

# As Superintendents We Can Build Our Future Together

By Robbie Hellstrom

Who designed the course? Who built the course? Who is the pro? Do these statements sound familiar? If you are a golf course superintendent they most probably do. All too often, unfortunately the question, "Who is the Superintendent?" never gets asked.

I have pondered over this question for many years now. When I became involved in the golf course maintenance business six years ago, I realized almost immediately the lack of recognition superintendents received. Just entering the business I had no concept of the dedication and hard work required of this profession. I do understand now, and this is what has led me to write this article.

The last five to ten years have signalled an enormous amount of growth in the golf industry. More people have taken up the game, equipment has improved and playing conditions have catapulted to incredible degrees. One would think that automatically the job of superintendent is certainly more recognized than in the past, yet the position does not enjoy the spotlight as much as it should. This is somewhat hard to believe when you compare certain other positions in the sporting industry to that of a golf course

superintendent. Let's look at a few jobs in sports maintenance to see just how much different the professions are.

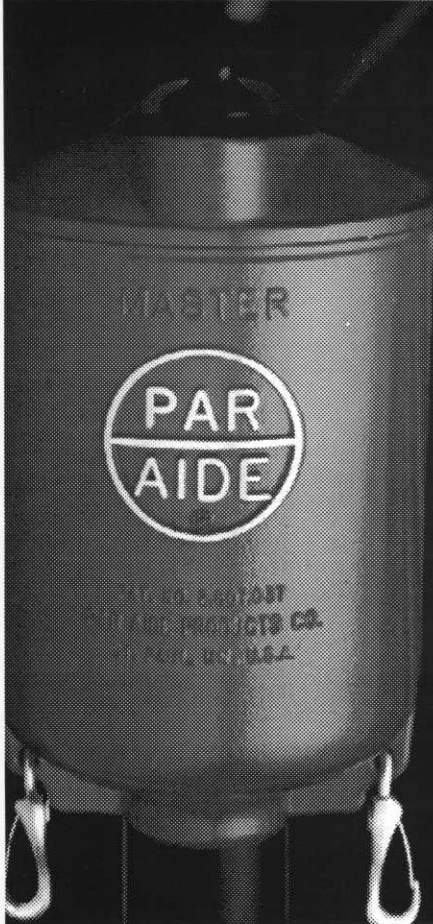
## 1. Golf course superintendent:

- In most cases a college education or specialized courses are required
- Responsible for the management of: staffs ranging in size from 15 to 50; dozens of pieces of equipment; more than 100 acres of varying types of turf; pesticide courses and licenses; water; wildlife; irrigation; drainage; computers and budget
- A playing season that ranges from 5.5 months to all year round with between 15,000 to 45,000 rounds of golf played, and this is just the beginning

## 2. Ice maker, professional hockey:

- No college degree required
- Elements completely controlled
- No need for enormous amounts of equipment or labor
- Playing time limited to sixty minutes a night two or three nights a week

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# Our Future —

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### 3. Professional baseball field manager:

- Certain specialized courses required
- Less equipment required for maintenance
- Less labor
- Dealing generally with one type of turf
- About 80 games a season played on the field over a six-month period

### 4. NFL field manager:

- Certain specialized courses required
- Field takes terrible abuse for short periods of time
- Maintaining one type of turf
- Less equipment and labor required

These are three jobs in the sports industry that receive a great deal of attention. Justly so, as these positions require dedication and hard work from the people who occupy them. Often during a game we hear statements made by the media on how good the ice or field conditions are. Or we hear about the challenges faced by the field manager to get the playing surface in shape for the big game. You will often see these people interviewed on TV explaining details about their job. Except when it comes to golf on television. Very seldom, if ever, do we hear the names of the superintendent mentioned or commended for the great course conditions. Instead we hear statements like "what a great course", "the greens are in great shape", "what a beautiful golf hole", "the fairways are immaculate". I often wonder who they think put the course into this condition? You may ask yourselves the question, "Why do we not enjoy a higher profile?" The answer in part, I believe, begins with us.

Superintendents should not be shy to take credit for the time, sacrifices, dedication and hard work required to maintain a golf course. Most of us had an opportunity to see courses like the Devil's Pulpit and Glen Abby on television this past year. The incredible job performed by those two superintendents helped to raise the stature of our profession in the eyes of many Canadians. Superintendents have talent that is in short supply and we need to learn to market ourselves. I am not advocating a "big-headed mentality" or "conceited attitudes", but we need to recognize the contribution that we make. The sport has taken leaps and bounds and we must not be ashamed to take some of the credit. Together with our Association, we continue to bring to the forefront our contributions to this ever growing sport. As individuals we can help promote our profession by:

- Referring to ourselves as "turf managers"
- Becoming involved in the Association, communicating to the representatives of the board our concerns and ideas
- Attending seminars and courses to upgrade our knowledge
- Taking up the game to have a better understanding of the concerns of golfers and board members.
- Taking financial courses during the winter to improve our understanding of financial and budgetary questions

and problems.

- Inviting the greens chairman, pro or board member to attend certain job related golf tournaments with you. This will help them better understand you and your job.

- Creating an open dialogue between ourselves, the golfers, pros, managers, members of the board and greens committee. When this exists it creates an environment of respect, understanding and mutual admiration.

These small changes can go a long way to improving the perception of our profession. We cannot change everything overnight, but we need to begin somewhere.

We owe it to ourselves as a group to work together towards creating a stronger tomorrow. Our profession has grown, with the help of our Association as well as dedicated superintendents past and present. We must continue to build on these positive accomplishments to help create a better future and establish the credit due to our profession.

*Robbie Hellstrom is Turf Manager, Balmoral Golf Club, Morin Heights, Quebec — Green Master*

"A golf course is no place to save money. It is no place to waste it either."

—O.J. Noer

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