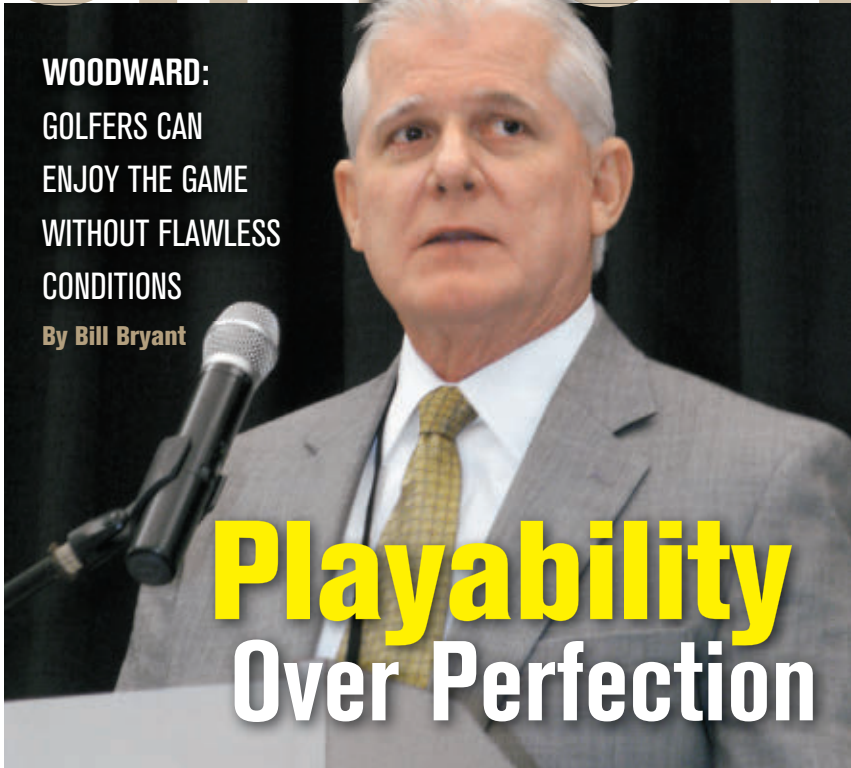


Off The Fringe

**WOODWARD:
GOLFERS CAN
ENJOY THE GAME
WITHOUT FLAWLESS
CONDITIONS**

By Bill Bryant



“There is a lot of pressure on (superintendents and their staffs) to continue to improve (conditions), and expectations continue to rise,” he said. “I’m not sure that’s the direction we need to go in light of the economy. A big part of our (environmental efforts) is to promote playability, and you all can help us tell that story. We think golfers can go out and have fun without every blade of grass being perfect.”

It’s ironic that some of the world’s most revered courses do not go to the extremes that U.S. courses do to present flawless conditions, Woodward said. “You go to other places in the world, and golf courses aren’t maintained to the degree they are here,” he said. “But when we go over there to play, we think we’ve died and gone to heaven. And then we come back here, and we think every blade of grass has to be perfectly green and perfectly in place.”

Woodward was asked if he thought “brown was the new green?”

“We don’t say brown is the new green,” he shot back. “We just talk about the fact that it needs to be playable, but it doesn’t have to be perfect.”

Woodward is also aware that courses must be sensitive to the expectations their members and customers have for quality playing conditions or risk losing them. “Surveys show that golfers choose to play a particular golf course because of conditions at that course,” he said. “So if we let that go down too much, we could shoot ourselves in the foot because golfers may not want to come to that facility for that reason.” ■

Bryant is a golf writer from Alpharetta, Ga.

Mark Woodward appreciates the pristine splendor of the Augusta National Golf Club, site of last month’s Masters Tournament, and other professional tour venues as much as anyone. But the CEO of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America knows those are not the agronomic standards by which his 21,000 members should be judged. Nor are they right for the times.

“People see what they see on TV, and they see the conditions we produced at Torrey Pines (the course Woodward prepared for the 2008 U.S. Open in his role as manager of golf operations for the city of San Diego), and they think that should be translated back to their local golf courses. But that’s truly an aberration. It’s not

reality,” Woodward told a crowd of golf course owners, operators, architects and developers at the Golf Inc. Conference at the World Golf Village in St. Augustine, Fla., recently.

Those conditions might be required for demanding PGA Tour professionals, but Woodward said they’re not essential for most players.

“We can still have a quality playing experience and playable conditions and have fun at it without going to the extremes of championship golf,” he said. “There just needs to be a balance between expectations and the resources we have to produce those conditions.”

Woodward encouraged owners, operators, designers and developers to help take the message of balance and playability back to their clubs and courses, many of which are struggling in a challenging economy.