



A REVELATION

By Derek J. VanDamme

Editor's Note: Derek VanDamme is a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he is majoring in Turf-grass Management. Derek is from Superior and has worked at the Nemadji Golf Club in Superior and the Golden Valley Country Club in suburban Minneapolis. This summer will be the third he has been on the staff at Blackhawk Country Club in Madison. He is president of the Badger Turf and Grounds Club; Dr. Wayne Kussov is his advisor.

Derek also has a two-year degree in Turf Management from Anoka Technical College in Minnesota. He spent one year playing hockey in the U.S. Hockey League on the Dubuque Fighting Saints team. His career goal is to become a golf course superintendent.

While doing the reorganizing that is inherent with the wholesale cleaning of one's room and "office", I stopped to read from two of my favorite publications — *THE GRASS ROOTS* and a book entitled *SUDDENLY* by George F. Will. Will's book is a collection of columns he wrote between 1986 and 1990.

Two articles I read that day struck me as being especially relevant in my life. Chad Eberhardt's article "What Is Success?" and Will's column "I Was Raised But Never Grew Up" caused me to pause and contemplate their meaning to me.

Both pieces have a sports twist to them. Will uses the Pete Rose gambling controversy to delve into the psyche of an athlete and find what sports, in general, give to a man. Eberhardt's article shows how traits necessary for success in sports can be applied to management.

Since being "forced into retirement" from competitive sports at the ripe old age of 20 (due to a lack of talent), there has been a definite void in my life. I had been unable to pinpoint exactly what was missing and how to fill that void until I read these two pieces successively.

Will explained to me what was missing in my life when he wrote the following two paragraphs: "...One reason for participating in sports is to become better — *better at the sport and in the soul* (italics mine). Acquisition of particular skills leads to appreciation of all skills. To learn a sport is to learn what mastery means, even if you fall short of it. Playing a sport...is an apprenticeship in craftsmanship.

"Becoming better at something is called self-improvement, a term with two meanings. It means improving one's self, one's character, one's core identity. It also means unavoidable loneliness, getting better by oneself, in submission to severe self-judgements, in the aloneness of private determination, under the last of the necessity to satisfy one's demanding self. Sport can be an exciting and elevating school."

Although my access to competitive sport had been cut off, the need to compete and the excitement generated from that need still burned within. Eberhardt's article showed me how I could channel these natural yearnings into my work, thus pointing out how to fill the aforementioned void.

I believe golf course superintendents who are ex-athletes are extremely fortunate in comparison to other former athletes in different fields. Superintendents are not only surrounded by and in charge of an "athletic field", but many of their employees are young, enthusiastic people who are often involved in sports. These employees have experienced the feelings articulated by George Will, and are aware of Coach John Wooden's formula of success as explained by Eberhardt.

These advantages can lead to a locker room-like atmosphere in the shop. A camaraderie among not only the crew members, but between the managers and the crew as well develops.

Or, as Eberhardt might say, between the "coaches" and the "players".

So it is no wonder to me why my bosses show up every morning with enthusiasm bursting from every word and gesture. Being a golf course superintendent appears to be a wonderful way to keep that competitive spirit burning — and staying young.

I'll bet many of you can relate to what Pete Rose meant when he said, "I was raised but I never grew up."

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