



CLEARING THE AIR

By Rob Schultz

I grew up in a liberally minded community, attended a liberally minded college and pick up a paycheck every two weeks from an extremely liberally minded newspaper.

But now I must admit, despite all the years I spent getting educated and working with many fine minds at my newspaper, that I was a closet conservative. My peers are shocked now that I've made my feelings public. They can't believe I voted for Ronald Reagan. Twice. I even voted for Gerald Ford. That's a vote I'm actually proud of.

I'm not a fan of widespread welfare, giving homes to rebellious Cubans and tax increases to help both aforementioned groups. I am a fan of big business, tax loopholes, the death penalty and the invasion of Grenada.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not *that* conservative. I cringe every time I see Jessie Helms, Phyllis Schlafly or some redneck representing the National Rifle Association. Whenever I see an NRA ad, I ask myself, "Why does someone own a .44 magnum, except to find a reason to shoot someone with it?"

While I'm taking time to come out of the closet on so many of these issues, I must admit to something else. I'm beginning to waver about unions.

Not all unions, mind you. I saw the movie "Norma Rae." I read Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle". I see many other journalists who work for crummy newspapers making six times what I make simply because they work for a union.

However, I have problems whenever I play a poorly maintained golf course and find out the grounds crew is a union shop. Then my conservatism comes pouring out of my veins. I get a little red under my collar.

I also get a little red over snobby low handicappers and the crazies who go along with paying astronomical rates to play golf and buy equipment. But more on that later.

Aside from disease or not getting enough money from its club to properly maintain a golf course, I find it inexcusable for any golf course, private or public, to look sloppy. And my definition of sloppy is actually pretty liberal. My only hopes when I play a golf course are to find well-maintained greens, raked and fully-sanded traps, and well-manicured fairways.

That's also what I'm hoping to find when the University of Wisconsin opens its new golf course in two years.

The UW has a chance to finally do something right with the construction of its golf course. The layout, by Palo Alto, Calif., architect Robert Trent Jones, Jr., looks exciting, although some feel it could've been better. Nevertheless, the UW is sparing no expense to make sure it will rate among the state's best when it opens around Memorial Day, 1990.

But the UW's decision who to hire to maintain its golf course will determine whether it will remain one of the state's best in the years to come. Now I'm not saying the course won't be nice if it hires a union shop grounds crew. All I'm saying is the chances are it will be nicer if it doesn't, but pays competitively.

Harry Peterson, the UW's assistant to the chancellor, isn't sure how the school will handle its grounds crew situation. Most of the decision-making, he said, will fall into the hands of the athletic department. Hopefully, the UW athletic department will take better care making decisions in this matter than it did when selecting its last men's basketball coach.

The UW has taken one step in the right direction, however, because Peterson said the school hopes to hire a golf course superintendent by "no later than next April."

Peterson, who has listened to many of the state's top golf course superintendents before and after the UW decided to build the course, obviously knows the importance of having a su-

perintendent on board to help supervise the construction.

A great example is Jeff Parks, that top-notch superintendent at Lake Arrowhead. He saved that course money and time and helped turn it into a quality layout because he was there almost from the start of construction.

Hopefully, whoever the UW hires will convince the athletic department of how important it is to hire a top-notch grounds crew. The new superintendent must make the UW hierarchy painfully aware of how courses look when maintained by a poorly managed crew.

The state's golf course superintendents should do their part to back up the new UW superintendent. Give Peterson, UW Athletic Director Ade Sponberg and Frank Remington a call or draft a letter asking the UW to hire the best possible crew. Many UW officials respect the state's golf course superintendents and they will listen when you call.

There is an easy solution for the UW concerning who to hire for its grounds crew. Many of Madison's private clubs reap the harvest of the UW's excellent soil science department and hire students as full-and part-time help. The UW should follow suit and pay them well as interns.

Peterson hinted that students could fill an important role with the grounds crew. Several students already are involved with the construction of the course. Let's hope that trend continues.

Now I feel better. I got that off my chest. My co-workers may not talk to me; in fact one co-worker is staring at me right now with his mouth open in disbelief. So what. I feel like I lifted a building off my shoulders.

And while I'm getting so much off my chest, there's one more point I better make.

In my last column, I wrote about how the GCSAA was conducting clinics across the country asking golfers what they thought of golf, golf courses, superintendents, etc. One of the questions asked was "What do you like least about golf?"

If I had to answer that question I would have said, "It's a rich man's and a low handicapper's sport. Golf is

quickly becoming extinct for the normal guy who doesn't have enough money to join a private club or play with the low handicappers at a public course."

It's true. I have no problems with golfers at private clubs, with the exception that I'm envious of their money or arrangement with their loan officer at the local bank. But I do have problems with those who feel they belong in that crowd and are making life miserable for golfers at public courses.

I play at a public course and am heavily pressured each year to join my club's men's association. I join just to get a handicap and better tee times on

Fridays and the weekends. But I think the stuffiness of some of the members is nauseating. I call those people—most of whom have low handicaps, rotten, low-paying jobs and love to brag about it—pseudo-country clubbers.

Those are the public course elitists. They frown at anything that they think can't be found at most country clubs.

Like unions. I must admit, when they start bad mouthing unions, I find it hard not to come to the union's defense. After all, unions, along with hundreds of leagues full of slow, old women golfers with handicaps as large as their bra sizes, represent the last bastion of

common man left on the public golf courses. And I miss the good 'ol days.

For that reason, I'd hate to see the unions disappear. But I change my mind when I play a course that hasn't had its greens or fairways aerified for 10 years when the equipment for such tasks is rotting in the tool shed.

I just hope that won't happen at the University of Wisconsin, whether it's with a union-shop grounds crew, or not.

Now, I have to leave in a hurry. A box of feathers has been placed next to my desk and I can smell the tar burning behind me.

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