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## GOLFER, GRASS GROWER OR PLAYING SURFACE PROVIDER?

I recall a few years ago having a conversation with a Men's Club president, who was very unhappy with course conditions. The rough was long, the fairways were wet and the greens were slow. However, the course looked great. The superintendent and assistant were not golfers. This golfer said to me, "the staff here is a bunch of grass growers when they should be playing-surface providers."

I've given serious thought to the question, should superintendents be golfers and play their own course? I've posed this to USGA committee members, superintendents, golfers, educators and consultants. Their answer was a resounding, "Yes."

There are exceptions. There may be a few superintendents who provide superior course conditions and never hold a club. There may be a few successful superintendents with physical handicaps who cannot play the game. I am convinced, experiencing our course as a golfer is essential to provide superior playing conditions.

I will go one step further. Since a multitude of surveys say course conditions are the primary reason golfers choose one course over another, I believe it is as important that the superintendent is a golfer as it is the golf pro is a golfer. Pros are expected to play, teach and be excellent golfers. Supers, on the other hand, do not need to be great or even good golfers. They do need to play the game to understand how course conditions impact affect their players.

When I talk to superintendents who don't play their course – or play it on a very limited basis – they often say they already work 50-plus hours per week and would rather be with their family than spend time playing golf. I have also heard them say they

do not enjoy playing their course as they spend too much time thinking about work.

I agree, finding the time and inclination to play one's course can be difficult. However, in my opinion, looking at course conditions from a golfer's perspective is an important aspect of every superintendent's job.

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A Super Course Tour is not a new idea, but I feel it is an under-utilized one. Most supers drive around their course looking at conditions, problem areas, etc. To conduct a Super Course Tour the superintendent takes his or her clubs and a cart and evaluates course conditions from a golfer's perspective. The goal is to complete the tour in 90 minutes or less.

For example, a tour can begin on the first tee. The super tees off on the first tee. He or she picks up the ball where it lands and drives to a greenside bunker and drops the ball into the bunker and hits it onto the green. The super then putts out. The superintendent can then move to the second fairway and drop the ball 150 yards from the putting surface and strike the ball. If the ball lands on the putting surface the super can play it or pick it up. If it lands in front of the

putting surface the ball can be pitched onto the green. A similar process of playing various places on the course takes place on every hole with the purpose of quickly evaluating course conditions.

The superintendent can use the Super Golf Tour to determine – from the golfer's perspective – the condition of green, tees, fairways and rough; the speed of greens and quality of putting surface; evaluate the condition and quantity of sand in bunkers; and evaluate the growth of trees and shrubs to see if they negatively impact a golf hole.

By striking a ball from the fairway and letting it bounce onto the green, the super can determine if the area is firm enough to allow the ball to bounce properly without plugging. Conducting a Super Course Tour once or twice per week provides the superintendent with beneficial information on course conditions from a golfer's perspective, without investing too much valuable time.

The Super Golf Tour should be conducted differently each time it is held. All areas of the course should be evaluated over time with maintenance activities modified to provide superior playing surfaces throughout the course.

Agree with my assessment of the importance of a superintendent playing their course?

Ideally, a round of golf with a staff member, the golf pro, a club official or other key individual can be a valuable asset to the superintendent. However, if time is limited, why not spend some time using the Super Golf Tour as a tool to evaluate course conditions. Give it a try and let me know what you think? You can contact me at [lyondennis48@aol.com](mailto:lyondennis48@aol.com). **GCI**