

You expect Steven McLeod to be white because you assume *all* golf course architects are white. In fact, you have *never* seen or heard of a black architect before. So the first thing you notice about McLeod when you meet him is his color — he's black. You're surprised, of course.

When shaking McLeod's hand, you try to conceal the shock on your face. It's not that you're prejudiced; you just didn't expect a black man to be a golf course architect.

Oh no. Here we go again.

This reminds me of the first-black-quarterback episode starring Doug Williams, which began more than 20 years ago. Williams was the first black quarterback taken in the NFL draft in 1978 and the first black quarterback to lead his team, the Washington Redskins, to a Super Bowl win in 1988.

When the Redskins were preparing for the Super Bowl against the Denver Broncos, the media wasn't asking Williams how it felt to be in the Super Bowl. Sports reporters were asking him how he felt to be the first black quarterback to be starting in a Super Bowl. The hype was inappropriate and ridiculous. But at the same time, it was a momentous occasion.

The hype surrounding Williams starting in the Super Bowl was inappropriate and ridiculous because he should have been viewed as a quarterback, not a *black* quarterback. But it was a momentous occasion because Williams was shattering a racial barrier — and the issue of whether a black could successfully play quarterback in the NFL would finally be put to rest.

McLeod can empathize with Williams' plight because he may be the golf industry's first black architect. He's going to get attention for that.

The 34-year-old, who graduated from Michigan State University in 1991 with a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture and is employed by Matthews & Nelhiebel in East Lansing, Mich., says he doesn't know of any other black designers. The American Society of Golf Course Architects has no members who are black. Tony Hourston, spokesman for the ASGCA and an African American, believes McLeod may be the only black architect.

Does McLeod view his perceived status as a big deal? Yes and no.

An Architect Who Happens to be ...

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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"I don't want to be known as a black designer," he says. "I want to be known as a good designer. I want to be noticed for my talents."

But McLeod realizes he might be breaking a racial barrier. If he is golf's first black architect, he knows he's opening the gate so more minorities can join the field.

"One of my goals is to get more minorities involved [in the profession]," he reveals. "The industry needs more minority representation."

McLeod is aware of the golf industry's lily white and sometimes racist history. So he's excited that he might be the industry's first black designer, but he's also wary of the label. "I'm tired of it because it shouldn't be an issue, but I'm not tired of it because *it is* an issue, he says."

McLeod's boss, W. Bruce Matthews III, says he hired McLeod because of his talent. "Steve is a golf course architect who happens to be black," Matthews says. "I'm a golf course architect who happens to have no hair."



Because of several successful black quarterbacks in the NFL today, it's no longer an issue for an African American to play the position. The barrier broken by Williams is now non-existent. McLeod hopes the same thing happens in his profession.

"One of my professional goals is to become a member of the ASGCA," McLeod says. "But a greater reward would be to have other minorities join me in this exciting profession."

Hopefully, that will happen. And, hopefully, these minorities will be noticed for their talents — and nothing else.

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