

Dulling that Awful Ax

Middle-age, middle-level executive.

This could mean the superintendent at your club or the super, himself, if he is reading this. Whatever, the plight of the "sacked" middle-age, middle-level executive should concern both the golf course superintendent and his employer.

First, let it be a reminder that the superintendent in the 50 to 60-year-old age bracket often lives in fear of losing his job. Not only that, those fears are intensified by the realization that his advancing age buoys no promise of finding a place in his chosen field should he come under the fall of the awful ax.

Is their job protection in the profession?

Unless a steadfast contract exists between the superintendent and his employer, that job remains in jeopardy. And reasons for terminating the association of club and super can run an exaggerated gamut - from watering the fifth green two more minutes than usual to failure to salute a green chairman while on duty.

The awful ax - swung with promiscuous absurdity - usually involves that most dreaded of job-loss instigators, a clash of personalities. One superintendent tells that he "just knows his days will be numbered" should a certain member ascend the club officials ladder to either the green chairmanship or — "curses or curses" - the presidency. And others live with similar thoughts of bumping into the wrong boss at the wrong time.

It should come as a form of at least partial relief, then, to learn that dismissed executives (especially those in the middle age group) are beginning to make headway in the courts in a battle to save their jobs and, in some cases, their sanity. After all, when a man has been separated from a long-standing position for reasons unbecoming a justified split, he is prone to periods of depression and the like.

An amendment to the Age Discrimination in Employment Act appears to serve as the wedge the fired middle-level, middle-aged exec uses to either retain his job or be compensated royally for the unwarranted pink slip he has received. For example, age discrimination cases handled by the Federal Labor Department have already doubled in the past two years and the results of those cases have been encouraging.

Although a worker can be dismissed for a good cause, the burden of proving incompetency (the most popular cause when employers feel the years are creeping up on an employee) falls on the employer to prove it when challenged. One change in the age discrimination edict is the legal load dumped on the employer. In any challenge by a dismissed employee, the employer must give proof of substandard performance to a jury rather than a sole judge.

Results of scattered cases appear to brighten the futures of those sacked execs who find themselves either regaining their old jobs or being awarded whopping financial settlements. In fact, the real thrust of the age discrimination act cannot be fully measured since many cases have been settled out of court in favor of the dismissed exec.

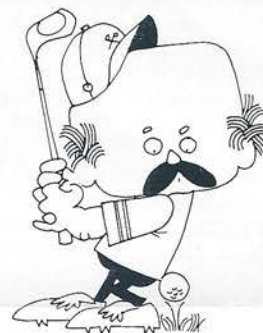
Certain employers, too, have begun to have second thoughts about bouncing employees with long service and mounting life years. The backlash has been such that they either are postponing and cancelling plans for dismissal or awarding the fired people increased severance pay in order to avoid messy and costly legal battles.

This knowledge should be kept in the mental files of all golf course superintendents (even the younger ones) as they face the uncertainties of their profession. It is, indeed, a profession where job security comes under the heading of rare species or species that never was. The occasion of country clubs and public courses "cutting down" overhead by replacing veteran superintendents with work-cheap newcomers for the sake of saving a buck could be eliminated on the basis of reports from the age discrimination scoreboard.

And that scoreboard just might bring some of that much-needed protection of livelihood into focus for the superintendent. If it doesn't interest the club board of governors or other arm of club operations, they had better change that attitude quickly. Maybe, at last, loyal service and long dedication will be rewarded. A safeguard against unjustified dismissal is only a start.

Gerry Finn

golf
Next
Meeting



October 13, 1978

Brae Burn Country Club

Host Superintendent - Robert Grant, CGCS

Superintendent/Pro Golf Tournament

This tournament is open to all members of the GCSA of New England and their Pro, and all members of NEPGA and their Superintendent. No Assistant Pros or Assistant Superintendents unless they are members of one of these associations. **ONE TEAM PER CLUB.** Superintendent must have a bonafide handicap and be able to show proof of that handicap. Selective drive alternate shots. Gross and Net prizes. Net winners are champions. Starting times may be obtained by calling the Director 617-245-5441 on Monday, October 9th. First tee only 8:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

The Oakmont Travesty

For a while there - in the pre-dawn hours of the 60th PGA Championship - it looked as though Paul Latshaw was going to come through as the most despicable character since the days of Rasputin, Scrooge and all those other jolly fellows. As golf course superintendent at the Oakmont Country Club (site of the PGA test), Latshaw had been pictured as some sort of sadistic schemer bent on deranging the minds of the tournament's participants as he prepared Oakmont for its prey.

The scene was set in a national publication whose sporting blood usually rushes only at the sound of the rise and fall of ATT, IBM and other thoroughbreds of the Dow Jones stable. Obviously, it hadn't bothered to concern itself with identification handles and the like. Latshaw was referred to as the course "greenskeeper" throughout. If the daily business digest retained this dark ages attitude in collecting normal data, it still would be using the Pony Express.

Regardless, Latshaw was the co-star of this piece, along with the Oakmont greens whose slippery, evil makeup had been designed to save the course from another axing by perhaps another "visting" professional. Oakmont and its members apparently were outraged over the record - breaking 63 shot there in 1973 by Johnny Miller in the U.S. Open. Even the memory of it brought daggers to their eyes.

So, Latshaw's job was to restore jaw-snapping fierceness to the putting surfaces and Oakmont got behind him with a \$200,000 operating budget and the moral support to spur him on. By a series of underfeeding, cross-cutting and rolling - he had his greens down to 5/64 of an inch for the start of play. "Bring on the Miller Gang," Oakmont licked its chops with glee.

What developed is history. Oakmont and Latshaw (if he be responsible for the travesty and trickery there) backed off considerably after about one-half round of play. Someone forgot to check the switch in the sky. It rained for the better part of the four days of action and the touring pros sang, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" as they desecrated the self-appointed shrine for the second time in six years.

Hopefully, the revelation of one golf course superintendent's devotion to plotting the embarrassment and degradation of the nation's outstanding golfers will not spread repercussion to the masses. Since Latshaw was painted as the dreaded enemy of all golfers, some people might misconstrue the true aims and goals of the superintendent profession. Among these are a course with the best conditions possible and setting of it under the fairest guidelines.

The whole idea of Oakmont darting fangs at anyone who dares take liberties with challenging its prescribed figures must be in direct conflict with the spirit of the game. After all, golf is a game and should be treated as such. . . this attitude still prevailing despite the business signs suggested by the big money thrust to the pro tour.

At that, the basis of all professional sports is to entertain those fans who pay their way into the park or onto the course. In baseball, they don't move back the fences when the boys come to play the World Series. In football, the first down markers aren't extended to 20 yards or the field flooded with quicksand when it comes time to contest for the Super Bowl. Why, then, should golf attempt to tarnish the expertise of its professionals when major tournaments appear on the schedule?

The PGA, itself, should not escape some of the blame for the planned massacre of its own ranks at Oakmont. Since it co-sponsors the tournament with the host club and actually sets the

course as to degree of difficulty, the PGA should be held responsible for the superintendent's contribution as well as the fiendish approach to the event course officials and members allegedly assumed.

But, above all the absurdities connected with this sham, the reputation of the average golf course superintendent has been taken for a bumpy ride. And to picture the superintendent as the sole culprit is an inaccuracy and an injustice. Latshaw did the dirty work, all right, but he was nothing more than a henchman for the PGA and Oakmont. Fortunately, the project blew back in their faces upon the arrival of the green-softening and slowing rain which enabled the pros to give paying fans what they want most - the opportunity to view experts applying their expertise without interruption and annoyance from fabricated playing conditions.

Gerry Finn

Tournament Results from Mt. Pleasant Golf Club

Florida Style Tournament.

First Place

Ron Kirkman
Tom Schofield
Leroy Allen
Brian Cowan

63

Second Place

Bill Carter
Steve Murphy
Steve Hoisington
Frank Marean

63

Third Place

Doug Johnson
Paul Johnson
Norm Mucciarone
Buddy Young

64

First place determined by sudden death match of cards.

NEW MEMBER voted in at the last meeting is Richard Arzillo. Richard is an Associate Member and is Superintendent at George Wright Golf Course. Congratulations Richard and we hope you will be an active member of our association.

TO BE VOTED on at the next meeting. Hank Coffin, Superintendent at Chestnut Hill Country Club will be voted on for a Regular Member.

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Water or Bluegrass

Many of the touring golf professionals don't like to play their game on bluegrass fairways. Too many fliers, so they say. Hard to control the ball. I say, a box of triple bogies to you, sir. There are times when conditions on bentgrass fairways are not always perfect, either. Hitting a shot into the grain certainly will give different results than hitting a shot with the grain. When one hears the touring pros complain about unsatisfactory playing conditions on bluegrass turf, the average golfers, the ones that really support the game and make it possible to balance the maintenance budget, hear these critical remarks and are ready to condemn the turfgrass on their course.

My purpose of writing this is not to criticize the golfer who has a problem with his score on the golf course, but to call to the attention of golfers the serious problem that we may be faced with in the near future - a shortage of water. As the population continues to increase and industrial markets increase to support a larger population, ground water levels have already receded significantly. It should be obvious to everyone that water levels will not increase in future years. A steady decline is inevitable. When the time comes that there is not enough water to satisfy everyone, you can be sure that golf course fairways will have a low priority. Golf courses in areas of California, Florida, and New York are at this time receiving water by allocation only.

Those of us who understand the growing habits of the grass plant know that one of the requirements of bent and poa annua is a relatively large amount of water. Without sufficient water the plant will die. This is not true with the bluegrass strain of grass. It will turn off color during periods of drought. One can get good lies on off color turf, normally better than on green lush turfgrass. During certain periods Kentucky bluegrass turf may look to be completely dead. However, after a good rain it is back to its original condition.

I remember years ago when the top touring golfers were Bobby Jones, Walter Hagen, Byron Nelson, Ben Hogan, Harry Cooper, and others. They won many tournaments on bluegrass fairways with scores comparable to those that you see today and using equipment that was technically inferior to today's golf clubs.

Therefore, golf courses should not be too hasty to change their bluegrass turf to bentgrass. There could be a time coming when fairway irrigation will be prohibited. Let us not be swayed by statements made by those who are only interested in their own financial benefit.

Ray Gerber-Editor
The Bull Sheet
Midwest Association of
Golf Course Superintendents

Guest Editorial

I read with great interest George Cleaver's President Message entitled, "Skilled Employees Need Financial Incentive" in the April, 1978 issue of THE GOLF SUPT. Mr. Cleaver rightfully contended that because of the low wage scale paid by golf courses, skilled employees are hard to find and keep. In other words you get what you pay for. Mr. Cleaver was

referring to the employees other than the superintendent in his article. However, I believe that this message should be carried a step further and should relate to the superintendent's position also.

It really irritates me to read the want ads in our trade publications and see something that reads, "Wanted - Golf Course Superintendent for prominent Midwestern 18-hole course; B.S. degree in Agronomy or similar field required; must have at least three years experience as a golf course superintendent; salary range - \$15,000-\$17,500." Do you realize how much \$15,000 equates to in an hourly wage scale? \$7.21, and that's figuring 40 hours a week times 52 weeks a year (I'd love to see the day when a superintendent averages 40 hours a week). Any dumb-dumb can today start at any major factory for at least \$6.50 an hour and can be making more than \$7.00 an hour in a year's time. Plus he gets a full major-medical hospitalization plan, a pension plan, a dental and eye care plan, and who knows how many paid sick days and vacation. Then there is the "skilled tradesmen" such as plumbers, electricians, bricklayers, etc. Let's just say that they average \$10.00 an hour (which is really a low estimate); this equates out to \$20,800 a year.

Then there is the golf superintendent. He is in charge of 120 acres of land valued in the area of between 3/4 and 1 million dollars. He is responsible for an inventory of machinery worth anywhere from \$50,000 to \$150,000 and chemicals and fertilizer worth \$15,000-\$25,000. He has the capacity to be an agronomist, plumber, electrician, horticulturist, PR man, just to name a few. He delegates authority to a crew of at least ten persons, and his salary is \$15,000. Plus the benefits are definitely not the best. To me that is a crime; actually a salary of only \$20,000 is too low.

The point that I want to make is that I believe we as golf course superintendents are underpaid. Yes, most of us like our jobs because it is a challenge; there is no routine, and it's enjoyable being outdoors, etc. However, as Mr. Cleaver said in his message, "But that doesn't pay the bills."

I hope that a lot of green chairmen in Central Illinois see this editorial. Perhaps they can relate to it to their club's situation. Let them ask the questions, "Out of the three positions at their club (club manager, pro, and superintendent), who receives the highest yearly income?" I bet that the majority of answers isn't the golf superintendent. Then ask the question, "Of those three positions, who has been at your club the longest?" The majority of answers to this is probably "the golf superintendent."

Today's golf course superintendent is highly skilled, dedicated professional. Then pay him like one!!!

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MEETING NOTICE Joint meeting of New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Northeast and New England.

October 17th
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Woodstock, Vermont

Host - Richard Blake, CGCS

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NEWSLETTER

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