



# Confessions of a superintendent

*Having read the Confessions of a Club Pro in a previous issue of Golfdom, the author has asked for equal time for the superintendent.*

## **Anonymous**

reasonable member requests, backs me up in my requests to the board and leaves me alone to manage the golf course.

In the matter of salary, I would be the first to admit that any super with a fairly good job could no doubt find another job (say milk truck driver) and make more money. We are behind many other responsible positions, especially in industry, in this respect. However, our freedom of movement and the atmosphere of our work more than compensate for this. As proof, few superintendents leave the field once they become established. Every super knows doctors and lawyers who can't wait to get out of the office and out on the golf course, and any superintendent who says he has no time to play golf really means that he prefers to do something else in his spare time. Frankly, I don't enjoy golf on my own course; I can't get my mind out of gear.

One of the most delightful and relaxing days I had this season was a round of golf with three other supers at another local course. Incidentally, this was with the full knowledge and blessing of my chairman, it being on a work day.

In regard to long hours, years ago my wife and I would mow fairways in

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the evening (20 years ago evening play on private courses was nil) and we enjoyed it, it was no hardship. But later on, when I found myself scheduling such work for myself after supper, I took the advice of an old-timer who told me, "Never do what your men can do, it's a waste. You are a \$4-an-hour man doing the work of a \$1.50-an-hour man. If you feel you must do something, do only what you can do. Check on the day's work and plan tomorrow's."

Along the same line, I can't feel too sorry for the pro who comes in weak and weary after nine or ten lessons. I come in sweaty at the end of the day, too, but I don't have \$60 or \$70 to fan my fevered brow with—and I'm not counting his salary or shop profits. I have only respect and admiration for club pros. I only wish my golf were good enough to have to put up with all their problems. Some pros would try to deceive the poor superintendent, and their relationship suffers—such as the one who swore to me that the soda machine (in the pro shop) was all that kept him in groceries. Unknown to him at that time, his \$100 a week salary was included in my budget, and that was \$10 more a week than my salary.

Basically, the root of the poor relationship between pro and super at many





clubs is that the pro takes for granted something the super feels very personal about—the course. I have been associated with five professionals and each one constantly violated rules made for the benefit of all golfers such as practicing pitch shots to greens, giving lessons just anywhere, instead of the designated area, and so on.

If you call the pro's attention to the violation it will likely lead to ill feeling, but if you ignore it he will continue to abuse the course, as will his assistant and some members, who feel "If the pro does it, I can get away with it, too." The one time this can be handled is when a "new" pro comes in. As some of my fellow supers put it, "You can break him in right."

One of the most troublesome aspects of the superintendent's craft is his public relations, or, more properly, his member relations.

I know that most clubs would have the super post information on the course operations, offer lawn clinics, greet the members on the first tee on a Saturday morning, and so on. But I suggest that all this will be for nothing until turfmen ask themselves one basic question: "Is what I am doing best for my members?" Now, I don't mean "Is what I am doing best for my

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## Confessions

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course?" There is a difference.

As an example, I know a superintendent who carries out greens and tee renovation the first two weeks in September. His timing for the turf is perfect, but not so for the members who happen to be having the club championship at the same time. Far too many turf managers seem to consider the golfer the enemy, instead of the only reason for the existence of the course—and the superintendent.

At times, this mutual distrust can come about through no fault of the superintendent. I took over an 18-hole private course when the old-time "greenkeeper" passed on. I never had the trust and confidence of the older members because no one (in their estimation) could fill old Jim's shoes. The fact that Jim was my dad made not a bit of difference. As new members came in and older ones left I gradually gained some measure of respect and confidence, but it took many years.

What so few people grasp in judging our craft is the great difference in knowledge, experience and aptitude from man to man, and from course to course. Just within my own turf association, our Class A (golf course superintendent) members range from a \$100-a-week man who is on a nine-hole course and is laid off in the winter, to men whose courses are just short of perfection and who command salaries unheard of just a few years ago... (our average for 18 holes is \$10,000).

I happen to have two sons. The older of the two has worked on the course since he was 15, but the interest is not there. My younger son is interested in all and everything on the course. This lad, like his dad and my dad, will be a golf course superintendent some day—we wouldn't have it any other way. □

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