



The Life of Riley

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

Dustin Riley CGCS began his term as the 39th President of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association at the Symposium on November 28th, 2008. Right off the bat he was indoctrinated with presidential duties. Opening comments at the Symposium, *The Grass Roots* Presidents column deadline looming and I am also asking him for his life story for this article. If history shows us anything, Dustin will handle the responsibilities of the association with ease.

It must be a sign of my aging when I can say, I knew Dustin when he was but a lad playing on his hometown Lomira Lions golf team. Dustin admits he was a typical jock, but without the talent. His lack of speed, bad arm and inability to hit a baseball sent him towards golf after two seasons of high school baseball. His high school golf career was successful as the team made trips to state his junior and senior years. Those trips to state gave Dustin experiences he says he will never forget.

After high school graduation, his career in golf started with a summer job at Camelot County Club in Lomira working for your's truly learning the basics of golf course maintenance. Dustin worked at Camelot for four summers.

Dustin's college life began at University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point working towards a Wildlife Biology major. After two years, Dustin realized that careers in natural resources were limited for those entering the job market. The best route would be to obtain a PhD and then apply for limited term employment, working his way up. That plan did not seem worth the years of schooling, so like many of us Dustin's summer job was becoming enjoyable despite the early mornings so he began to consider a career in golf.

He changed his major to Urban Forestry with a Soil Science minor for his junior year at Point. After learning UW-Madison had a Turfgrass and Grounds emphasis Dustin transferred there and graduated in 1994 with a BS in Soil Science. Dustin enjoyed Madison and the simple, straight forward thinking of Dr. Wayne Kussow mixed along with the "fiery" approach to turf management from Dr. Frank Rossi.

In discussing his career options and the need to expand his golf course experience with Dr. Rossi, Dustin was given contact information for Scott Schaller then superintendent at South Hills Country Club in Fond du Lac. Dustin made the necessary contacts and received an interview with Scott, and



WGCSA President Dustin Riley with wife Jamileen, daughter Dayle Patricia who is two years old and daughter Riann Adelaide who is two months.

received a position. While at South Hills, Dustin learned quickly that golfer expectations and turf management intensity is much different at the private club than those he experienced at the public Camelot CC.

With his degree from UW-Madison, and new position Dustin's passion for turf knowledge grew 10 fold and he wanted to continue learning but did not want to pursue graduate studies. Scott along with Andy Gruse the assistant superintendent at South Hills were graduates of the Penn State Golf Course Turfgrass Management Program. In discussing his educational and career options with Scott and Andy, Dustin decided that Penn State was exactly what he was looking for. Dustin considers himself fortunate to be selected to the program

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on his first try and he was able to use his passion for learning under the direction of the late George Hamilton. At the 1997 GCSAA Conference and Show, Dustin along with 2 other classmates from Penn State were presented with GCSAA Scholarships. Also at the conference and show, Dustin put his education and experience to work and finished second at the Student Turf Bowl, losing out to a graduate student from Texas A&M.

After graduating from Penn State's two year program in 1997 Dustin became the Assistant Golf Course Superintendent at North Shore Golf Club in Menasha, WI, working under the direction of Certified Golf Course Superintendent Scott Schaller. Working with Scott for several years while gaining the confidence needed to manage an effective crew led Dustin to decide it was time to find a position as Golf Course Superintendent. After several successful interviews the right position became available in 1999 and Dustin became the Golf Course Superintendent at Oconomowoc Golf Club.

Oconomowoc Golf Club is a private 18-hole club designed by Donald Ross in 1916. Membership is capped at 175 and the club is maintaining a small waiting list something unique in the current golf market. The club is for golfers and does not have tennis, swimming or tee times. Members show up to play when they want, and rarely have to wait long at the club that hosts 14,000 rounds annually.

The club is on the 2nd highest elevation in Waukesha County and has about 10" of topsoil overlaying gravel. This soil profile makes drainage one thing Dustin and his staff do not have to worry about. The only rain concern they do have is the fact Oconomowoc Golf Club is one of the few remaining clubs with member carts. A restriction of cart traffic during wet periods becomes



Hole 8 at Oconomowoc Golf Club



Hole 12 at Oconomowoc Golf Club

more challenging politically when the members own the carts. Dustin has rebuilt two greens to USGA specifications while the other 16 native soil greens offer some challenges with past inconsistent modified green expansions.

As with many courses as old and historic as Oconomowoc Golf Club fairway turf is mixed with bentgrass, *poa annua*, *poa trivialis*, perennial ryegrass and old Kentucky bluegrasses. This mix offers varied views and playing conditions through the golf season as weather changes exposes each variety to its particular weaknesses. The biggest fairway

challenge is the old Kentucky bluegrasses on the perimeter the newly re-contoured fairways. Re-grassing the fairways is being considered by the club so Dustin and his staff re-grassed two par 3 fairways in 2007 as a test plot for the members to examine. More information on Oconomowoc Golf Club can be found at www.ocongolfclub.org.

You can imagine Dustin could be torn during football season being a graduate of Wisconsin and Penn State, however he was quick to point out he is a Badger fan and always will be. Dustin's family life is growing along with his career. He




The Clubhouse at Oconomowoc Golf Club

and his wife Jamileen have been married for 5 years and they have two daughters, Dayle Patricia who is 2 and the newest member of the family Riann Adelaide who is two months. When asked of his current hobbies family and turf were at the top along with fishing and following the Green Bay Packers.

WGCSA Past President Scott Schaller not only set a great example for Dustin as an employer but also in association service. Dustin joined the WGCSA Board of Directors in 2001 and has moved through the ranks to President of the 500 member organization. He feels one of the challenges for the board is to find members willing to donate their time and talent to the WGCSA while making family and work high on their priority list. Dustin said joining the board requires extra effort outside the normal day, but so far has found the experience rewarding.

His personal challenge as President of the 78 year old organization is to help ensure each member is getting the value they deserve from the association. To achieve this Dustin believes the board can provide a better awareness of all the services and benefits that the WGCSA provides to its

membership. As important as the communication of the benefits, those benefits must be delivered professionally and efficiently. As the WGCSA expands into new services Dustin will be careful not to let the quality of the current services drop.

This editor believes the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association is in great hands with Dustin Riley leading the current mix of board members. I know they will make a great team. I am lucky to be able to say, "I knew him when" he was just a bright eyed whipper snapper looking for summer work. 

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