

The future of golf

This week I had the pleasure of attending a USGA conference. During lunch, I sat at a table with a group of assistant superintendents. They taught me a great deal.

Golf is rich in history. Since the late 1800's, golf has played a part of American life. We immortalize the sport, the rules, the architects, the golfers, and more recently the early greenskeepers.

This tradition attracted good people in the 50's and 60's to manage the acres of landscape needed to play the game. Today, it seems to take more than tradition to attract good future superintendents.

The lure of a prestige course, a tournament course, or a resort course seems to exceed the attraction of tradition. The job entails more than the love of working outdoors in beautiful surroundings, or being able to play golf everyday after you finish taking care of the course. It entails competitive salaries, course prestige, and fringes, such as freedom and budget to attend shows and be active in associations.

Knowing this, what happens next? What about those persons who liked golf so much they put up their own money to buy the land, build the course and run it? I know men who work seven days a week, 12 hours a day, and take home less than beginning superintendents at private clubs. Can this last?

Today, golf is a contest, both as a player and as a superintendent. Golf is becoming a commodity needed to help sell real estate, return dividends to stockholders of multi-course companies, or sell television advertising.

If you were a young turf graduate, wouldn't you tend to overlook the tradition for the bucks of being part of 'the big time'? After five years as an assistant superintendent, wouldn't you be busting at the seams to experience the challenge of a tournament, adding another nine, or rebuilding an old course? When you saw the equipment or chemical budget for the first time, didn't you ask yourself why it was so much more than your salary?

These are natural reactions today for anyone, not just college 'know-it-alls'. The only way to deal with them is to realize how they feel, teach them their time will come, keep them challenged and interested, and remind them of the tradition of the sport, not just the facts of the business of golf.

Kids aren't as idealistic as they were in the 50's and 60's. When they select a career and go to college, they are thinking of more than a pleasant career. They are thinking of income, advancement, and making their mark on this world. That ambition and drive is valuable. They will fight to achieve their goals or leave the industry for more challenging and responsive careers.

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by Bruce F. Shank, executive editor

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