



IT PAYS TO PLAY

Many of us entered the golf maintenance profession for specific reasons: to work outdoors, to recognize a sense of accomplishment through hard work, to be part of a team or for the love of the game. Yet, I'd wager that many of you enjoy the outdoors and the pursuit of agronomic objectives, yet unfortunately, have put playing the game low on your priority list.

Instead of watching Tiger, Lorena and their fellow professional tour counterparts showcase their talents on the plasma screen, we should take the opportunity to play. I'm not advocating heading to the first tee each afternoon, but rather using the game to enhance your position within your club and among fellow professional staff and membership.

Consider these reasons you should take out your clubs, invest the time and go enjoy this great sport we strive to protect, promote and preserve.

1 Play to further the social and professional aspects of meeting with fellow golf course superintendents. Playing each week at one another's golf courses, while discussing agronomic concerns, ideas and philosophies, is a great learning experience. When possible, rotate the venue.

2 Don't be bashful or intimidated by playing with your green chairperson, golf professional or even the club president. Remember, you are the leader on the golf course. You should be informing them what's best for the golf course; by playing the golf course, you become even more knowledgeable.

3 Whether your golf course is a new design or a timeless classic, playing the course provides first-hand knowledge of the architect's original intentions. Armed with this perspective, you can better communicate the agenda for change, improvements or upgrades to the golf course.

4 Each time you play, play from a different teeing ground to gain the perspective of what players of different abilities, gender and age experience when they step onto your golf course. The game is for everyone, not solely for those with low handicaps.

5 Like it or not, your golf professional can be your greatest supporter or an adversary in the quest to deliver better playing conditions. Golf professionals can positively or negatively affect your agronomic agenda by explaining to members exactly what's happening on the golf course or why you're coring the greens again. Since golf professionals and their staffs are typically the first people members encounter when they arrive at the golf course, who better to have on your side?

6 When you play, walk! What better way to review the performance of your staff, equipment, irrigation and learn the various aspects, microclimates and environments of the property? In my mind, golf is a "touchy and feely" sport. You must touch the earth to understand what it's communicating to you.

7 If possible when you do play, take time to arrive at the golf course as if you are a member or guest. Drive through the main entrance, ride through the parking lot, drop your clubs and head to the practice range. Remember, many golfers perfect their flaws on the range. Often, the range is also the first impression golfers get when they come to play.

8 Golf course maintenance is not limited to agronomics. Think like a golfer and take the time to see what they see. We spend too much time looking down at the ground. Take a 360-degree look around and notice what a non-agronomic person will see. What might not seem important to us may be very important to golfers at your course. Check the cart paths, the flower beds, the mulch, weeds, tee box accessories, water dispensers and other non-agronomic details.

9 When playing you can check the condition of each feature of the golf course. You can review green speed, putting trueness, consistency and surface firmness. You can evaluate the daily golf course set up by your staff to avoid questionable hole locations, rough depth and bunker playing conditions by hitting shots. Unfortunately, bunkers have become a primary issue among those who play and require constant upkeep to please golfers. A veteran superintendent once told me he could do anything the members wanted to the golf course, but he could not affect their inability to hit a golf shot.

10 When I ask golf course superintendents why they don't play occasionally the standard reply is, "I can't concentrate or enjoy myself because I see everything that's wrong with the golf course." This is one reason to play more. Remember, "Rome wasn't built in a day," and by seeing what's needed, you will stay ahead of the curve, your membership, boards, owners and customers. Realize you won't be able to fix everything all at once, but you get an idea of what's important and truly needs repairing, rebuilding, restoring, replanting and renovating. **GCI**