Avoiding the standard

There are a few standard jumping-off points for an editor's first column, and for your sake and mine, I thought I might try to avoid them all.

There's the sentimental column in which I'd wax ad nauseam about my favorite boyhood golf course in the rolling Western Pennsylvania hills — the many dew-kissed mornings I walked over its tender turf, dreaming of the day I finally knew every mound, every subtle undulation. A day that would never come, of course.

There's the way-too-standard "Industry Cheerleader" column that starts something like, "There has never been a more exciting time for the industry, bla bla bla...and we'll be right there with you to communicate with our staff. It's inescapable. There's a passion with a club general manager and four superintendents, I've met with several advertisers, got a personal tour of the USGA museum and testing center in Far Hills, N.J., and experienced my first field day. In all those situations the common thread was that the people I met held a strong knowledge of the business and a passion for the game — the likes I've never seen again.

It was wonderful to see Dave McGee, an ex-super who is now GM at Fiddler's Elbow in Far Hills, N.J., out of his office and back on the course for an afternoon. I could tell that Dave is pretty happy with his management post, but even after 10 years of being out of the maintenance shed, he couldn't keep his hands off the turf. "Do you miss it," I asked him after we got three holes of Fiddler's Forest Course under our belts. He gave me a hard stare, the kind you get when you insult somebody, "It's in the blood," Dave said. A reassuring smile directly followed.

Thanks Dave, I'm starting to understand.

My travels will take me all over the country, to many different courses — and maybe even into your office.

If you would allow me one standard "first column" note, I'm looking forward to meeting as many of you as I can. I like to listen and learn and the best way is by going face to face, course to course.

One last quick note: When was the last time you saw, in any media, any ballyhoo about a tennis tournament? Where are the characters and the glitz that surrounded the court in those free-wheeling '70s?

It's pretty easy to see that Golf — thank you Mr. Woods — is slowly turning into the "sexy" game that tennis once was.

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It's pretty easy to see that Golf — thank you Mr. Woods — is slowly turning into the "sexy" game that tennis once was.

So sexy, in fact, that while I was recently paging through Rolling Stone magazine (old habits die hard), I saw two advertisements placed by two prominent golf club manufacturers. The flood gates have opened. You better be ready.

Please, accept my apologies

O.K. I apologize. I apologize to Donald Ross for all his sand bunkers being filled in at Portland (Maine) Country Club back in the 1950s — that all the sand bunkers filled in at all his golf courses throughout the last six decades.

I apologize to golf course community homeowners who've been corked on the head by errant golf balls while they sat comfortably in their backyards.

I apologize to all the superintendents who have had to repair myriad divots made by poor golfers, which we all were at one point in our lives.

I apologize to all the golfers "from away" who were so taken with the view from the 7th green at Pebble Beach that they fell into the brine.

I apologize to all the environmentalists ever smirled by any builder/developer anywhere, anytime throughout history.

The Indian side of my heritage apologizes to the Scottish side for killing them; and the Scottish side of me apologizes to the Indian side.

I'm sorry, Mark.

"I accept your apology. I'm sorry, Mark."

"That's OK."

"Go ahead, cry on my shoulder, Mark."

"That's impossible. My neck won't turn that far.

This, of course, is all part of Apolomania. No, not apologetics. This time it's a slight departure: production of a six-print litho-graph collection from St. Andrews. Selected from a cool quarter of 1000 images, which we all were at one point in our lives.

This being said, I do as the Good Book says and forgive all of you who have ever thought, said or done evil to me. (No need to call; it would flood our meager phone lines.)