

Avoiding the standard



Michael Levans,
editor

There are a few standard jumping-off points for an editor's first column, and for your sake and mine, I thought I might try to avoid them all.

There's the sentimental column in which I'd wax *ad nauseam* about my favorite boyhood golf course in the rolling Western Pennsylvania hills — the many dew-kissed mornings I walked over its tender turf, dreaming of the day I finally knew every mound, every subtle undulation. A day that would never come, of course.

There's the way-too-standard "Industry Cheerleader" column that starts something like, "There has never been a more exciting time for the industry, bla bla bla...and we'll be right there with you tracking its trends, its movers and shakers...."

And of course there's the "getting to know you," followed by the plea for reader mail and story tips. "And don't ever be afraid to pick up the phone and give us a call."

In those standard formats, however, there's a deeply rooted dishonesty. They're formulaic, transparent, so interchangeable that I could tailor any of them to any industry newspaper and it could still hold ground as a competent first try.

It wouldn't be right to pull one of those stunts on the readers of *Golf Course News* — it never has, and never will be our style.

The one thing that has stuck out about GCN over the past nine years is its bare-bones editorial honesty. There's a familiar tone in its writing and such a familiarity of subject that its readers can't help but feel that the *GCN* editors and contributors truly know, and love, the game and its business.

I'm finding that it's the people who make up the industry that makes this "familiar" tone possible and, in turn, their open communication with our staff. It's inescapable. There's a passion present when you talk golf, something that people in other lines of work can only dream of establishing.

So far I've seen and heard nothing but enthusiasm for where golf and course development are going and how we can capitalize on where golf has been.

Ok, so maybe I'm cheerleading just a little.

In my travels during my first month for *GCN*, I've played rounds with a club general manager and four superintendents, I've met with several advertisers, got a personal tour of the USGA museum and testing center in Far Hills, N.J., and experienced my first field day. In all those situations the common thread was that the people I met held a strong knowledge of the business and a passion for the game — the likes I've never seen.

One stands out in particular.

It was wonderful to see Dave McGee, an ex-super who is now GM at Fiddler's Elbow in Far Hills, N.J., out of his office and back on the course for an afternoon. I could tell that Dave is pretty happy with his management post, but even after 10 years of being out of the maintenance shed, he couldn't keep his hands off the turf.

"Do you miss it," I asked him after we got three holes of Fiddler's Forest Course under our belts.

He gave me a hard stare, the kind you get when you insult somebody. "It's in the blood," Dave said. A reassuring smile directly followed.

Thanks Dave, I'm starting to understand.

...

My travels will take me all over the country, to many different courses — and maybe even into your office.

If you would allow me one standard "first column" note, I'm looking forward to meeting as many of you as I can. I like to listen and learn and the best way is by going face to face, course to course.

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One last quick note: When was the last time you saw, in any media, any ballyhoo about a tennis tournament? Where are the characters and the glitz that surrounded the court in those free-wheeling '70s?

It's pretty easy to see that Golf — thank you Mr. Woods — is slowly turning into the "sexy" game that tennis once was.

So sexy, in fact, that while I was recently paging through *Rolling Stone* magazine (old habits die hard), I saw two advertisements placed by two prominent golf club manufacturers.

The flood gates have opened. You better be ready.

Please, accept my apologies

OK. OK. I apologize. I apologize to Donald Ross for all his sand bunkers being filled in at Portland (Maine) Country Club back in the 1950s — make that all the sand bunkers filled in at all his golf courses throughout the last six decades.

I apologize to golf course community homeowners who've been conked on the head by errant golf balls while they sat comfortably in their backyards.

I apologize to all the superintendents who have had to repair myriad divots made by poor golfers, which we all were at one point in our lives.

I apologize to all the golfers "from away" who were so taken with the view from the 7th green at Pebble Beach that they fell into the brink.

I apologize to all the environmentalists ever slurred by any builder/developer anywhere, anytime throughout history.

The Indian side of my heritage apologizes to the Scottish side for killing them; and the Scottish side of me apologizes to the Indian side.

"I'm sorry, Mark."

"I accept your apology. I'm sorry, Mark."

"That's OK."

"Go ahead, cry on my shoulder, Mark."

"That's impossible. My neck won't turn that far."

This, of course, is all part of Apolomania. No, not apologetics. Apolomania: that is, apologizing. Someday, somehow, but not until we get to heaven, will we be able to apologize to all the people who have been wronged, offended, or upended by someone in their lives.

Thinking as a golfer, our president surely would have realized that we in the golf industry should be thankful because 1) there was no golf in the United States during slavery, so the industry has no apologies to make for that time period; and 2) for class, golf has it all over baseball (no spitting on umpires here, Mr. Alomar), basketball (tattoos are not kosher, Mr., or is that Ms. Rodman?), football (keep those drugs in your pocket, Mr. Irvin!) and various other recreations which all have vices overshadowing our grand sport.

All this being said, I do as the Good Book says and forgive all of you who have ever thought, said or done evil to me. (No need to call; it would flood our meager phone lines.)

...

Is there something in the air in Henderson, N.C.? A couple of years ago Tom Fazio bought a building and put up the money to fund a Boys and Girls Club in the community. Now his lead architect, Andy Banfield, has bought a house and is opening a crisis pregnancy center.

...

Sleeping Bear Press may be headquartered in Chelsea, Mich., but its arm reaches around the globe. Publisher Brian Lewis — who brought us Alister Mackenzie's *"The Spirit of St. Andrews,"* Donald Ross's *"Golf Has Never Failed Me,"* the reproduction of George Thomas' 1927 gem *"Golf Architecture in America"* and Tom Doak's *"The Confidential Guide to Golf Courses"* — has done it again.

This time it's a slight departure: production of a six-print lithograph collection from St. Andrews. Selected from a cool quarter of a million of photographs by Iain Macfarlane Lowe, who has lived at St. Andrews for three years, these 22-by-28s display the contrariness — and the beauty — of the home of golf, the Old Course.

Sleeping Bear printed 1,000 of each image, which are signed and numbered. Wonderful for a den or office. Then again, how many members in the Golf Collector's Society? Right, they've probably all been sold.



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GOLF COURSE NEWS

THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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Subscription Information

Golf Course News, P.O. Box 3047

Langhorne, PA 19047

215-788-7112

United Publications, Inc.

Publishers of specialized business and consumer magazines.

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