

From the Sidelines



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What if we had replacement turf managers?

BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS I sure hope that the National Football League's billionaire bunglers and the league's greedy referees have put their egos aside and reached an agreement to get those zebras back on the field. As of this writing, three games into the season, I'm still tuning into the latest Wonder of the World, the NFL Network's RedZone channel, to watch the games but I might not soon if the product continues to be nearly unwatchable.

I don't care what the bargaining issues are; the refs make more money on 16 Sundays than most of us do all year and they still make mistakes every game. As for the league, what, they don't have the money? What a joke.

Call them replacements or scabs but the poor schmucks who are allegedly running the games so far this season are in way over their heads and together with the actions of the players and coaches, they are making a mockery of "the integrity of the game."

Imagine if turf managers across the country were suddenly replaced by folks who work on their home lawns. Hasn't rained in a week? Heck, no need to mow the field! Gotta paint a logo at midfield? Uh, where is the color by numbers? Field seems too hard? Let's turn on the sprinklers overnight, that'll soften it up! Grass not as green as you'd like? Put out more fertilizer and lots of it! Is that a weed? Better spray some chemical—and lots of it!

JACOBSEN EXEC GOES "UNDERCOVER"

I love this story. Ric Stone, the VP of sales for Jacobsen, recently spent a week working on the maintenance crew at a resort golf course in Alabama, Kiva Dunes, but the crew didn't know who he was. Stone's goal was to get some authentic user feedback (the course uses all Jake equipment). Kiva Dunes Superintendent Mike Rienzi played along with the ruse and introduced Ric as a new member of the crew on the first day. "Nobody suspected anything," said Rienzi. "But they probably wondered why I was working him so hard. He held up pretty well, except for the blisters."

Ric's gnarled hands were the result of some very hard work: he was tasked with bunker raking, hole cutting, floor sweeping, greens and fairway mowing, machine maintenance and a handful of other odd jobs around the shop.

At the end of the week over a pizza lunch, Rienzi revealed the true identity of the new rookie. After a moment of stunned silence, the room filled with gasps, laughter and head shaking.

"What I learned from the operators was invaluable. They love using our machines, but there are little things we can do to make them even better," said Stone. "I will take that feedback directly to our engineering department.

"Above all else, I came away with a great respect for operators. They have a true passion for presenting world-class conditions for their customers. It was an awe-inspiring week that will be with me for a long, long time." ■

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