



WHAT PRICE GLORY?

By Joel D. Jackson

Editor's Note: This editorial appears here with permission from Joel Jackson, editor of The Florida Green. Joel is one of the most articulate golf course superintendents I've met, a good thinker and a very witty man. Both traits are evident in this piece, which appeared in the fall 1997 issue of the journal he edits for the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association.

Why do we do it to ourselves?

While it may be true that a superintendent is often his/her own worst critic, superintendents striving for success and perfection drive changes in the industry.

Ironically, it is these same superintendents what also create many woes we face. In the south, we have been living on the edge for the past decade trying to manage 30-year-old grasses to suicidal green speeds beyond the biology of the plant. A reprieve may be on the horizon in the form of a crop of new ultra dwarf grasses...a case where the turf breeders have been forced by legions of frustrated and often fired superintendents to do something to meet the insatiable demand for speed by today's golfer. It was a matter of survival or lunatic glory.

And now with a glimmer of hope and reason in the form of these new grasses, what do I see superintendents doing on national television? Hand mowing fairways!

I can reluctantly accept the fact that it may be possible at a major event. When over a hundred superintendents, suppliers, friends and volunteers gather to experience the aura and history of a major tournament, reality becomes blurred and your wildest maintenance fantasies can come true. When your fleet of equipment is supplemented by loaners and attended by extra mechanics, the impractical becomes the possible.

These magical mystical events are

things legends are made of. Courses resurrected from floods. Balls rolling off greens from people breathing too hard. Knee deep rough. Greens, tees and approaches pinstriped and checker boarded.

Hey guys, it looks great on TV, but I don't play golf from a blimp.

And now, hand-mowing fairways?

Television is the great instigator. After touting and publicizing hand-mowed fairways at two events this year, the 1997 US Open and the 1997 PGA Championship, the question is already being asked, "What would it take to hand mow our fairways?"

It was a hypothetical question, but the fact that it was asked at all is depressing. Status is a mysterious thing. And money can buy status. And if you have the money, by jiminy, you can hand mow your fairways to your heart's content.

A quick review of the fairway fiascoes at the Open and the PGA revealed a staff of 25 was required *just to mow the fairways*. Let's see...25 people at \$6.00 an hour, 4 to 4.5 hours per mowing, three mowings per week, 52 weeks per year = \$93,000 per year in labor alone...*just to mow fairways?*

Where are these people going to park their cars when they come to work? How are the people and equipment going to fit in a maintenance building that is most likely undersized and poorly designed anyhow? How many more mechanics will be hired to service the expanded fleet of mowers and utility vehicles assuming they don't just walk each mower around the course?

And who are these highly dedicated and motivated people and will they be used 40 hours per week? They could make one heck of a bunker and cart path edging crew on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Could your budget take a \$312,000 hit in the labor line item?

This whole discussion is preposterous and yet I know that at some club somewhere, hand mowers will find their way onto the fairways as an everyday routine. Status will demand it, and we will have done it to ourselves again. 🌱



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