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JOB SECURITY VIA THE RULES

Golf course superintendents have been cautioned consistently through their careers to be familiar with the Rules of Golf so they would understand how the Rules applied specifically to their golf courses. The worry always has been, for example, that hazard lines might be laid down in a manner that created unfair dropping areas, or tee markers might be placed so close to the back edge of tees, they don't allow for the two-club-length-deep teeing ground the Rules require.

While this caution is justified, it doesn't come close to identifying what the true value of the Rules can mean to a superintendent. In support of this premise, I recommend a nine-step, Rules-based program intended to provide participating superintendents access to the national golf fraternity (those players and representatives of golf who are recognized specially by their peers for their respect for and service to the game). Accordingly, it's recommended that superintendents should:

Step 1: Take the time to ensure they'll be able to play the game comfortably at their natural playing level. A wide range of final scoring is acceptable provided superintendents play at a good pace and accept bad shot-making gracefully.

Step 2: Take playing lessons every year at their home course from the host golf professional staff and be seen doing this. Lessons will stabilize playing ability, and being seen taking lessons will send the message to all who notice that the superintendent wants to become an integral part of the playing fraternity of golf.

Step 3: Play at least 20 rounds a season with course members/players and officials – briefly discussing course issues during each round – giving priority to playing with each board/council and green committee member once a season.

Step 4: Visibly participate in the club's/course's handicap computation service. This will show respect for the game and earn greater acceptance within the golf fraternity.

Step 5: Initially, commit to acquiring a complete understanding of the Rules of Golf, which will require becoming knowledgeable about the current Rules book, as well as purchasing and becoming familiar with the organizational structure of the 515-page Decisions of Golf book.

Step 6: Register for a USGA/PGA Rules of Golf multiday workshop once a year for the few years it takes to become accomplished with the Rules – a situation that's measured at the end of each Rules workshop via testing. Fifty percent of questions are open book, and 50 percent are closed book based on a working knowledge of the Rules book (not the Decisions book).

Step 7: The natural follow-up to scoring credibly on the Rules workshop test would be for a superintendent to be invited to serve on the Rules Committee at the club/course where he or she works.

Step 8: The next natural follow-up would be for a superintendent to apply to become a member of the Junior Rules Committee (start slowly by working junior qualifying rounds) for the regional/state golf association, later graduating to work at the more visible local association events as time away from work and accomplishment with the Rules allow.

Step 9: The final follow-up (for those willing to make the extra commitment) would be for a superintendent to aspire to receive an invitation to serve on the USGA Rules Committee (thereby qualifying to officiate at USGA events) through multiple years of accomplished officiating service at the regional/state golf association level. Because relatively few are chosen for this assignment, this final goal should be looked at as a lifetime pursuit worth the commitment because of the pride and sense of accomplishment to be realized.

Once superintendents complete steps six through eight (and possibly nine) above, they should make sure each of these unique

accomplishments is reported in their home course newsletters and Web sites. This commentary should focus on the quality and duration of commitment required to move through these levels of Rules accomplishments and how this brings honor and recognition to their clubs and courses.

Working through this nine-step Rules program will benefit superintendents in ways never anticipated previously. For example, superintendents will: (i) earn unprecedented professional respect; (ii) convert their present back-of-the-house image to a newly respected front-of-the-house image; (iii) acquire virtual guaranteed job security and fair compensation because employers will always be supportive of fellow peer members of the national golf fraternity servicing golf effectively; (iv) gain a decided edge when seeking new jobs because their job applications will command immediate attention and respect; and (v) enjoy more rewarding careers because of the enduring pride they'll have in themselves and bring to their profession.

Clearly, this won't be an easy road to travel, but it's one in which the benefits gained are valued and true. Who would've thought the Rules of Golf could deliver treasures forever sought but never previously perceived as being deliverable to superintendents? **GCI**

THE RULES OF GOLF 1744

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