



THE SUPERINTENDENT FIT

By Pat Norton

So just what is the superintendent fit? How does the superintendent fit? How do you as a superintendent fit into the management team at your golf club? Do you and your staff get the respect of everybody at your golf course? Or, are you taken for granted by your golfers and not accorded the treatment that a professional deserves? Indeed, do your superiors view your work as that of a professional? Do you, as a golf course manager, view yourself as a true professional?

These may be some pretty heavy questions, but, in my opinion, are questions that we should all ask ourselves from time to time.

How should the golf course superintendent be viewed by the golfers, fellow staff, BOD, owners, municipal officials, or whomever? If you, as a superintendent, have any smarts whatsoever you will insure, through your job performance, that everybody views you and your staff with a sense of respect, even awe, in light of what they experience every day out on your magnificent golf course.

Remember, golfers generally have a very poor idea of how it is that the golf course looks and plays so great on a daily basis. There is a bit of mystery involved in the looks of a well maintained golf course, at least in their minds. It serves notice that course managers are highly trained and experienced professionals.

Each and every superintendent must carve out a niche and enhance it whenever possible. Mainly, it's carved out through the performance of your responsibilities, which should result in a finely conditioned golf course complex. This results in a strong superintendent fit.

Recognition can also come from professional involvement in turfgrass associations, involvement in church or civic groups, other business involvement, or simply by playing the game of golf. Like it or not, non-golfers, a golfing superintendent, for some reason, is perceived to understand the game just a little bit better.

Golf course conditioning has changed

dramatically even since the 70's when I was in high school. Heck, we didn't even realize that there was a difference between our golf course and any other, except for those mythically perfect private clubs up in Madison. I still clearly remember hearing about those courses and their plushness. I also remember that nobody seemed to know why they were so perfect. It was assumed that they'd always been that nice without any special care.

Today, we are seeing the ultra high quality golf course becoming commonplace. As the demand for good course conditioning has risen, so too has the stature of the golf course superintendent. This makes for a great superintendent fit. I can't imagine being in a position of the greenkeeper of yesteryear.

As the quest for ultra high quality continues there will also be those instances when excess abuse tends to creep into the picture. Usually, the powers-that-be provide funding, ideas, and recommendations in the proper manner. At too many golf courses, though, these same people seem to control everything.

The superintendent must stand up for himself, his ideas, his recommendations, and his programs. This leadership trait is a common characteristic found in every successful superintendent.

Do not be led around by your green committee, BOD, or owners. Have the

courage to stand up for what's right and proper. Doing that daily will make you a better superintendent, and will enhance your superintendent fit.

The superintendent must be given the autonomy to operate the golf course in the correct manner. The key, however, is that each superintendent must earn this autonomy through solid course management, leadership, ability, diligence/work ethic, and a good knowledge of golf.

In addition, the superintendent must have the intestinal fortitude to stand up for certain beliefs. By employing this fortitude, you will begin to create a better superintendent fit.

Your superintendent fit will be much smoother and your stature will rise if you stand up for yourself. This is, of course, assuming that you are right in your recommended course of action. Secondly, you need a track record of good management to rely on before being so bold as to stand up to your Board of Directors on a particular issue.

There seems to be too many instances of others making decisions and then expecting the superintendent to blindly carry out their orders.

Enhance your superintendent fit by standing up for yourself. It's what any good manager is supposed to do.

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IMAGE

By Dean Musbach

Is image everything? We know this is a catchy slogan that some advertising company undoubtedly was paid millions for. Nike coined the phrase for Andre Agassi with the hopes it would help sell more shoes. If you look at any political election race, the candidates are trying to present or sell an electable image. If you look at Golf Course Superintendents what image are they trying to sell? A professional image, of course.

Professionalism, this is something that the keeper of the green and greenkeeper had strived for, and today's superintendent continues to strive for. For many years the greenkeeper worked hard to improve his professional image so maybe he might gain the same public respect that both the golf professional and club manager had.

Although not openly sighted as a reason for change, the title of golf course superintendent replaced the title of greenkeeper with hopes that it would enhance the greenkeeper's image. Even today there is talk of changing the job title again because the term superintendent is not professional enough. In the minds of some, a superintendent is some guy who wears a green uniform and empties trash cans for a living.

The New terms being kicked around are, golf course manager, and director of golf course operations. Both sound professional, but if I had my choice, I'd rather be a golf course manager because of the shorter title.

Seriously, I respect the importance of our image, but image is not everything. Image does not save one's job, ultimately everyone has to produce the desired results of the employer. What these results are and how one accomplishes them, is relative to the job.

Without question, the job has become more complex. Government regulation, environmental awareness and public relations all have added to the superintendent's work load. During an earlier era, the greenkeeper didn't worry about these things, he concentrated on the basic maintenance of the course.

The administrative workload changed both the position and the image of the greenkeeper. When this happened, the greenkeeper became the superintendent. Once the greenkeeper became an administrator, it was easier to be considered a professional.

The GCSAA and local superintendent associations saw an opportunity to promote the idea of professionalism, and they have done much in improving the professional image of the superintendent. The criticism I have of the promotion is that the GCSAA's job description for a superintendent applies only to a minority of positions.

The promoters of our professional image have forgotten what our primary responsibilities and duties are, maintaining the golf course. The impression left with me is that some people think it is belittling or unprofessional for a superintendent to change cups, mow greens or dig an irrigation hole; I think this is bogus.

Every superintendent's position has different requirements. There are positions that are strictly management positions, but they are a minority. Conversely, there are positions that require very little management where the superintendent concentrates strictly on greenkeeping; these jobs also are a minority.

Reality of the situation is that most superintendent positions fall somewhere between the two extremes. The amount of time a superintendent spends doing the actual course maintenance doesn't make him/her any more or any less of a professional. A real professional can make an observation, make a decision based on the observation and then take whatever action is required.

This is a multi-faceted profession that requires multi-talented people. Golf course superintendents are agronomists, environmentalists, financial advisors, irrigation technicians, personnel managers, and regulatory experts; superintendents also are bunker rakers, cup changers, equipment operators, green mowers, mechanics, and

spray technicians. The second list is not glamorous but it certainly cannot be ignored or forgotten because it is the backbone of the profession.

Is image everything? No; image is important, but it is not everything. Our superintendent associations have done much to promote, expand and improve the superintendents position and image, but if our profession is to be credible we need to promote an accurate assessment of what our profession is, not what we wish it were or what it might be someday.

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He's Always Wanted To Work In The Golf Industry

by Lori Ward Bocher

Ed Devinger, turf division manager for Reinders, was still a boy when he decided that he wanted to work on golf courses for the rest of his life. "I took up golf at an early age as a caddie for my dad," he explains. "Then I started to play on my own and liked the game. So I decided to stay in the golf field."

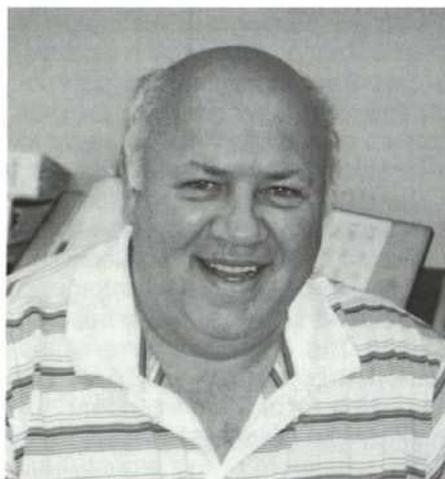
But playing golf wasn't all he did. "I started working on a golf course when I was 12 years old. I decided then that that was what I wanted to do," he continues. "I was actually head of a golf course at the age of 15—a small nine-hole course in Iowa. I was in charge of keeping the grass cut, making sure everything was done. I didn't know much about it at the time, but I was the one who was in charge."

Ed was born in Chicago but raised in Mount Pleasant in southeastern Iowa. He graduated from Wentworth Military Academy in Missouri in 1960. Then he studied liberal arts for one and one half years at the University of Iowa followed by one and one half years at Iowa Wesleyan in his home town.

"But I never formally finished college," he recalls. "I decided that college wasn't really going to help me. And I had an opportunity to get a job in golf course maintenance in another town. So I took it."

"I had my first head superintendent job in 1965 in Pekin, Ill.," he continues, adding that he was there for only one year. "In 1966 a sales opportunity opened up—working for Armour Fertilizer Co. in Chicago. At Armour, I sold fertilizer mostly to golf courses, but also to some municipalities."

Why did he give up a job as a golf course superintendent for a job in sales? "I felt it was a career advancement, and there was more money involved," he explains. "I guess the reason I got out of the superintendent business is because it didn't take me long to realize how tough of a job it is, especially when you're dealing with a membership. It's hard to keep everyone happy. It seemed like that was



always going to be a problem, so I tried sales."

And he's been in sales ever since. He lived in Chicago and worked at Armour for five and one half years. Then, in 1971, he accepted a job as a sales representative with Reinders in Elm Grove, Wis. Why the switch? "At Armour, I was selling only fertilizer products," he recalls. "I wanted to sell a complete line of products to golf courses. That's what Reinders does—not only fertilizer, but pesticides, grass seed, equipment. I said, 'That's what I would really like to do.'"

Ed was a sales rep for three years before being promoted to sales manager in 1974. Later, the title was changed to turf division manager. "I'm in charge of six salesmen on the road, all the ordering, purchasing of supplies, sales incentive programs, budgeting, implementing manufacturer's programs, inventory control, shipping, product set-up," he explains.

Reinders is an old, family-owned company, according to Ed. "It started more than 125 years ago as a feed mill in the rural part of Waukesha County," he points out. "Since then, of course, the city of Milwaukee has grown out to us and Waukesha has grown into us. So now we're land locked."

"Reinders has always looked for ways to expand its business," he continues. "It got into the turf business in

1959 selling Jacobsen equipment." But its Jacobsen territory was small—only five Wisconsin counties. So in 1971 Reinders switched major suppliers to Toro.

"Toro gave Reinders the territory we have now, which is most of the state of Wisconsin and the UP of Michigan," Ed explains. "Quite honestly, I've been here 21 years and it took us 10 or 12 years just to build up to where we could service that large of a geographic area. It's taken a long time to work out the logistics of making deliveries that far." One answer was to open a service center in Appleton in 1990.

In addition to Toro, Reinders represents Cushman, Ryan, all of the major pesticide lines, Pickseed West and Par Ex fertilizer. About one-third of the company's business is with golf courses, and the rest is with lawn care service companies, landscapers, cemeteries, schools, municipalities, parks (city, county, state and national) and airports. Reinders Irrigation Supply is a separate division of the company.

Even though the business world is competitive, Ed has always put competition aside to work for the good of the turf industry as a whole. "As this industry gets tougher due to more regulations, we have to become a stronger, single voice in order to be heard," he believes. "If we're splintered into too many segments, we'll never be heard. The more people you have working together, the more the politicians are going to listen to you. That's ultracritical today more than ever."

That's one reason Ed has been a director or honorary director of the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association ever since its inception in 1980. He was also involved in fund raising for the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility. "Our company has been a leader in that," he points out. "We've donated in excess of \$25,000 over the past five years through a promotion of our products (portion of sales price would go to Noer Center).

"I always laugh...when we first started WTA, we didn't know if we had enough money to buy a pickup," Ed recalls. "Now look at this facility that we've built. It's a dream come true and quite an accomplishment for 12 years. It shows the dedication of our industry. It's incredible. You wouldn't be in this line of work if you didn't love it."

Now that the research facility is complete, Ed thinks it's time for WTA to start focusing on widening its base so that it has more political clout with legislators and regulators. "We need to get more of the park people, the school people, the lawn care people into our organization to increase our membership. Then I think we can become a more effective voice for the industry," he says.

Over-regulation, especially with pesticides, is one of the biggest challenges facing the Wisconsin turfgrass industry right now, Ed believes. "It's one regulation after another," he says. "For example, they're licensing each lawn care operator in each county, even down to each city where they do business. It's like another tax.

"I guess that's part of the handicap of being organized," he continues. "It's very easy to get to us as a group of people, whether it's the golf course superintendents, the landscapers or the lawn care operators. Like we constantly say, the worst offenders of pesticide misuse are the homeowners. They use 100 times more pesticides than we do. But they can't be regulated because there's no way to police it."

Wisconsin is also an expensive place for manufacturers to sell pesticides, according to Ed. "This year Wisconsin passed a law that increases manufacturer registration from \$150 per product to \$1,100 per product," he explains. "Some of the suppliers that we buy from are saying, 'We don't sell enough of this product in Wisconsin. We're not going to register it here.' If things continue this way, we won't have the tools to do our job."

In spite of the challenges, Ed loves the turf business. "I love being outside and growing grass," he says. "Unfortunately, I don't have to do that anymore. But I empathize with the people who do it—the jobs they have to do, the hours they work. Again, if they didn't like it, they'd be in some other line of work because it's a lot of pressure. Don't give up!"

Ed also likes his work because it gives him a chance to serve people. "I like to help people—to make their jobs

better, easier," he says. "Even when I'm playing golf, for pleasure or with a customer, if I see any way I can help the superintendent or make a suggestion, I usually do. I always look for opportunities to be able to help people."

Ed's job has taken him to numerous golf courses in Wisconsin. "Wisconsin people are spoiled. As a whole, there are no finer golf courses in the country," he believes. "The combination of the type of grass we grow and the climate makes it the best that there is."

Ironically, his job limits his time for playing golf—only 10 or 12 games a year, he estimates. What are some of his favorite courses? "Now you're going to get me in trouble," he jokes. "I played the Waupaca Country Club, a small nine-hole course, for the first time this year. It was one of the nicest nine-hole courses I'd ever seen.

"Naga-Waukee Golf Club in Waukesha County is an awful nice public course," he continues. "But I'm going to stay away from mentioning country clubs. There are just too many of them that are nice. And they're all incredibly tough. I'd be in trouble if I singled out any one course!"

Fishing is another hobby for which Ed can never find enough time. "I like to fish. But I'm in the wrong business for that," he says, adding that he isn't interested in ice fishing even though he'd have more time to fish in the winter. "When I fish, I like it to be nice and warm so I can have a cold beer in my hand," he adds.

Ed and his wife, Jane, have three grown children—two sons and a daughter. They still have a family in Iowa and they get back for a visit two or three times a year. But Wisconsin is home now. "I moved from Iowa when I was 21, was in Illinois for five years, and now I've been in Wisconsin for 21 years. So I feel I'm a Wisconsinite," Ed admits. "I love the Badgers, the hockey team especially. I'm an avid hockey fan.

"And I've been here long enough to know most of the people in the Wisconsin turf industry. They're all great people. They're all fun to work with and to talk to," he concludes.

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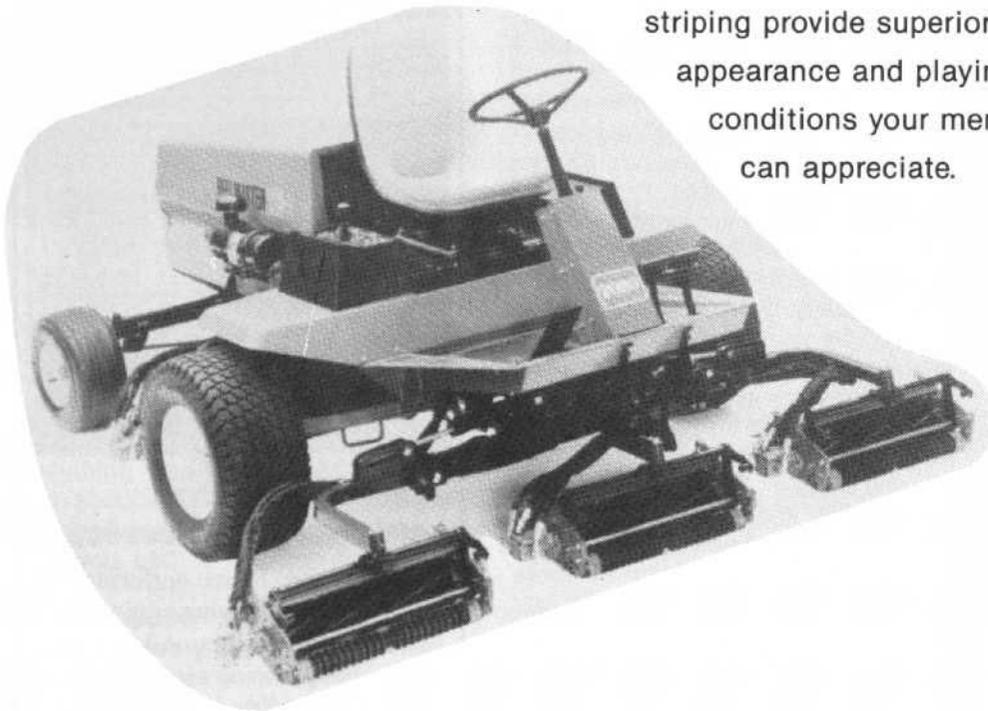
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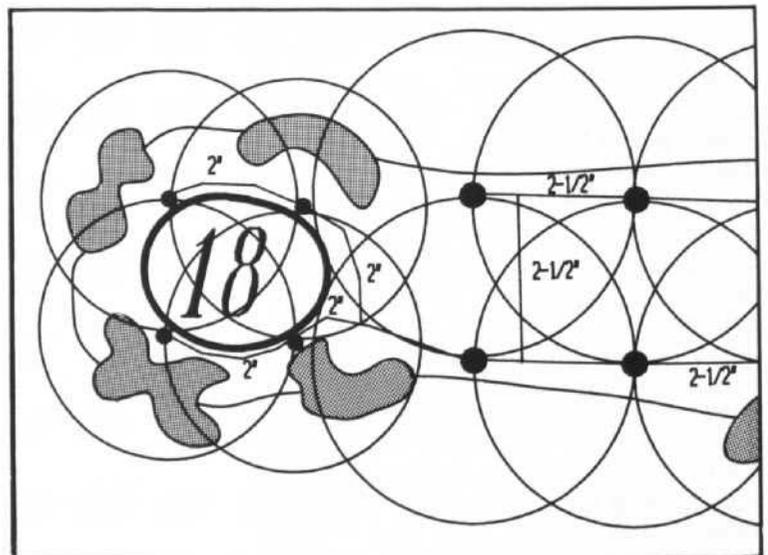
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The Nutrition-Disease Connection

By Dr. Wayne R. Kussow
Department of Soil Science
University of Wisconsin-Madison

We're nearing the end of an unusually cool season with very low disease pressures on turfgrass. Dollar spot seems to have been the only disease of any notable incidence this year. Climatologists tell us to expect another cool summer next year. How cool will depend on how quickly the upper stratosphere is cleansed of volcanic ash from Mt. Pinatubo. So why write about the nutrition-disease connection at this time? Simply because the connection is strongest when weather is not ideal for disease development.

Read no further if you expect me to say that nutrition can prevent disease in turfgrass. The role of nutrition is to reduce disease injury and speed recovery. Diseases occur when three conditions are satisfied: (1) the disease-causing organism is present; (2) weather is favorable for active growth

of the organism; and (3) the turfgrass is susceptible to attack by the pathogen. Nutrition can alter the microenvironment of turf, but its primary effect is on the ability of the turfgrass plant to fight off pathogen invasion and to replace damaged tissues.

To further complicate matters, the nutrition-disease connection depends not only on weather, but on cultural practices as well. Many turfgrass cultural practices are stressful and stressed turfgrass is disease susceptible. It is this interplay of weather and cultural practices that has made it so difficult for researchers to clearly define the nutrition-disease connection. You've likely heard or read statements such as "excessive N favors leaf spot" or "low N favors dollar spot". Why don't turf specialists define "excessive" or "low" N levels? To answer

this question, consider the results from a recent research report. In this instance the concern was with brown patch in Kentucky bluegrass mowed at 1.5 or 3.0 inches and treated with different levels of N. At the 1.5-inch cutting height, there was 46% more damage from brown patch than at the 3.0-inch cutting height and N level had no influence on the incidence of the disease. On the other hand, at the 3.0-inch cutting height brown patch was increased 19% by increasing the annual N rate from 3 to 5 lb/M. Thus, one might say that 5 lb N/M were excessive at the 3-inch cutting height but not at the 1.5-inch height of cut.

The foregoing example illustrates why you don't encounter concise statements about what rate of application of a nutrient such as N minimizes
(Continued on page 19)

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disease incidence. There are, however, some useful guidelines regarding the nutrition-disease connection. For the diseases we commonly encounter, the general effects of nutrition are as follows.

Dollar spot: Incidence of the disease does not appear to be influenced by soil pH or P levels. Nitrogen is the key nutrient. Low levels of N favor the disease. Adequate to high N rates are advised during periods when the disease is most active. Soluble N sources are more effective than slow-release N carriers.

Red thread: Low soil pH, P, and K favor the disease. Regulation of N nutrition is particularly important. Levels should be adequate to high but not excessive. High soil K levels or use of a high K fertilizer tends to enhance the positive effect of N applications.

Gray and pink snow mold: Timing of late season N is important here, particularly if application rates are in the range of 1.0 to 1.5 lb N/M. Fertilization should not occur until topgrowth has ceased. This means after the last mowing of the season or after several successive days in which the mean daily air temperature is 60°F or less. Fertilization just prior to cold weather induced dormancy is not advised. Use of slow-release N carriers is generally recommended, but I found no difference last spring when I had applied 1.0 lb late season N as IBDU or urea the previous fall. I did observe slightly less gray snow mold when soluble rather than coated slow-release KCl was applied in the absence of chemical control. A single 3.0 oz application of Calo-Clor reduced snow mold dam-

age more than 70% and eliminated any effects of N or K carriers on the incidence of the disease.

Anthracnose: This scourge of *Poa annua* is notably suppressed by adequate nutrition. The disease is favored by low soil levels of P and K and by heavy N applications during periods of high temperature and humidity.

Summer patch: High soil K levels and moderate rates of slow-release N often reduce the amount of damage done by summer patch diseases. However, as noted earlier, cultural practices can override any nutritional effects on the disease. Summer patch diseases seem to be so highly favored by low mowing heights and/or light frequent irrigation that these cultural practices over-shadow effects of adjustments in N fertilization rates.

Necrotic ring spot: Balanced turfgrass nutrition is important with this disease, but N carrier is of even greater significance. Frequency of the disease is often reduced substantially by switching from a soluble to a slow-release N fertilizer.

Pythium diseases: Environmental conditions exert a controlling influence on the extent of damage to turf by these diseases. Moderate rates of slow-release N fertilizer are advised. This recommendation coincides with my observations over three successive seasons that 4.8 lb N/M/season on creeping bentgrass consistently resulted in less Pythium than did 2.4 or 7.2 lb N.

This summarizes what we currently know about the influences of nutrition on the incidence and severity of common turfgrass diseases. Nutrition also influences recovery from disease. As long as P and K supplies are adequate, N is the key to rapid recovery

from disease. From approximately April to August, relatively high N rates speed the healing process. But during the normal heat of August, moderate N rates are more effective. Time of N application appears to be vital as far as recovery from snow mold damage is concerned. This past spring bentgrass recovery from extensive snow mold damage in my research plots was essentially complete by mid-May when 1.0 lb N was applied the previous October 15. In the absence of late season N, snow mold scars did not heal until late June despite an April 28 application of the same amount of N.

Now we return to where we began—with the idea that the nutrition-disease connection in turfgrass is a diffuse relationship. The relationship is strongest when weather and cultural practices do not favor the activity of disease organisms or unduly stress the turfgrass. In the long run, proper nutrition is complementary to but not a replacement for biological or chemical disease control in turfgrass.

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