

It's no news that golf course maintenance is a pressure-packed profession. Soon, the profession will make the Top 10 list for "The Most Stressful Jobs in America." The pressure and stress is directly related to golfers' increased expectations for the courses they play to be wall-to-wall green without a smidgen of brown. Of course, many golfers are getting this crazy notion of perfection by watching PGA Tour events on television.

When golfers see unblemished courses on the tube every weekend, they begin to expect similar conditions at their clubs. Soon, they're demanding such conditions.

All of this is leading to a road of ruin for some superintendents. Many of them try to give golfers what they want, but they don't have the bucks in their budgets to appease golfers' desires for flawless conditions. In the end, they take the blame for being "inefficient."

In turn, some of these superintendents blame their problem on the PGA Tour for only playing tournaments on courses in immaculate condition. But, as it turns out, the PGA Tour may not be to blame.

During a seminar on golf technology at the GCSAA show in February, I asked Jon Scott, vice president of agronomy for the PGA Tour, what he thought about superintendents blaming the PGA Tour for raising the bar on golf course maintenance. First, Scott said the issue was "exaggerated." Then, however, he proceeded to politely blame TV for demanding that PGA Tour courses be in such ideal condition. Although he was gentlemanly in his approach, Scott didn't hold back.

"The advent of the televised golf event has been the driving force in the market demand for better conditioned golf courses," Scott said. "Television isn't enamored with brown. Many times, TV [producers] have come to us and said, '[The course] isn't green enough. Can you put some fertilizer out or can you paint this?'"

"The sponsors connected [to the tournament], who want to sell their products, don't agree with brown," Scott continued. "They like green very much. It's the color of money."

Even if a course contains some brown, which most of the players don't mind as long as brown translates to fair playing conditions, TV

Time to Turn TV On to Brown Turf

BY LARRY AYLWARD



THIS IS ABOUT
MORE THAN THE
COLOR OF MONEY;
THIS IS ABOUT
LIVELIHOODS

has a knack for masking it, Scott says.

"Brown isn't beautiful," Scott admits, "but brown is OK. [The problem is,] how do we get that message out? I'm not sure."

To a degree, Scott answered his own question when he said the issue needs to be further discussed, and that more media coverage is needed to explain that brown turf isn't bad. But Scott, while disagreeing with TV's green-is-gold philosophy, sounded like he was ready to wave the white flag.

"You're fighting a losing battle because it's an economic issue," he said. "I'm afraid this cat got out of the bag a long time ago at a club in Georgia that we all revere. And it's awfully hard to put that cat back in the bag."

Well, Mr. Scott, that cat has to be put back — stuffed back — in the bag. What you might not realize is that superintendents' reputations, and jobs, could be on the line because of this inane issue.

This is about more than the color of money; this is about livelihoods. I can't tell you how many superintendents blame the Augusta Syndrome, which was born from The Masters on network TV, for creating hardship in their lives.

It's time Scott and the PGA take a hard-line approach with the TV bigwigs and their sponsors about the issue. The PGA's leaders need to convince TV's leaders that this is far from just an economic issue. I'm sure many superintendents would be willing to assist the PGA in such a lobbying effort.

Finally, let there be no talk from anyone about "fighting a losing battle." Ask any superintendent and he or she will tell you, "This is a battle we can't afford to lose, or it's just going to get worse."

Editor Larry Aylward can be reached at 440-891-2770 or larryward@advanstar.com.