



Editorial

## HIGH FANTASY, INDEED

By Monroe S. Miller

I write a column for a newsletter called "THE BADGER BROADCAST," a publication of the Wisconsin chapter of the Club Managers Association of America, and receive a copy of each newsletter. The issue before last had a lead story that doubled me over in a paroxysm of anger — they're still promoting the concept of general manager for golf and country clubs. I thought this bureaucratic notion had died a natural death from lack of interest and because it is almost completely devoid of even a thread of merit. I guess I was wrong.

The article is "authorless" (I can see why) and was reprinted from the March 1985 issue of the National Club Association publication **Perspectives**. If you would like a copy of the article, call me. You need to know the kind of thinking and promoting that goes on, sometimes even behind your back. Two groups are heavy into this bluster about a GM — the NCA and the CMAA. Both are good groups and contribute to the club industry, but they are way off the mark on this one.

It is assumed and supposed that the clubhouse manager is the one that will move into a GM position, if a club can be hooked on this ludicrous and preposterous "idea." Oh, there is token gesture made to our group. Quoting from the article: "Through the years, we have seen club general managers who have risen through the ranks of the Club Managers Association of America and of the Professional Golfers Association. Individual Golf Course Superintendents, too, have demonstrated the capability to enhance or change their role to that of a general manager." Thanks for the afterthought.

Early in the article, while trying (hopelessly) to build an argument for their point of view, their prejudice really shows. Again, quoting: "For instance, the greens committee chairman may recommend to the board that it is appropriate to spend \$50,000 on a new tractor that the golf course superintendent believes is necessary. The chairman assures the board that the budget is sufficient to cover this expense. In reality, although there are budgetary dollars to cover the expense, it may be of a lower priority than other needed improvements, and the purchase will deplete the funds for these. Or, the club's board may have made a decision two years before not to purchase the tractor, but the new committee chairman is unaware of the previous decision." I have several thoughts:

1. The NCA doesn't seem to know that it is the GREEN committee.

2. Wouldn't you love to see one of those \$50,000 tractors? For all the equipment shows I've attended, never once have I seen one. Shows the author's interest in and knowledge of golf courses — he's one who would make a lousy GM.

3. Why not use an example of \$50,000 worth of bar furniture and the House chairman instead — it's called even handedness and open mindedness.

4. It is assumed that the Golf Course Superintendent is uninformed about previous decisions, a rude assumption. Many of us report directly to the Board of Directors and are well aware of their decisions and priorities.

5. It is assumed that the Green Committee Chairman is also uninformed and that he cares not about the club but only the golf course. This seldom is the case. He wants a well ordered priority list and probably doesn't even want a \$20,000 tractor if the clubhouse roof leaks or the bar furniture is worn beyond repair. And it is certain that the Board of Directors does not need a GM to point out the obvious. Directors are among the most successful citizens in the community and have operated thousands of clubs for many years, and will continue to do so, with intelligence and a concern for what is best for the club.

The **Perspective** article explains

the specific role of a GM. Guess where they got their "excellent core definition" of the general manager's role? Yep — Club Managers Association of America. Guess where the organization chart for a club under a GM came from? (One guess).

Nowhere in the NCA article do they tell what is wrong with the clubs managed by a triumvirate system. They ask the question "Who's in charge here?", and it is easily answered with "the Board of Directors, obviously." They miss (or won't recognize) that the triumvirate concept has worked tremendously well for over a century in thousands and thousands of clubs. It has, by and large, provided balance and a well ordered integration of the principal elements of a club, regardless of the kind of club. It has provided stability and harmony that is encouraged by divisional entrepreneurship by each department head. Carried another step, it has given clubs the synergism of these three department heads (in the case of golf clubs), combining the ideas of all three. The result is a sum that adds up to prosperous and progressive clubs that cannot find the need to convert to the GM style. A GM cannot improve the situation. The triumvirate system insures that the Board of Directors hear **all** sides of an issue, not just a one-sided discussion with the GM; a good system of checks and balances exists and it ought to be left alone.

I'm not going to suggest that there aren't a few situations where a GM might work or could even be the best system. But the **Perspectives** article, unburdened by fact, reality or historical perspective (no pun intended!), implies even those clubs open for only part of the year would find a GM worthwhile. The argument that institution of a GM is a wise business move ignores the fact that if clubs were totally run like businesses, half of what is provided for the members would be eliminated.

I think there are other reasons why we should be alarmed and on guard — more personal reasons. The extra staff person represents extra salary that has to come from somewhere; he isn't going to be paid from the money he saves. Best guess is that he will also ex-

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effective chemicals failed completely with the second date. In the Wausau trial, there was not much difference. Trials in previous years have trended the same way. Our 1984-85 results were not striking, as there was relatively little disease. However, there was enough to support earlier years' observations that neither the newer registered fungicides nor several experimentals have provided as consistent snow mold control as the earlier "tried and true" compounds.

Two other comments seem in order. First, our most common snow mold failures in recent years have been on courses where transitions in superintendents have occurred, and proper treatments sort of "fall through the slats." If you're in a new location this year, my admonition would be: Don't take anything for granted on snow mold control!" Secondly, the northern part of the state suffered severely this past winter from a long siege of ice that began in December and lasted through March. In most situations the cause was obvious, but in marginal areas, the damage sometimes mimicked snow mold. Laboratory tests told us that the problem was not disease. We hope no part of the state fares badly this winter—either from fungal or physical damage!

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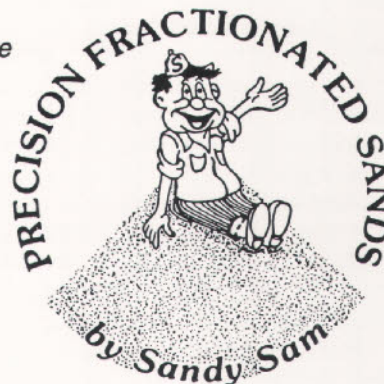
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**High Fantasy** continued

pect (I would) to make more than existing department heads. This will stifle your potential earnings at your club, unless you are the GM! I think this concept not only threatens our salary as Golf Course Superintendents, it also threatens our identity and stability. If the Golf Course Superintendent has a good year, the GM gets the praise. If the golf course has a bad year, color the golf course superintendent GONE.

The GM concept isolates the Superintendent from the members of the club. We need that contact to sell ourselves, our programs and our ideas to the membership, the Green Committee and the Board **directly**, not through a figurehead.

And let's face it — the GM will end up being a false title anyway. Most will never have control over

the Golf Committee or the Green Committee or the House Committee. There is great risk he will be resented, no matter how sincere. When he goes to buy one of those \$50,000 tractors, the House Chairman will declare that the bar furniture is needed much more. What problem has the GM solved here? He will be subjected to fierce lobbying and chances are that the strongest and most convincing chairman will prevail, NOT the most pressing problem.

I subscribe to the old saying "if it ain't broke, don't fix it," when it comes to this proposal. If I didn't have respect for the NCA and its officials, I would suggest they were feigning seriousness. I am convinced, however, that the CMAA harbors a gene that compels them to constantly and con-

tinually promote this idea, in hopes of creating another rung for their club manager members to step up. The ultimate solution for us, if this silly notion crops up, is to apply for the job. I think many of us would get it. But that doesn't change the fact that the idea has little or no merit.

The problem of the general manager concept is that it is high fantasy. Most clubs have seen that and left things well enough alone. "Greater than the tread of mighty armies," wrote Victor Hugo, "is an idea whose time has come." Well, the GM idea is one whose time **hasn't** come and probably won't. It's a bad idea that won't be instituted, no matter how often it is brought to the table. It doesn't need to be revised or refined or resurrected; it needs to be buried.