

We Can Work It Out

Life is short and there's no time for arguing about aerification with the pro. So here are several tips to improve your relationship with him or her

BY RON FURLONG

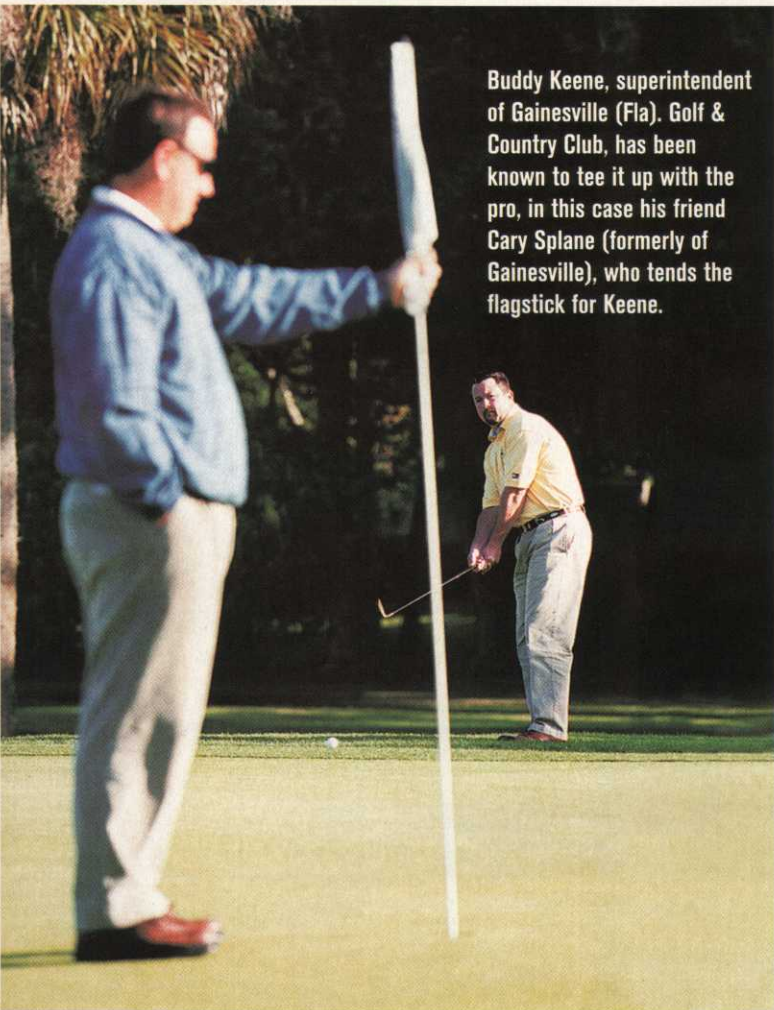
Occasionally, I've thought of the relationship between a pro and the superintendent as similar to that of a baseball umpire and manager.

The umpire represents the pro, who calls the game and sets the rules. The manager represents the superintendent, who just wants a fair game called and an atmosphere created to try and do his job to the best of his ability. The image of the superintendent kicking sand on the pro's shoes and throwing his hat down in disgust is a hard one to shake.

Maybe this isn't fair, and certainly it's not always the case. However, in many instances it is indeed an analogy that rings somewhat true. It's probably a DNA thing — a predetermined path each personality is set upon based on trillions of incidents of chance, making each person into what they will become.

I grew up with a kid, let's call him Tom (his real name is Joe, but let's call him Tom), who ended up becoming a pro. While Tom's path ultimately led to the pro shop, mine directed me to the maintenance building. Why? Good question, and I've pondered it a fair amount recently.

Tom and I were similar in many ways. We



Buddy Keene, superintendent of Gainesville (Fla.) Golf & Country Club, has been known to tee it up with the pro, in this case his friend Cary Splane (formerly of Gainesville), who tends the flagstick for Keene.

FILE PHOTO (JON M. FLETCHER)

loved sports and grew up playing them all side by side. Whether it was hockey, golf or baseball, we were there together. However, early on an interesting fork came up in our mutual road, which led us to take the first of many separate paths in life.

Tom chose wrestling in the fall, while I took to basketball. I never thought anything of it at the time, but now I find it rather interesting. Wrestler — pro. Basketball player — superintendent. Hmmmm ... Could there be something to this?

A wrestler tends to be somewhat assertive and wants conclusion quickly, while a basketball player may tend more toward passiveness and seeing more of the long-term goal. A basketball game draws out over a great length of time, while a wrestling match is over quickly. Reminds me a bit of trying to talk about the long-term benefits of aerification with some people.

Hmmm ...

All of this nostalgia about old Tom has led me to ponder even more the relationship of the pro with the superintendent, and the personality that each brings to the table. I'm fortunate to have a great relationship with the pro at my club, and I know many superintendents who are just as fortunate. I also know of a few on

the other side of the spectrum that are — for one reason or another and certainly not to cast any blame either way — not quite as lucky.

So if this relationship *is* strained and not functioning as it should in a healthy, beneficial manner to all concerned, what can be done? Are there miracle steps that the two sides can take to mend the wounds?

Thankfully, I'm here to answer all of your prayers. Dr. Ron is in the house, and he's come up with 10 sure-fire, can't-miss, guaranteed solutions to all strained relationships between pros and superintendents.

And wait, there's more. Not only will I give you these 10 guaranteed solutions, I'll throw in a bonus tip at the end for dealing with an arrogant golfer. You get all of this for only \$19.95. Yes, \$19.95!

Drum roll please. Let's go Letterman-style backwards for full effect:

The Top 10 Ways to Bond With Your Pro

10 Play computer golf together. It may be the only chance you ever have of beating him or her in a game of golf. It will do both of you good to see the superintendent stick a six iron from 170 yards to three feet from the pin.

Continued on page 78

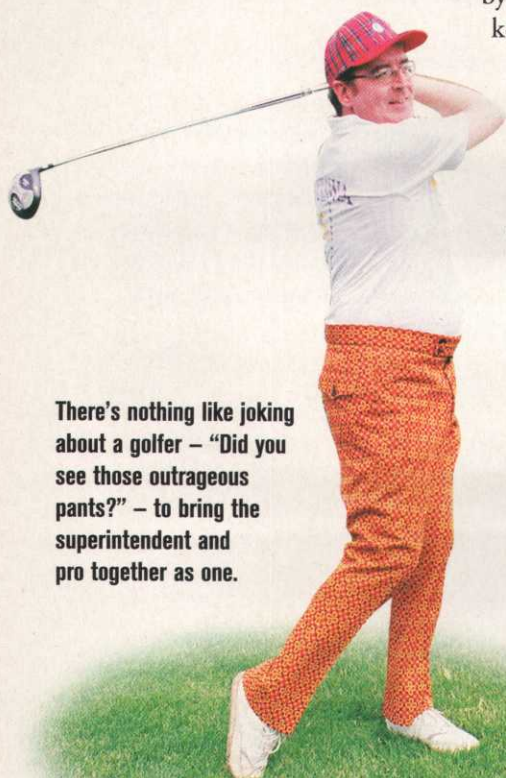


Superintendents need to explain to pros how important aerification is to golf courses — and that it's not some devious ploy by them to mess up courses twice a year.

USGA

Sure you'll want to eat it, but think of the bridge you can gap by offering your kosher dill pickle to someone.

There's nothing like joking about a golfer – "Did you see those outrageous pants?" – to bring the superintendent and pro together as one.



Continued from page 77

9 Trade hats (literally). Have the pro don one of your square Toro or John Deere hats while you strut around in a Greg Normanish top.

8 Joke about the golfers together. Something like, "Did you see those pants?"

7 Pretend there is frost one morning when there really isn't. Keep the golfers in the clubhouse for hours during a perfectly beautiful morning, all the while insisting the greens are frozen. Then, hours later, let the pro in on the joke. It's sure to be a big hit.

6 Stop mowing. Don't mow the greens for a week and see if anyone notices. Once the pro says something about the greens stimping at 4, you can commend him on his perceptiveness. Nothing can ease a tense relationship more than complimenting someone.

5 Give golf cars the green light. Following a night of 4 or 5 inches of hard rain, don't be such a prude about golf cars. Let them out there. What harm can they really cause? Think of the revenue for once, would you?

4 Share your pickle at lunch. Sure, you'll want to eat it, but think of the bridge you can gap by offering your kosher dill to someone. I know this one from personal experience. I offered my wife my pickle on our second date, and look at us now.

3 Clean up the pro shop. Offer to vacuum, dust and even do the windows on a weekly basis.

2 Help with lessons. Sure, you stink, but why not give it a shot? Just remember, it's all in the grip anyway. Just have them keep regripping.

1 Tell the truth about aerification. Admit the deep dark secret of all superintendents: Aerification does nothing. Tell them the truth

that it's all a sick and demented ploy on superintendents part to mess up the course twice a year. It's scary at first, but you'll feel better afterward. It's time we all stopped living this lie.

Seriously, though

OK, that's my poor attempt at humor. Here are five more that may be slightly more helpful.

5 Golf together. Obvious, but in my experience nothing can bring two people together more than the game of golf. And get out and play other courses.

4 Meet weekly. Keep the lines of communication open. If you're not meeting as a staff weekly, make sure the two of you are.

3 Team work. Try and remember you're on the same team, with the same goal in mind. Sometimes this little fact gets forgotten.

2 Listen. We're all guilty of going into situations with preconceived notions of how

people are going to act and what they are going to say. Improving one's listening skills usually goes hand in hand with improving relationships.

You know the old saying about making assumptions — and try and remember you don't know everything. Hard for some of us, I know.

1 Improve your golf game. Sounds a little silly, but the better you are on the course, the more likely your opinion is going to be considered from an angle other than that of the superintendent and more of that of a golfer, which in the pro shop means a lot.

When I think back to growing up with my old friend Joe (I mean Tom), I recall the different paths our lives started to take as we grew older. Yet as different as we were becoming, we were still cut from the same mold. I still call him up from time to time and shoot the bull, and argue with him who was the better hockey player. And every now and then we get together and do the only thing the two of us really feel like doing together anymore, which is golfing. When he gives me 10 strokes, we usually have a good match. ■

Furlong is superintendent of the Avalon Golf Club in Burlington, Wash.

