

The Religion of Golf

Is it my imagination or has there been a movement out there by a select number of golfers who actually believe the GAME of golf is more than just a game? These fanatics who insist that under all circumstances putting greens should be maintained at or above 10 feet, that fairways should be maintained both firm and uniformly green, that bunkers should be maintained such that bad lies are never a possibility, and that tees should be maintained perfectly flat and mowed to a height that only a military barber can appreciate!

At the same time, they also want roughs at 2", or higher and that the golf course be set up for championship competition. Oddly enough, these same fanatics seem to completely forget that most golfers have handicaps of 16 and above.

Guess who's caught in the middle of this? You guessed it, the golf course superintendent. Regardless of the physical state of the irrigation system, topography, weather conditions, turfgrass species, amount of play, size of greens, soil type and countless other circumstances, they are expected by this vocal minority to perform miracles in turf care.

To this minority of vocal players, I wish you would remember one thing. That is, golf is a game that is supposed to be fun! Sure it is exasperating and difficult, but it is not a matter of life and death. If your ball lands in a wet spot - play it! If your ball is buried in a bunker - hit it and continue on your way! If your ball does not roll far enough on the first green - adjust your putting stroke for the rest of the round!

There are far too many golf course superintendents whose livelihoods are being threatened by those that look at golf as a religion, rather than a game. For those of you that have still not gotten the message, allow your superintendent to do the following:

Maintain greens at a moderate speed that puts the turf first and speed second. Most golfers truly prefer smoothness over speed with an 8'6"-9' Stimp meter reading being entirely acceptable for normal play.

Maintain conditions in the fairways such that large areas of turf are not lost due to deficit irrigation. Remember, the superintendent's main function is to keep players from messing up their own golf course!

Let us realize that golf course superintendents have an entire staff and family that rely on their decision-making skills. While golf should be a game to golfers, it is a livelihood to the superintendent. We should all try to remember this fact the next time we explode after missing a four footer and immediately blame everyone but ourselves! It truly does put the GAME of golf in its proper perspective. Hallelujah!

—Larry Gilhuly



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