



**Pat Jones** is president of Flagstick LLC, a consulting firm that provides sales and marketing intelligence to green-industry businesses. He can be reached at psjhawk@cox.net or 440-478-4763.

## CURMUDGEONLY THOUGHTS

**F**rankly, I'm pissed off right now. There seems to be a lull in the industry at the moment ... and editorial columnists despise lulls. Here's what I mean:

- None of the idiot/millionaire PGA Tour pros has said anything incredibly stupid about Stimpmeter readings lately.
- The GCSAA's PDI launch last summer turned out to be more of a whimper than a bang.
- The big show site in Anaheim might not be the most dynamic place to visit, but it's just not as much fun to heap abuse on as Atlanta or Dallas.
- Despite dire predictions, the golf economy continues to not crash and burn.
- I'm bored to death with the whole "new club and ball technology is killing golf" debate.
- Hell, the Democrats didn't even make banning turf pesticides one their legislative priorities in their first 100 hours of running Congress.
- Worst of all, Johnny Miller turned out to be a genuinely likable guy when I interviewed him several months ago. He loves fishing, for God's sake! We actually compared notes about the joys of chasing Northern Pike in the Great White North. Oh, the humanity!

It's pretty depressing being the industry's designated curmudgeon right now. So I'll take things into my own hands and fling some feces at the fan by posing five tough questions:

1. The GCSAA claims to represent the interests of our industry in Washington, D.C. It has several full-time staffers dedicated to government relations, and it pays a large annual sum to a hired lobbying firm to get things done inside the Beltway. Yet, there are basically zero dollars of federal funding for turfgrass research designated for our university programs. Golf is supposedly a \$62 billion business in the United States, and we hear various enormous numbers about the economic impact of turf, but

we get nothing back for all the tax revenues we generate and the contributions we make to society. Why?

2. The PGA Tour has bet the farm – and the visibility of our industry – on the Golf Channel. I make my living in this business, and I couldn't find the Golf Channel on my cable system if my life depended on it. Remember when the Senior Tour used to be on regular network TV a lot? As I recall, that was before the Tour sold television rights for the renamed Champions Tour to Nick at Nite, or was it QVC? When's the last time you accidentally stumbled across

**"The days of pros, superintendents and club managers working in their own little kingdoms without cooperation or coordination have come to an end if the facility is to survive."**

a Champions Tour event on TV? That's what we have to look forward to with this new Golf Channel deal. It's like a federal witness relocation program for televised golf tournaments. The Tour's new motto should be: "These Guys Are Hidden." What are Tim Finchem and his overpaid geniuses smoking down in Florida?

3. I'm fed up with hearing about the slump in the golf market. When will facilities start taking responsibility for their own business success? Every time I give a speech at a golf conference, I ask for a show of hands about how many attendees have formal, written marketing plans. About nine hands out of a hundred usually are raised. Ask the same question at any other meeting of small businesspeople

and damned near every hand will go up. If you're an owner who's just waiting around for the market to rebound on its own and hoping that it will somehow trickle down to you, it's time to sell your property to a condo developer. Why do so many facilities let the business manage them instead of managing the business?

4. I've also had it with the Rodney Dangerfield "I get no respect" routine I hear too often from some superintendents. If you're sitting around waiting for someone in Lawrence, Kan., to magically make golfers recognize that you're a professional, you better find a comfy chair because you'll be sitting for a long time. Not that the GCSAA isn't trying. (It keeps talking about vague plans for a big public relations campaign on the Golf Channel. Oops, see above.) But any superintendent who isn't taking his own image and his own career into his own hands is kidding himself. When will these whiners realize their challenges are no different than any other manager at any other business and no one else is going to solve their problems for them?

5. Finally, when will clubs start tearing down the walls that separate the different departments. I'm constantly amazed when I meet a golf professional who has no clue whatsoever about the maintenance program. Or, I'll meet a superintendent who's only barely aware that food-and-beverage operations impact the bottom line. When you ask members of the management team about membership growth or rounds development, they'll say, "Lisa in the sales department handles that." The days of pros, superintendents and club managers working in their own little kingdoms without cooperation or coordination have to come to an end if the facility is to survive. As Benjamin Franklin said, "We must all hang together, or most assuredly, we will all hang separately." Thus, why do so few facilities make teamwork a priority?

OK, I'm still pissed, but at least I've had some fun. I posed several questions and didn't manage to answer any. That's what curmudgeonly columnists do. We have that luxury. You don't. **GCI**