no less than when he finished college. He and Roy discuss his future openly and the boss has even put his shoulder to Mack’s career wheel more than once. “Rob’s been the one to make me aware of some vacancies when they’ve come up,” Mack says. “He’s made some calls to try and get me shuffled to the top of the pile.”

Four times Mack has made it as far as the interview stage for a superintendent position. No small feat in itself when one club told him they stopped collecting resumes at 200. “It used to be that assistants had a little bargaining edge because they’d be willing to work for less just to get the title,” Mack says. “But now you have very experienced superintendents who are willing to do that. The pile has definitely gotten bigger. Just judging from the feeling at meetings and events, there’s an underlying frustration among assistant superintendents who feel that it’s a pretty desolate picture out there. Let’s face it: no one went to turf school to be an assistant.”

Even so, Mack says he is content



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*Lydell Mack*

enough to wait it out. It helps that he is at a club that compensates him sufficiently to “pay the bills and keep a roof over our heads.” Benefits such as medical, dental and vision also help, and carry more weight than they might for someone without a family. “And the guy I work for is teaching me everything I need to know,” Mack says. “Sure, I’m hoping there is light at the end of the tunnel but I made my decision to do this a long time ago and I plan to stick with it. You just have to be adaptable.”

In the meantime, Mack constantly strives to expand his network of contacts. He serves on the Georgia GCSA assistant superintendents committee and also has a seat on the education committee alongside many experienced, well-

connected industry veterans. “Definitely, part of my motivation for serving is to give back and do my fair share but it’s also to meet people, to build some kind of name recognition,” he says. “If you’re not optimistic then you’re sinking your own boat.”

At 37 and with 12 years as an assistant superintendent, Jamey Smith, from Big Canoe in Jasper, has been at it even longer than Mack but he too remains hopeful. “I try to get up with a good attitude every day, some days it’s easier than others,” he says. “When everything was kicking in the industry, guys were being assistants for four years then moving up. My hope was that after six or seven years I’d have a superintendent position. But I try not to dwell on it too much.”



*Jamey Smith*

When he does think hard about his circumstance, Smith always comes away “grateful to have a job” and mindful that there is always a “trade off.” He and wife, Jamie, have been married for 12 years and they have two children, Brody, 4, and Briley, 1-1/2. “Sure, there are good days and bad days but if I didn’t enjoy what I do so much, then the assistant superintendent pay might bother me more,” he says. “It’s always tight. You can always use more money. We’re not buying a lake house. But we get by and I am at a great facility, with great people. I get to work outside. The fact is it’s tight for a lot of superintendents too these days.”

Smith’s last point is true enough. Some superintendents have had their compensation packages trimmed, along with their operating budgets and often their staffing levels. Yet, expectations for the product they turn out remain as high as ever. The stress that comes with that territory is generally not borne as much by the assistant superintendent. But in cases like Smith’s where has been with superintendent Jason Brownell, for eight

years, he does feel a strong sense of ownership, not of the property but definitely of how it performs.

“I take it personally. If I am going to do the job I am going to do it to the best of my ability,” he says. “I want to make it look as good as it can possibly look and try to never make excuses. It’s the work ethic I was raised with.”

Smith says Brownell’s support and willingness to encourage and immerse him in all aspects of the operation also make the wait a lot more bearable. “If I couldn’t be as involved as I am it might be a different story,” Smith says. “But I am in on green committee meetings, bid processes, the whole range, and that’s good because I want to be well versed in everything involved with the job.”

Patrick Reinhardt, 30, says similar support from superintendent Mike Brown, while Reinhardt spent seven and a half years as an assistant at The Standard Club in Johns Creek, was critical as he waited for an opportunity to advance. “It gets hard to push yourself every day of the year, year after year, for five, six, seven years, but you’ve got to keep your head in it,” Reinhardt says. “It’s rough. It takes a toll on you if you’re working until 5pm or later every day. But Mike (Brown) was great. He made sure we took some time off whenever we could. Every chance he got to hook me up with people who might be able to help me out, he made it happen. Phone calls, recommendations, you name it. He was helping me network all the way through.”

Reinhardt’s chance finally came late last year and today he is superintendent at Georgia Southern University where he is overseeing the renovation of what was formerly known as Southern Links Golf Course in Statesboro. The course is expected to open early next year.

Unlike, Smith or Mack, Reinhardt is not married and held off buying a house to ensure he retained maximum mobility while he searched. In total, he applied for more than 20 superintendent positions “all over the country” before his break came. “It’s tough even getting an interview when they’re getting 300-plus applications,” he says.

Not every superintendent-in-waiting is so fortunate, or so patient. “It gets



*Patrick Reinhardt*

really hard being an assistant when you’re competing for jobs with a lot of laid-off superintendents,” Reinhardt says. “A lot of good young assistants are burning out and getting out of the industry because they don’t see any room to move up and it’s hard to start a family and provide for a family on \$30,000 or \$40,000. I think a lot of the guys who are

sticking it out are at the higher-end clubs because they are getting paid just enough to make it possible. But it’s got to be hard to have heavy feet and stick around if you’re only earning \$20,000 to \$30,000.”

Adam Wilhite, from East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta, is the assistant superintendent liaison to the Georgia GCSA board of directors and networks frequently with a group of fellow assistants at informal “shop talk” gatherings away from the golf course most months. Job prospects are “a broad topic of conversation,” he says. “A lot of guys would like to see their name next to the title superintendent on the club website or on the business card. I would definitely like to be in a position to make more money. I planned to be a superintendent by the time I was 30 (which he is now).”

Indeed, Wilhite has had, and rejected, the opportunity to move and assume the number-one job at another facility. “A lot of it is also what type of golf course you want to manage. It’s not just about saying you are a superintendent,” he says. “I’m comfortable with my position now because I’m stimulated and learning every single day. I’m not going to spend all my time looking for a superintendent’s job, I’m going to spend my time getting prepared. It’s a quality-of-life thing. If I’m happy and learning and it’s working for my family, then I’m fine with still being an assistant. The leaf is going to flip when it’s ready.”

In the meantime, neither Wilhite nor his colleagues are expecting any overnight change. They’ve been around long enough and understand their industry well enough to know that the outlook is for a lot more déjà vu and very, very few “Cinderella stories.”

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A close-up photograph of a person's open hand, palm facing up. On the back of the hand, there is a black ink tattoo of a map of the Southeastern United States, showing the outlines of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, with fingers spread.

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# FIELD OBSERVATIONS

## FUNDING RESEARCH, ADVOCACY, AND EDUCATION GCSAA/EIFG R4R



By *Ralph K. Dain Jr.*,  
GCSAA Regional Representative Florida

Are nematodes giving you headaches? Is the fear of fertilizer bans keeping you up at night? Do you want to attend a chapter meeting and be awed by a great presentation (other than the ones I provide)? If only there were an opportunity that could facilitate answers to these questions. But wait a minute! There is an answer!

That answer is Rounds 4 Research. In a previous edition of *The Florida Green*, and in my recent travels, I have discussed the basics of the GCSAA's Environmental Institute for Golf program and the great opportunity we have in Florida to raise some much-needed money. I want to illustrate ways that these funds can provide real solutions to the issues you are facing regularly.

The rewards will benefit the entire industry, not just one segment. Golfer expectations are still very high, and solutions to today's challenges can go a long way to maintaining their enjoyment of the game and subsequently your enjoyment of the profession.

As an industry, we enjoy a great relationship with the University of Florida. UF scientists are willing and able to conduct research on issues like nematode control, finding alternatives for MSMA and Methyl Bromide, as well as field studies on new chemistries. Unfortunately, there are limited resources to conduct the necessary research. In exchange for foursomes of golf at local facilities, funds could be generated to help raise the necessary dollars.

The fear of fertilizer bans and water regulations definitely keep me up at night. Just when you think you are winning, a new issue arises somewhere in the state. Right now the issue of fertilizer ordinances containing restrictive blackout periods is ongoing in Volusia County with the cities of Melbourne and Rockledge considering ordinances.

In my discussions with the chapters, I reference the \$38.5 million raised by the Conservancy in SW Florida to protect the Florida environment. By the way, the Conservancy views golf as a polluter and would enjoy very much taking us down. I am also aware that in Collier County there is a movement to reduce the amount of water that golf courses have available through their consumptive-use permits. I have been

told by as much as 50 percent. The price of a few foursomes of golf seems very little to pay to fight these issues, right??

I am considering taking up juggling flaming golf balls to keep everyone engaged when I speak at meetings. I will resume practice once my eyebrows grow back. As much as I know that all the chapters appreciate the professionalism of my presentations, wouldn't it be nice to attend a meeting with an authority on any issue with which you are currently dealing. Again, the funds generated from our Rounds 4 Research program can be directed for chapter education. One of the primary functions of the chapter is to educate their members and help them advance in their careers.

Here is what I now ask of you. Please take a moment and visit our website at <http://eifg.org/>. Review the R4R information and if you have any questions contact me (my information is included below). Our first auction this year is June 6-16 in conjunction with the US Open. Our second auction is Aug. 1-11 in conjunction with the PGA Championship. Please, Please, Please consider making a donation of at least a foursome to this very worthwhile cause. your donation is an investment in your future success.

Until next time,  
Ralph Dain – GCSAA Regional Representative (FL)  
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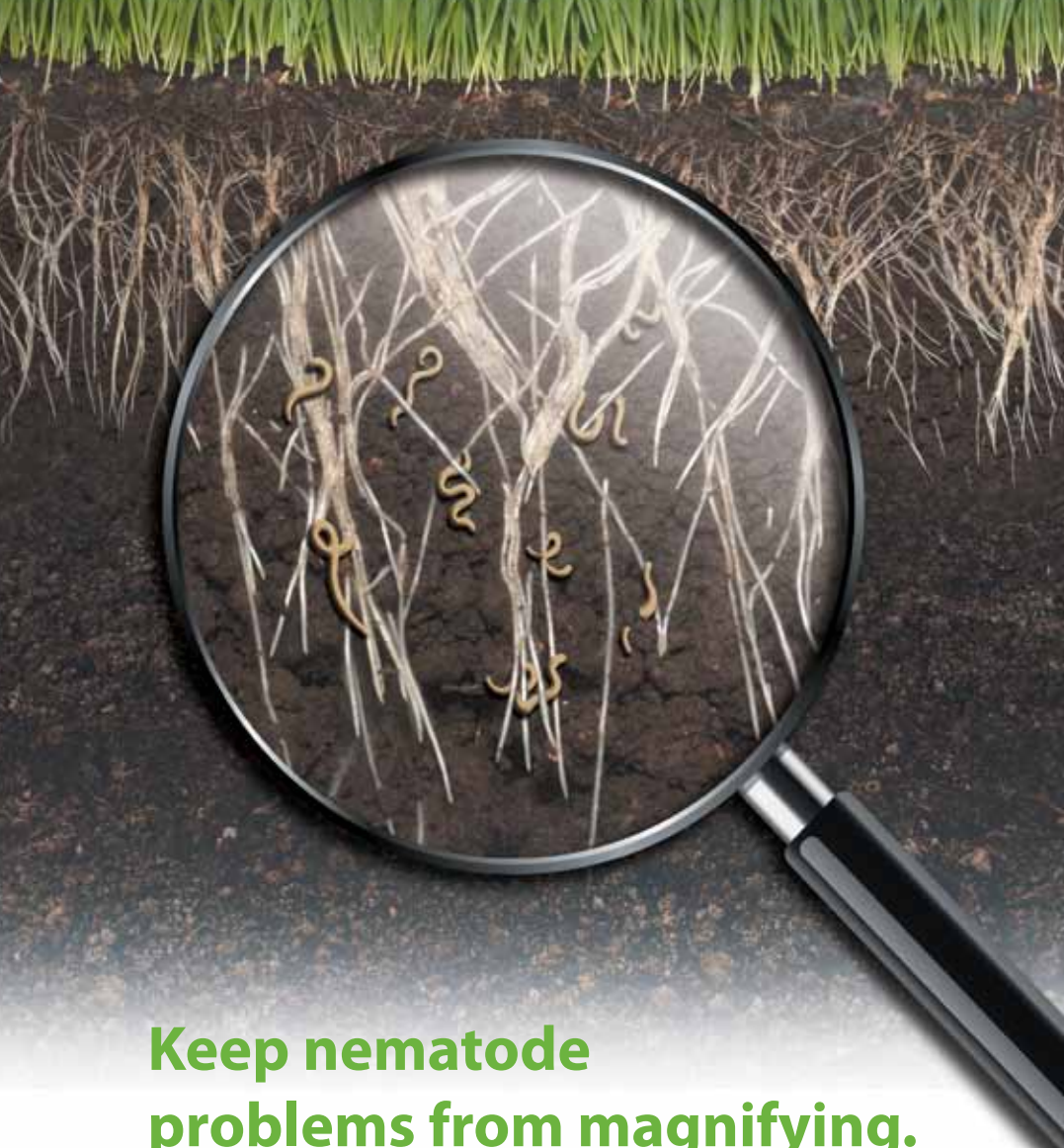
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**HELP US  
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**GREEN SIDE UP  
BY JOEL JACKSON**

If every golf course in Florida annually donated \$100 to the FGCSA for education, research and advocacy for golf course turf management issues, that would roughly come to around \$120,000.

Consistently, the most important factor for “enjoyment of the game” voted by golfers across the nation is “golf course conditioning.” Yet most courses or golfers

can't find it in their hearts or budgets to write the check to help the game they love.

Superintendent associations have been trying to raise money from their own ranks and from the vendors they do business with, but business and budgets in general lately are making that a tough proposition. What can we do to engage clubs and golfers into helping out?

Hello! There is a new and simple way to solve the problem. Instead of cash money, all a golf course has to do is donate a foursome round of golf and it will be auctioned off online and 80 percent of the money raised will be returned to the designated superintendent chapter to be used precisely for education, research and advocacy.

Guess what? The program already exists. It's called Rounds4Research. Surely you have heard of it by now.

Of course the trick is that someone has to tell the general manager, Green Committee, golf pro and members and

customers that the program exists and the club should participate. Why? Oh, I don't know, ever heard of fertilizer bans, water shortage restrictions, immigrant labor regulations, applicator licenses or certifications and chemical registration cancellations?

Those are all such boring, mundane matters compared to hosting the Member/Guest Tournament, or prepping for a PGA, LPGA or Champions Tour event. But wait, the course presentation and reputation are at stake not just for these special events but for charity fundraisers and, of course, for those who pay dues and greens fees to play golf every day for the pure enjoyment of the game.

No one has to squeeze the budget to eke out some funds to grudgingly donate to turf research or legislative advocacy. All a club has to do is fill out a simple one-sided form designating a month, day and time for a tee time to be donated to the cause. The club dictates the time of year,

time of day, dress code and places a dollar value on the outing. Fill in the name of the superintendent organization to receive the proceeds and you're done.

But if clubs still can't bring themselves to donate a round (or rounds) of golf for a worthy cause such as golf course sustainability with regard to conditioning, then they can make a cash donation.

The Rounds4Research program gives golfers a method to contribute to the game, and they are a virtually untapped source of funding to help battle the war mounted by activists on turfgrass in general and they are drawing a bead on golf as they build up steam, and they have deep pockets.

We have enclosed a Rounds4Research fact sheet and donation form with this Florida Green to take to your GM and/or Golf Pro and get your club involved. To paraphrase fictional sports agent Jerry Maguire, “Help us help you!”



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