



THE SUPERINTENDENT: PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE

RICHARD BLAKE, GCSAA PRESIDENT, DISCUSSES WITH GOLFDOM CHEMICAL BANS, CERTIFICATION, THE SUPERINTENDENT'S IMAGE AND THE FUTURE ROLE THE SUPERINTENDENT MUST PLAY TO DECIDE HIS DESTINY

By Jerry A. Olson

Associate Editor

“Golf clubs, club officials, superintendents and everyone associated with the game of golf have played ostrich long enough.”

Editor's note: Right or wrong, Richard Blake, president of the Golf Course Superintendent's Assn. of America, could well be the best remembered president in the history of the organization. Decades of hard work have finally brought a dream of yesteryear—a pension plan and certification—on the threshold of reality. No one man can be singled out for the culmination of these two steps to improve the superintendent's image and future, but the progressive Blake, an officer in the GCSAA for six years, played an important part. Blake, who has been a superintendent since 1952, has been at Mt. Pleasant CC in Boylston, Mass., for the past 11 years. In an exclusive interview for GOLFDOM,

Blake discusses the past, present and future of the superintendent.

GOLFDOM: *What do you hope to accomplish in your one year tenure as president of the GCSAA?*

Blake: I'd like to see the certification program implemented and started, and I'd also like to see the pension program in operation. I think these are two things the membership needs. I think most of all, though, I'd like to see the superintendents, who aren't national members, realize there is an advantage to being a member of the national association. It is to their own benefit as well as their clubs'.

GOLFDOM: *When will certification and the pension plan be presented to the membership?*

Blake: The certification plan was mailed to superintendents in the national organization this month. The new pension program is now pending before the Internal Revenue Service, so we don't know when it will be ready. We hope the IRS will approve it for 1972. I think the pension plan is one very good example of the benefits which can be derived by being a member of the national association. Under our pension program, a superintendent will be able to accept a position with another golf club and not lose any credits in the pension program. It is actually a pool whereby as he changes jobs, he still continues to build up his pension for the future. He won't be penalized for changing jobs. In many



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areas of business today a man has built up so many years of pension towards retirement, that he cannot afford to leave the company and take a job elsewhere. Under that kind of a pension plan an individual stagnates and just wants to put in his time until retirement. He won't make constructive criticism or ask for changes because he has too much to lose. I think our program offers financial security for the superintendent at no cost to his conscience.

GOLFDOM: *There has been a lot of talk these days about improving the image of the superintendent. How can the individual superintendent enhance his professional position?*

Blake: You use the word talk and that is one area which we have over-emphasized. We do a lot of talking and not much doing. This is true at the national, sectional and individual levels. Communication is a better word and I think it has a different meaning than talk. I think it is time we all became involved in our associations and in the community. It's very easy to criticize. There has been a lot of criticism towards Federal and state governments, the country clubs and a lot of superintendents. If you don't want to be criticized, many people think you should do nothing. That is the easy way out and the one that leaves you the most vulnerable to criticism. But, the opportunity is here to stick your neck out. Golf clubs, club officials, superintendents and

everyone associated with the game of golf have played ostrich long enough. There are some serious problems that must be faced by everyone connected with golf. The only way to solve these problems is by bringing them out in the open: Coordination, communication and cooperation. There has been an effort by the Allied Assn., the GCSAA, Club Manager's Assn. of America, Professional Golfers' Assn., the United States Golf Assn., the National Club Assn. and the National Golf Foundation to improve the total image of the golf industry. There is enough brainpower and executive ability in the GCSAA alone to do something, if only everyone would become involved. It's not what you say you are going to do, but what you do, that is important.

GOLFDOM: *Does the GCSAA plan to fight any of the Federal or state pesticide regulations?*

Blake: Fight isn't the right word. We are going to communicate with the people evaluating all of the different rulings and regulations and coordinate our efforts to seek knowledge from people that know and are in a position to influence this legislation—the Federal, state and local agencies as well as universities and the USDA experimental stations. We are not going to get involved in the emotional issues. We are going to deal strictly with facts and proven results.

GOLFDOM: *Has the superinten-*

dent been chemically disarmed?

Blake: In certain states, yes. However, there are alternative chemicals, plant protectants, available for the superintendent to use. The chemical industry is coming up with alternatives and there is a lot of research being conducted with safer, more effective chemicals. But, it takes time, knowledge and money.

There has been an overreaction by many states in passing emotional legislation. Many of the people making all of the noise know the least about the problems. But again, this is where the superintendent must bear part of the blame for waiting too long to become involved in the issues. After all, the superintendent has been an ecologist or environmentalist long before the terms became popular.

GOLFDOM: *Does the GCSAA plan to establish a lobby at the national level to get favorable legislation?*

Blake: It has been discussed, but right now the finances aren't available. The one thing that appears to be overlooked by golf clubs in general, is that they have the biggest lobby available in their membership. If club officials, including the superintendent, could gather support from the membership and work with legislators, sensible legislation could become realized and it would offset the vocal emotionalists. Too often, club officials and members, who are real business leaders in their community, do an about-turn as far as the country club is concerned. They are trying to escape the pressures of the office at the club. Consequently, they don't practice good sound business procedures at the club. They seem to throw all of their business knowledge out of the window. Golf is a business of pleasure.

GOLFDOM: *How can the superintendent, then, become involved?*

Blake: Through education. We at the national level have an obligation to keep our members abreast of the changing times. We run a very strong educational program every year. However, this year we are going to add regional workshops on business management in different parts of the country. These workshops will cover all phases of the superintendent's operation, but will center around business management. This is going to start before the end of the year with the first workshop scheduled for the Chicago area. Eventually, the

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Superintendent

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program will encompass all sections of the country.

GOLFDOM: *I'd like to digress for a moment back to the pesticide issue. What specifically is the national association doing on pesticide research?*

Blake: We hope to coordinate our efforts and get better research in specific areas. We are urging universities, schools and research centers to keep us informed of results of their studies so we can pass this information along to our members. We are also trying to raise additional money from our membership for research. We are urging our members to contribute money to the GCSAA for research rather than sending Christmas cards. This may sound like a minor program, but if each superintendent would contribute \$5, we could fund pertinent research which would offer some solutions to the pesticide problem.

GOLFDOM: *How has mechanization affected the role of the superintendent?*

Blake: There is more mechanization and there has to be because of the demands. There are more people golfing more days a week and demanding better playing conditions. The only way a superintendent can keep up with this demand is by using more complex, sophisticated, multi-purpose machinery. Most of the clubs operate with fewer people because the pay scale doesn't attract good help. In fact, we are in a position where we can't even compete with welfare. Wages will have to be raised for the superintendent and his staff. I think it is time for club officials to realize there is more to a superintendents' duties than just cutting grass. They are starting to realize this, but it's been a long time in coming. It is interesting, also, that although machinery is supplanting people in getting the work done, it requires a more intelligent, highly skilled and technically capable individual to operate the machinery.

GOLFDOM: *Will the 70s see an increase in the financial status of the superintendent?*

Blake: It had better. As I said before, the superintendent is in charge of quite a financial investment when you consider the land, equipment

and purpose of the country club. I think people are now realizing that it isn't the restaurant, pro shop or the clubhouse that makes a successful country club atmosphere. It's the golf course. If the course is in good shape then the rest of the operation has a good chance of being successful. The whole operation of the club depends upon the golf course. The salary of superintendents depends on productivity and what he has accomplished. The salaries of superintendents have come a long way in the past few years, but so have salaries of all professional and skilled persons. A plumber or electrician, for example, is making a lot more money in comparison to hours worked than the superintendent. Most superintendents are working a lot more hours, have more responsibility and are making less money. They should be compensated for this responsibility. In too many cases they aren't. In some other professions, persons are working 35 or 40 hours a week. Most superintendents, however, work 50 or 60 hours a week and enjoy it. This has created a problem. Because they enjoy what they are doing and take great pride in their work, they have been shortchanged for their sincerity and dedication. They have been taken advantage of.

GOLFDOM: *Is the GCSAA attracting younger people into the organization?*

Blake: Younger, capable, better educated and more aggressive. They want recognition now for what they are doing and have helped elevate the status of the superintendent.

GOLFDOM: *Do you foresee the demise of the "rising up through the ranks" superintendent?*

Blake: Definitely. The expanding role of the superintendent has made a college education a necessity. He must work with his head as well as his hands. He must not only be familiar with turf, safe and effective chemicals and equipment, but also budgeting and public relations. I know I have quite a few boys who come to me with college backgrounds and ask for help in gaining the practical experience of working with turf. After the diploma, the "true" education begins. I know in Boston at Northeastern University, prospective engineers and businessmen go to school for six months and work for six

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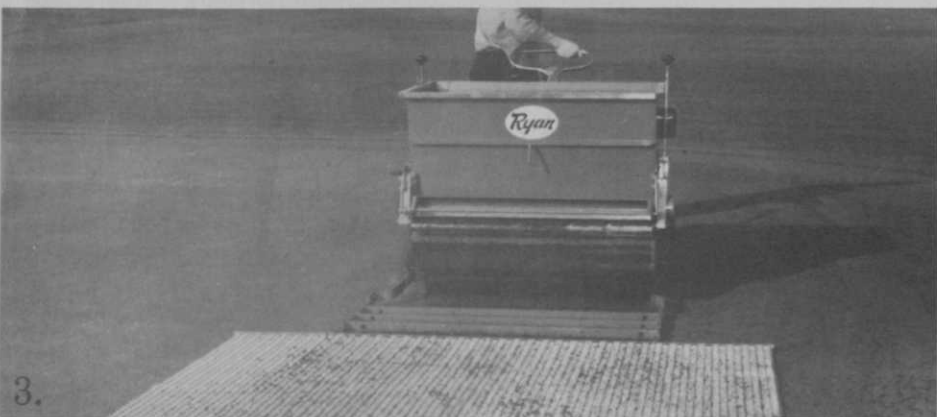
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months. A lot of people have been led to believe that if you get that piece of paper or degree, you are set for life. A degree doesn't mean a thing unless you can do something with it. But don't get me wrong. A college degree is a fundamental requirement nowadays for the superintendent.

GOLFDOM: Do you foresee several clubs in an area pooling their equipment to save money in the future?

Blake: I think it comes down to the point that the average golfer is a pretty impatient person. He comes to a course and spends so much to join and he wants instant service. There are a lot of areas where clubs could operate more efficiently if they could utilize certain pieces of equipment, if the golfer could just wait for a few minutes. But, it comes down to who would use the equipment first and when it would be available for use. And in turf management, a lot of things hinge on being able to do certain things at certain times or you lose the value of doing them. But, I think it is one area which should be more fully investigated.

GOLFDOM: How important is it for the superintendent to conduct a community relations program?

Blake: I think it is critical that they do. Many superintendents are involved in their community in areas of conservation, recreation and planning. These are all pluses. I think that in the past the superintendent has hidden in the background. As someone once said "actors in the dark." The superintendent has a definite responsibility to the community, should recognize it and should fulfill it.

GOLFDOM: What can the individual superintendent do for his local and national organizations?

Blake: Get involved. Most of the local chapters have monthly meetings with very good educational programs. They play golf, invite people from the press, club officials and members of the industry to compare ideas. Local universities have field days, manufacturers bring in equipment for showing. There is a great deal of time and effort being spent on education at the national and local levels, if the superintendent is interested in improving his knowledge.

But, I guess it boils down to if he wants to stick his neck out and be a real doer. □