



Photo: Courtesy of the PGA Tour.

“My biggest concern about design right now is that architects are trying to outdo each other ... they keep forgetting the game is about recreation.”
- JERRY PATE

the 2007 Outback was a bigger payday than the '76 U.S. Open. That should tell you a lot about how the game has changed during three decades.

Despite the day job that keeps him busy selling Toro, Echo and Lawn-Boy products (among many others), Pate and his recently rebuilt shoulder are doing well on the Champions Tour this year. Earlier this month, he returned from the Senior British Open after shooting 5 under par in the first round of the 3M Championship in Minneapolis. He eventually finished in a tie for 16th place and, at press time, was ranked 46th on the money list. Not bad for something he does in his spare time when he's not pushing red iron.

But, when we talked, the game was secondary, and Pate was all business – focused on what he's learned from working with superintendents, his different kind of design philosophy and the joy of building a business that now serves courses in seven different states.

HOW WAS THE SENIOR BRITISH OPEN?

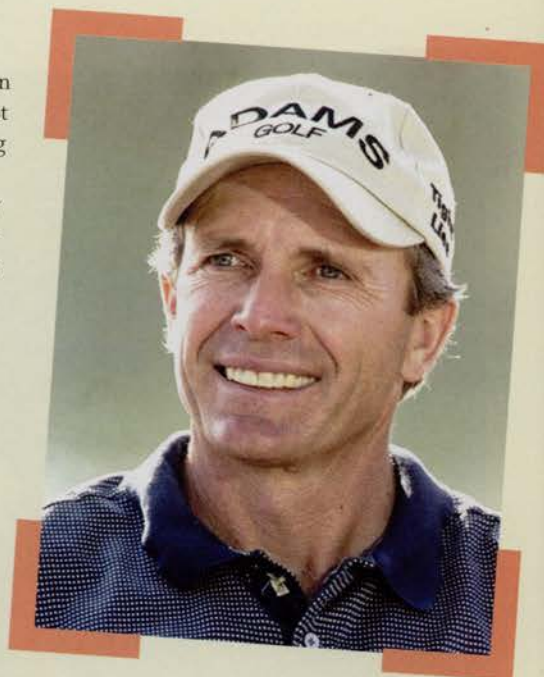
It was terrific. I was striking the ball purely and putting with confidence. That's something I hadn't done since my last shoulder surgery and all the rehab. I hit the ball spectacularly well and had a great time over there.

AS AN ARCHITECT, WHAT WAS YOUR TAKE ON MUIRFIELD?

It's one of the great golf courses in world. There's so much history and tradition there. The club started in 1744. I played that Wednesday with Ben Crenshaw, and we talked about greens and bunkers throughout the round. The conclusion we came up with is you can't build golf courses like Muirfield in America is because golfers want them green. The superintendent would get fired. But I love that sandy turf in combination of a little bit of rye. When they get firm, they're just great to play.

WHAT COURSES DO YOU KEEP IN THE BACK OF YOUR MIND WHEN DESIGNING A COURSE?

I try not to emulate other courses. The biggest strategic elements of any golf course are hazards. In sandy soils, you want to try to use cape bunkers like George Thomas did at Riviera or the



Other than playing golf professionally, Jerry Pate designs golf courses, owns a sod farm and operates a turf equipment company. Photo: courtesy of the PGA Tour

L.A. Country Club or MacKenzie at Cypress and Augusta. The sand stays up on the face and makes it much more interesting. We did a course called Kiva Dunes (in the Alabama Gulf Shores area) where we were able to use that look.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF THE DESIGN BUSINESS?

My biggest concern about design right now is that architects are trying to outdo each other – too many bunkers, too much undulation, too long and too penal. They keep forgetting the game is about recreation. Unfortunately, the golf magazines have touted those kind of courses for years instead of those that were well-constructed and playable.

I don't see many renovations designed to make a course more playable. Pebble Beach took the fourth green and others and flattened them out. It gave them more putting surface. Jack Nicklaus did a really good job of redoing them. I'm getting to be more of a minimalist. We're losing golfers because the game is too difficult and it takes too long. We have to focus more on playability instead of designing for Tiger and Vijay.

WHO INFLUENCES YOU AS A DESIGNER?

I like the simplicity of Tom Doak and Crenshaw/Coore. Their courses are “on the ground.” They’re not trying to move a world of dirt. On the other hand, they’re getting some nice sites. I’ve also always been a big fan of Tom Fazio. He gets the cream of the clients. It would be hard to not build a great-looking course with a great piece of land or great clients.

I love the look of Pete Dye’s courses. He has an imagination like no one else. Some of his better-known courses that challenge me are Casa de Campo, TPC Sawgrass, Oak Tree and Whistling Straights. On Pete’s courses, there are always a few holes where you can barely miss a pin and take a six or a seven. It looks great, but I don’t know if it’s good for the average player. Kiva Dunes has a Pete Dye look with sort of George Thomas bunkering. Pete’s courses are tough, but he was my mentor, and I love him.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN THE TURF BUSINESS?

In 1997, I was a customer of a small Toro distributor. I owned a few courses, and I liked Toro and what they represent – quality and innovation. I went and met with the owner who wanted to sell the business and bought it. We’ve grown a lot, and we’re now in seven states. We sell Toro, Echo, Standard Golf, Dakota, Tycrop and a bunch of other strong lines. It’s not a business in which you’re going to become wealthy, but it’s a nice business. People outside the industry laugh when they find out I play golf on weekends and work the rest of the week selling turf equipment.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUR WEEKEND JOB OVERLAPS WITH YOUR WEEKDAY JOB?

Well, Mike Hoffman (the c.e.o. of Toro) followed me around at the 3M Championship wearing a “Pate’s Posse” golf shirt. That was funny and kind of neat to have the big boss following me around and rooting for me.

WHAT’S YOUR PRIMARY ROLE WITH THE TURF COMPANY?

I meet with customers and try to understand their needs. Superintendents need support. They want the best they can get and always have to negotiate with their owners or boards. We try to partner with them and make sure they can get the best they can and still afford it. Most courses now are leasing – three-year leases, just

like cars. It’s a great option for them.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED DURING A DECADE IN THE TURF BUSINESS?

The biggest lesson? It’s just dealing with people. The toughest thing is that people just think I’m a “face.” Hey, I’m the owner. I have to be on top of things every day. You have to hire quality people with a good conscience and a good heart. The message always has to be that we’re there for superintendents when they need us.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO DEALERS AND DISTRIBUTORS FACE THAT SUPERINTENDENTS NEED TO UNDERSTAND?

You have to make sure you make a profit. You’re always working on the margins and everything constantly goes up in cost. Everything is related to the cost of oil: steel, coal, rubber and plastics ... it’s an ongoing struggle to remain profitable. But you still have to back it up with customer service and care. You can make mistakes, but you can’t hit the ball out of bounds on every shot. You just have to keep moving the ball forward and keep a good attitude. We have to go above and beyond the call of duty every day. Toro is keenly on top of all those issues. It has a great presence in the market.

YOU EVEN OWN A SOD FARM. HOW’S THAT GOING?

I kept revisiting the courses we’d built and finding mutations and problems with the Bermuda-grass we’d put in and I said, “What the heck, I’ll just plant my own.” That way I know what I have. We grow 419 and Tifdwarf as well as MiniVerde. Putting green grasses are always in an evolutionary and revolutionary state. Particularly Bermuda in the Southeast.

ARE YOU DESIGNING ANY NEW COURSES?

We just finished The Preserve in VanCleave, Miss., and we have a project in the works, Jubilee in Pace, Fla. To be honest, I haven’t worked hard on trying to build a lot of courses. I’d love to do more, but it’s not an everyday thing. We don’t build superexpensive golf courses. The greatest compliment I get is that we design fair golf courses that a high-handicapper can play but the best player in the world can play if we move the pins. When Doak said, “I hope Tiger does as well as Pate did on his first course,” that

was a nice compliment.

If we’re not careful, architects – with their high and mighty opinions of themselves – are going to ruin this market. My sole interest is preserving the integrity of the game. People should have fun, not throw clubs.

WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE AT MOST COURSES YOU SEE?

Raise the height of cut, put the pins in the middle of the green and quit taking backhoes to the bunkers, and the members will love it.

HOW DO YOU RATE THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPERINTENDENTS IN THE INDUSTRY?

In terms of golf course superintendents, it’s hard to be objective because they’re my customers, and I have tremendous respect for what they do. I compare golf courses to an aircraft carrier that simply can’t run without the guys in the engine room. The pros are sort of like the fighter pilots who get all the credit. The superintendents are the ones who make the ships run.

The reality is they make the industry work. The thing that’s so important is they understand what they want and, when they understand what the designer has laid out on the ground, it’s a recipe for greatness.

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED 100 YEARS FROM NOW?

I want to be remembered as a person with many interests. I try to learn from my mistakes and pass on what I’ve learned. I’ve had an unbelievable life. I wouldn’t trade it with anybody. Faith is a big part of my life. I was the U.S. Amateur champ at 20 and the Open champ at 22. I took that fast start and realized that I had to put faith first, family second and my job third. That made the landings a lot softer when I crashed.

Golf’s such a great game. I have a drive to try to make the world better and make the game better. Everybody wants a sense of self-worth. That comes in a lot of different packages. But, it’s easy to figure out when you ask, “What would my God want me to do.” You boil it down to the Ten Commandments. If you can live by those rules, you’ll be just fine.

In the end, I just keep trying to chase the rainbow and see where it takes me. **GCI**

Jerry Pate can be reached at 800-700-7001 or through www.jerrypate.com.



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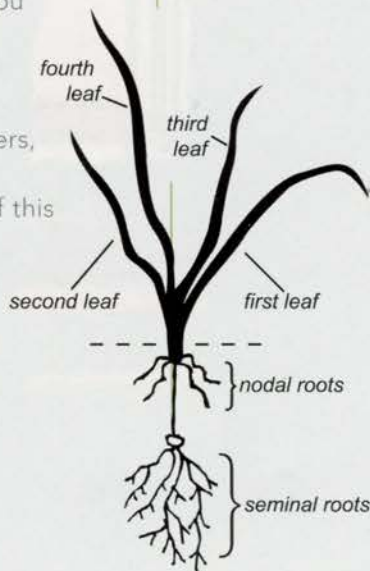


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The Right-hand **Man**



Superintendents value their longtime assistants

BY JOHN WALSH

The typical assistant golf course superintendent is a young buck with a turfgrass degree in hand. He's excited and eager to become a golf course superintendent as quickly as possible. The goal is to move up to the next level in about five years, but these days, it's not as much of a lock as it used to be.


But there's another type of assistant superintendent who doesn't receive as much attention – one who's just as valuable as the young buck, although in a different way. He's the longtime – or career – assistant superintendent. He knows the intimate details of the course and crew because he's been there for a while, as long as 20 years or more in some cases. His job is simple in theory, which is to make life easier for the superintendent.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Doug Martin, golf course superintendent at the Wilshire Country Club in Los Angeles, has been working with his assistant, Jose Rocha, for 22 years. Martin, who has been a superintendent for 12 years and in the industry for 23, worked for Bruce Williams at the Los Angeles Country Club for 10 years before Wilshire. He came to the L.A. Country Club two years after Rocha arrived there.

"We were both hired on the grounds crew," Martin says. "I was a foreman working on the South Course, and Jose worked on the North Course. As I got promoted, he followed in my footsteps. As we went along, he kept the same attitude and took personal responsibility for doing a job right."

Rocha, who is originally from Mexico, worked at the 36-hole LACC for 23 years, starting at the age of 18 in 1982. His father worked on the landscaping



Jose Rocha, left, has worked with Doug Martin for 22 years.
Photo: Kelsey Edwards

crew that took care of the nongolf course areas such as the clubhouse.

"I first started on the landscaping crew, working with flowers, around tennis courts and on lawns," he says. "I did that for one year. Then, the golf course maintenance crew was short of people. I was interested in spraying pesticides and operating different machines. The landscaping side became boring."

When Rocha first started on the golf course maintenance crew, he changed cups, operated string trimmers and raked bunkers. Then he progressed to mowing greens and tees. Soon after that, the golf course superintendent at the time, Mike Hathaway, said he saw something in Rocha after seeing him work.

"You're responsible," he told me," Rocha says. "He pulled me aside and said, 'I need someone to man the crew, to be a foreman.' I was paired with Doug to work together. Then Doug became superintendent on the North Course."

Rocha became the foreman on the North Course and then worked for Martin in the capacity of an assistant without the formal title. Under Martin, Rocha eventually earned more responsibilities involving more paperwork and scheduling. He also learned more about irriga-

"We know how each other thinks and know each other's strengths and weaknesses. I can relax when I'm not there."

- DOUG MARTIN

tion, ultimately seeing the bigger picture of golf course maintenance.

After about 10 years as a superintendent at the LACC, Martin was ready to progress and thought he went as far as he could at the club.

"I wanted more responsibility, and Wilshire was a good fit," he says. "I had talked to Bruce about the next step. I wasn't in any rush, so it had to be the perfect job. Bruce kept me informed as opportunities arose. I received a lot of support from Bruce to make the move."

The transition was smooth for Martin because the LACC and Wilshire are similar: Both are private, are on the West side of L.A., have similar climate and grass, have similar budgets per 18 holes, and even have members who belong to

both clubs. However, Wilshire has fewer members (475) than the LACC (1,500).

Martin talked to Rocha about wanting to move on.

"When I heard Doug was moving on, I was happy because I knew he was ready to take that job," Rocha says. "I felt kind of bad, though, because we had worked closely together for so many years."

Martin has more responsibilities now compared to when he was at the LACC, including dealing with members more closely. At the LACC, Williams handled the relationships with members and worked closely with the membership and green committee, Martin says. At Wilshire, Martin has the final say with the budget, unlike when he was at the LACC.

But it wasn't until Martin had the job at Wilshire that he talked to Rocha about coming to work with him after one of the former assistants left.

"Jose stopped by to visit, and I mentioned I was looking for an assistant," Martin says. "I conducted a nationwide search and interviewed other people, but he was the right fit. He had the right communication skills. He was good at motivating the crew. I talked to Bruce extensively to

see if it was OK for Jose to move over here."

Rocha, who doesn't have a college degree, says he wasn't planning to go anywhere before Martin mentioned the Wilshire job.

"I was happy at the L.A. Country Club," he says. "I knew the guys well. I was with them for 20 years. One day, I went to see how Doug was doing. I was convinced I wasn't going to get another chance at an assistant's job. I knew if I was going to stay at the L.A. Country Club, I was going to be a foreman for a long time. I wasn't moving up anytime soon."

Like Martin, Rocha has more responsibilities now compared to when he was at the LACC. These involve personnel and planning, as well as learning more technical aspects of the job,

such as the intricacies of the irrigation system – programming the computer, learning about heads and nozzles – and which pesticides to apply and when.

"He's improving on organizing the staff to be as productive as possible, but sometimes I intervene," Martin says about Rocha. "Jose is also improving on technical aspects of the job. I help him in this area, too. He's improving on these aspects but isn't ready to go solo yet."

Rocha says he has learned a lot from Martin, such as being responsible, understanding pesticide labels, being involved in projects and being more organized.

"Doug also gives me freedom to get ideas together," he says.

Rocha says he also feels comfortable with the crew, 90 percent of whom are Hispanic, even though he's only been there a year and a half.

Martin says he feels lucky to have an assistant like Rocha.

"We know how each other thinks and know each other's strengths and weaknesses," Martin says. "I can relax when I'm not there."

That relaxation is tied to Rocha's confidence. "When Doug leaves to attend meetings or go on vacation, I run the place without problems," Rocha says. "I know what he likes. I have a lot of respect for Doug as a person and employer. I have a lot of trust in him. I'm at where I'm at because of Doug."

Rocha also helps Martin with one of his weaknesses – Spanish.

"Jose speaks better Spanish and has more patience with the staff," Martin says. "Some communication is better coming from him."

Martin values Rocha and says it's ideal to have two types of assistants – the stability of Rocha and the excitement of a young guy.

"The trend in the industry is to hire an educated graduate because of his technical experience," Martin says. "That creates a different kind of environment. I have another assistant, Mike Prouty, who's going along the superintendent path. He keeps me on my toes. When a young fellow joins the crew, he's excited about the job and constantly is learning and asking questions. It's good to be questioned about what you do and to receive an influx of new ideas. But if these assistants move on, you lose consistency.

"On the other hand, Jose has intimate knowledge of the course and crew," he adds. "He knows what's going to happen."

ON THE SAME PAGE

Like Martin and Rocha, Joe McCleary, CGCS, at Saddle Rock Golf Course in Aurora, Colo., and his assistant Richard Hurd, have been working closely together for a while – 11 years to be exact. They've been at Saddle Rock together since the course was under construction, which started in 1995. It opened in 1997.

McCleary, who has a four-year horticultural degree from Kansas State University and an MBA from the University of Colorado at Denver, has worked for the city of Aurora for 17 years. Before Saddle Rock, he worked at Meadow Hills Golf Course in Aurora as an irrigation technician. Meadow Hills is where McCleary and Hurd first met 20 years ago as seasonal laborers while McCleary was attending KSU.

Hurd, who's in his sixth year as assistant superintendent at Saddle Rock, left Meadow Hills after 10 years and went to Saddle Rock for a change of pace.

"I wanted to pursue a different path and experience new construction," he says.

During the construction of Saddle Rock, when Hurd was reintroduced to McCleary, Hurd's responsibilities included checking the irrigation system installation and helping with the grow-in. He also worked on projects tying in new grades throughout the property. For example, when the new clubhouse was built, Hurd tied in road crossings.

"When they rough grade, it's pretty rough," he says. "Construction is a challenge, especially when tying everything in. Irrigation was also a challenge. When we established new turf, it remained weak for a while. There was little housing at the time, and the wind sucked the irrigation right out of here. But once we established a good stand of turf, it was nice.

"I wish every college kid could go through the construction process to see how much work is involved," he adds. "It's not easy."

McCleary's trust of Hurd and Hurd's responsibilities have grown throughout time.

"During the past seven or eight years, I've felt more confident leaving the course," McCleary says. "Part of that is my maturing."

After the course was built, a lot of home-building was happening next to the course, and McCleary needed to communicate with the developer often. Since the homes have been completed, McCleary feels more comfortable leaving the course.



"It would have been too much to put Dick in charge of both the course and the relationship with the developer," he says. "It wasn't something you could just put on someone's desk to take care of."

Hurd's responsibilities include the daily scheduling of the crew, with whom he has a close relationship, and hiring.

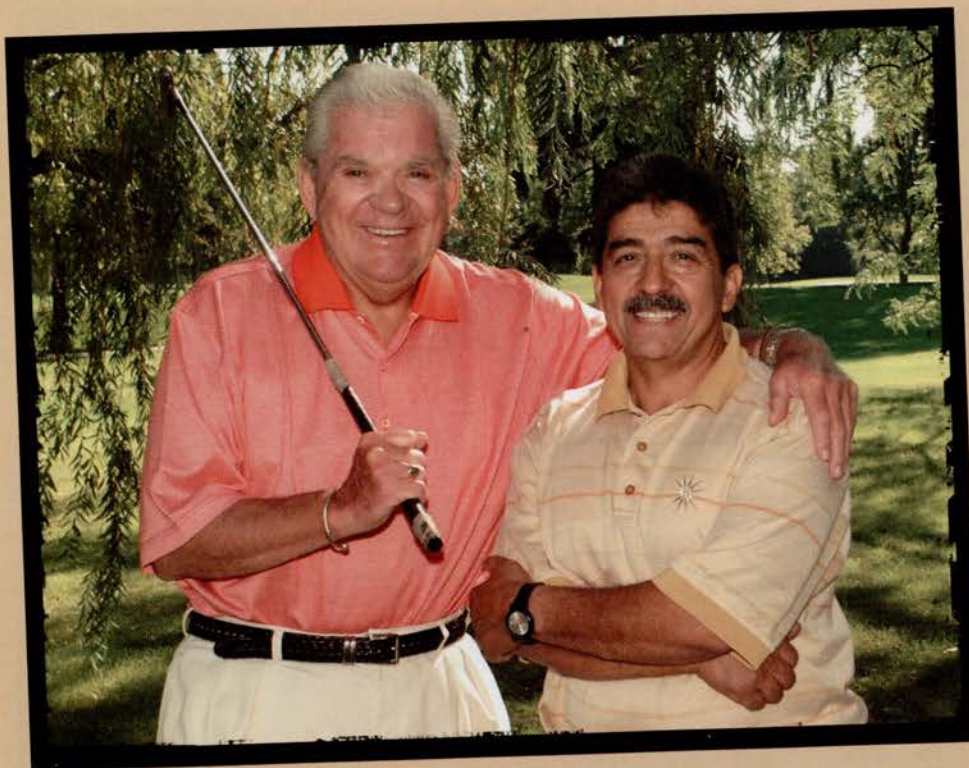
"When I became an assistant, I became in charge of hiring, scheduling and managing the staff," he says. "I'm a good judge of character. We have good rapport with the seasonal workers. They're the backbone of the industry. Without them, it would be hard to get stuff done."

One of the aspects of course maintenance that Hurd isn't responsible for is the development of the budget.

"I work with Dennis (Lyon, CGCS, manager of golf for the city) on that," McCleary says. "But I talk about budgeting for labor and equipment with Dick. He and other full-time staff are aware of budget performance."

McCleary also is responsible for the fertilizer program. There isn't much disease pressure in Aurora, so that isn't much of an issue, although McCleary says his eye is trained for

Richard Hurd, left, first met Joe McCleary 20 years ago while working at Meadow Hills Golf Course in Aurora, Colo. They went separate ways but joined up again and have been working closely together for 11 years. Photo: Don Cudney



Paul Voykin, left, and Moe Sanchez have been working together for 43 years. Photo: Jim Summaria Photography

“I’ve never had a better friend, and nobody has a better assistant. He thinks like I do when it comes to the golf course. Moe is right there by my side.”

- PAUL VOYKIN

spotting disease and treating it, unlike Hurd who would have difficulty with that because he’s colorblind.

The biggest benefit of McCleary working with Hurd for 11 years is Hurd’s experience and knowledge of how important relationships are within the city of Aurora.

“I feel confident that when I leave the course he can run the operation,” McCleary says. “When I’m on vacation, the details are taken care of. The pro shop staff and golfers wouldn’t know the difference if I’m gone. I was off for two weeks in July. I haven’t had a long vacation in 12 years. That shows my confidence in Richard and the staff. And being part of the city’s seven courses, Richard can call on other courses for management help if needed.”

Having a longtime assistant such as Hurd has allowed McCleary to take time away from the course to serve on the board of the local superintendent’s chapter, of which he was past president, national committees for the GCSAA and the Colorado Golf Association.

“I might be gone a couple of days, so having a strong, experienced assistant has allowed me to devote more time to the industry at the volunteer level,” McCleary says. “I’d be hard

pressed to find a disadvantage of having a guy like Richard. It’s a huge benefit to have a guy with that much experience. “If I moved on, he could take care of things. He could move up in the future.”

Hurd says he has learned a lot from McCleary. They work well together and complement each other.

“Joe is an avid golfer – I’m not, but I don’t mind playing,” Hurd says. “Joe is a professional and very smart. He’s one of the smartest people I’ve met in life. I might have the attitude like, ‘What does it matter, it’ll be here tomorrow,’ as opposed to Joe’s attitude, which is more like ‘Get it done today.’ I’m more laid back than Joe. I have the seasonal mentality at times.”

Working together with McCleary so long, Hurd knows what McCleary expects, such as smooth, rolling greens and straight, clean edges.

“We expect the same results,” Hurd says. “We know how to address the staff when we see something that isn’t right. We talk to individuals and explain the steps they take to better the project and prevent that mistake again. Joe and I are great communicators. We ask the staff for ideas, such as changing the fairway lines. Our whole attitude is to let them have ownership. We’re not always banging heads and have a great working relationship. The staff self-manages, making my job easier. We’re a tight-knit group and expectations are very high.”

Even though Hurd says he’s happy and isn’t looking for another job, McCleary doesn’t want to get too comfortable assuming he’ll be there forever. He knows Hurd has been working to finish his associate degree amid raising two children.

“Education is important to me, and I encourage it,” McCleary says.

“I’m mostly working on experience,” Hurd says. “I don’t know if I’d go to another course. If there’s an opportunity to better myself, I’d con-