

News from the Big Show

Here's our report from the 73rd GCSAA convention

Editor's note: We left cold Cleveland for sunny Orlando with pasty complexions. We returned home to cold Cleveland from sunny Orlando four days later with pasty complexions. You get the drift — we lived in the Orange County Convention Center for all that time! How else could we bring you such a comprehensive report from the 75th GCSAA Conference and Show last month? Read on.

He's OK

GCSAA CEO Steve Mona made the biggest news of the show. Fortunately, it didn't turn out to be bad news. Mona collapsed on Thursday during the show after experiencing an attack of a neuro-cardiac condition. Thankfully, the trim and athletic Mona is doing fine.

He regained consciousness after fainting and was taken to an Orlando hospital, where he stayed overnight. Tests revealed that Mona has an easily treatable condition known as Neurocardiogenic Syncope, "a transient loss of consciousness causing collapse with spontaneous recovery." The cause is "transient global cerebral hypoperfusion" or a sudden cessation of cerebral blood flow for six to eight seconds.

Mona returned to the show on Saturday for a few hours and then went home the same day. He was back in the GCSAA office on Monday.

PDI ... Who Cares?

Where were the Professional Development Initiative's (PDI) backers and critics?

Less than 100 superintendents attended a seminar titled "PDI Implementation Update" during the show. PDI, of course, is GCSAA's program to "improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of superintendents" to make them more com-



Can you say walk-up crowd? When the trade opened on Thursday, hundreds of showgoers joined the registration line at the same time. Doh! Yikes! Arrghh! When the line refused to die, GCSAA officials let many showgoers on the floor sans badges.

petent and marketable. Last year, superintendents voted PDI in by a wide margin. While PDI was the talk of the GCSAA show last year in Dallas, it was not this year. The lecture hall was not even one-quarter full for the seminar.

Certified superintendents John Maddern and Mark Woodward, members of GCSAA's Board of Directors, updated attendees on the timeline for PDI's implementation. A pilot program featuring about 200 members is set to begin in September and run through March 2003 before PDI is officially implemented on July 1, 2003.

Maddern announced that a new Code of Standards was approved. The code, much like the certification Code of Standards, contains policies and procedures for the administration of Class A membership. "This is a living document and will need revisions in the future," Maddern said.

“The Faithful Brotherhood Flag”

Before certified superintendent Walter Mattison died in December 2000, he solicited a request to fellow superintendents for a “flag from your golf course.” The response was tremendous. Mattison received 550 logoed flags from around the world.



The BIG flag is the result of the late Walter Mattison's efforts to unite the profession.

Mattison wanted the flags to live on and stand for unity among superintendents. They are — as one big flag, known as “The Faithful Brotherhood Flag.” Mattison's wife, Nancy, and fellow superintendent, Don Clemans, organized and oversaw the construction of the flags into one flag, which was displayed above the 75th anniversary tribute area on the show floor. It looked grand!

Jimmy Fumbles, Mike Scores

The GCSAA brass had football on the brain when they selected their keynote speakers for this year's show: former Dallas Cowboy coach Jimmy “Don't Touch My Perfect Hair” Johnson and former Chicago Bear middle linebacker Mike “The Scowl” Singletary.

We missed Johnson's talk, and we're glad we did from what we heard about it. We talked to several attendees (including a few high-ranking GCSAA officials) who said Jimmy's talk ... shall we say ... a personal foul.

On the other hand, we saw Singletary's talk, which was magnificent and moving. We admit we were skeptical, especially when we saw Singletary dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and two-toned shoes sitting on the stage with the GCSAA suits before the presentation. We also had no idea what Singletary, one of the baddest linebackers to ever play, would talk about (taking off running backs' heads, maybe?).

Boy, were we surprised. The guy is more than big, strong and fierce. He has a heart the size of William “The Fridge” Perry, his former teammate. Singletary's talk focused on vision, commitment and relationships. He spoke a lot about the relationship he had with his mother, who made the best out of a lot of bad situations. Singletary was superb.

However, we wished Singletary could have come down from the stage and tackled the dude with the ringing cell phone when it went off during a poignant moment in Singletary's speech. It was the epitome of rudeness.

If You Missed Witteveen, You Missed a Good Thing

There was a hint of morose in Gordon Witteveen's voice. “It's a shame there weren't more people here,” he said after his speech.

It *was* a shame. Witteveen, the former veteran superintendent and now owner of Pleasant View GC in Brantford, Ontario, gave a talk under the topic, “Reflecting on the Past — Looking Into the Future.” But the huge room was dotted with a sparse crowd.

Witteveen talked about what it takes to be a great superintendent. He listed four points:

- The ability to produce quality conditions over a long period of time.

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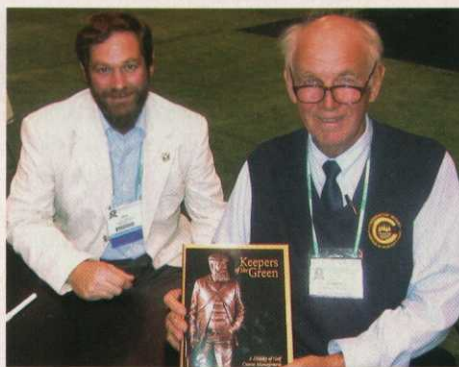
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- Involvement in professional associations, both regional and national.
- Having a legacy of protégés in the field.
- Having the opportunity to host major events and to shine during such competitions.

Witteveen also spoke about his book, *Keepers of the Green*, which he co-authored with writer Bob Labbanca.

“Our book deals with the birth of the game and with the birth of our profession,” Witteveen said. “It also relates the story of the greenkeepers from the time when organized golf first arrived in North America in 1873 until contemporary times. It’s the story of men and women who toiled, often in obscurity, and created some of the finest golf courses in the world.”

Witteveen’s advice to be a successful superintendent? “Listen to your golfers,” he said. “Remember that a pleasant personality is ever more important than agronomic knowledge.”



Gordon Witteveen (right) and Bob Labbanca show off their cool book, *Keepers of the Green*.

Sounds of Silence

Speaking at the forum on “The State of Public Golf” reminded Ted Woehrle, superintendent of The Orchards GC in Washington, Mich., of the first time he spoke at the conference 45 years ago.

“Here I was, barely two years out of Purdue, and I found myself on the same dais with [legendary turf professors] Burt Musser and O.J. Noer,” Woehrle recalls. “When it was finally my time to speak, I couldn’t get the words out. I was speechless.”

Woehrle stood stricken with stage fright as the normally rowdy crowd started staring at him. Slowly but surely, the hall quieted down. It became so silent, in fact, that according to Woehrle, you could have heard a pin drop. “Once the room was completely silent, I suddenly found my voice,” Woehrle says. “I don’t remember exactly what I said, but I finished. Then I sat down, horrified at how I’d performed in front of these turf legends.”

When the panel finished its session and the crowd dispersed, Musser approached Woehrle, who was sure he was about to get the tongue-lashing of his life.

“He said, ‘That silence at the beginning of your talk was one of the most effective attention getters I’ve ever seen,’” Woehrle says. “Then he told me he was going to use it from then on.”

Woehrle says he never had the heart to tell Musser his silence wasn’t intentional.

Cell Phone Follies

We probably don’t have to tell you this if you’re faithful readers of the magazine, but one of our pet peeves here at *Golfdom* is cell phones that ring in the middle of presentations. So imagine our consternation and anger when a cell phone kept ringing every 90 seconds during former superintendent Ray Davies’ presentation on Environmental Success Stories.

Davies, who now oversees maintenance for CourseCo, a

Lock Out

ClubCar’s booth featured an array of cool utility vehicles and golf cars, but this simple steering-wheel lock caught the eye of at least one superintendent. “Finally, there’s a way for me to keep my crew members from driving off in my vehicle,” he said.



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GCSAA Show Quotables

“One of my turf professors used to say, ‘Children learn from constant repetition.’ The same could be said of my members.”

— Robert Collins, certified superintendent of Cripple Creek CC in Dagsboro, Del., on the importance of hammering home your message to members

“Green speed is out of control. ... People take too much time to play the damn game. ... Slow play and excessive conditioning have bogged down the game. Where’s it going to stop?”

— Tim Moraghan, chief agronomist for the USGA

“I’d like everyone to keep their voices down and be quiet. I’m in the midst of dream with this new

job, and I don’t want to wake up.”

— Gregg Breningmeyer, who made his show debut as John Deere’s director of marketing and sales

“We’re not saying outside producers have to drink the Kool-Aid, but it’s important that they understand what a Golf Channel program feels like.”

— Adam Barr, business reporter for the Golf Channel, on why they produce most of their shows internally

“My wife couldn’t be here today because she’s pregnant with our first child. So I get another reward in six months.”

— William Davidson Jr., superintendent of Collier’s Reserve CC in Naples, Fla., after receiving an Environmental Leaders in Golf Award for national private course

Petaluma, Calif.-based management company, battled through the interruptions bravely, even though half his audience turned around every minute or two to try to find the person with the offending phone. By the end of his presentation, the audience was looking for blood.

So when Davies asked for questions, one irritated superintendent shouted, “I have a question: Who owns that phone?”

Davies started to answer, and then looked down at his own computer bag as the phone rang again. Sheepishly, he admitted the offending phone was his. It had been in his computer bag the entire time.

“It’s my wife calling to find out how I’d done with my presentation,” he said, drawing loud laughter from the crowd.

Bundled Up

Maybe it’s because we come from a cold-weather state (Ohio), but we were amused to see GCSAA’s shuttle monitors bundled up in knit hats, gloves and winter coats as they escorted people to and from buses. After all, the temperature didn’t dip much below 45 degrees F.

That’s swimming weather where we come from. ■



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