

Mr. James A. Bertoni
Golf Course Superintendent
La Jolla Country Club
La Jolla, CA 92038

Dear Jim:

It's been a long time since receipt of your good letter and I'm embarrassed to have been this long in replying. It's been a busy month, hence this delay. I very much appreciated your remarks concerning my "Green is Not Great" article and I was pleased to have your observations since they open the door to many other areas of discussion.

First with regard to the agronomics of the question, we have come a long way in maintenance and management since the early days but the question I raise is - Haven't we gone too far in tipping the scale in the direction of pleasing the membership who normally judge perfection by color and not by turfgrass playing quality? Prior to the installation of fairway watering systems the only watered areas were greens and tees. Nature took care of watering the fairways and they looked good for a good part of the season with exception of serious stress periods. Fairways at that time were uniform and consistent, in fact I considered them more uniform and consistent for golf than many of the overwatered fairways of today. My contention, however, is that somewhere in between there is the better approach to uniformity and consistency. If members would accept that, it would make the superintendent's job more enjoyable and we would, in my opinion, have better playing turf. Moreover, in my opinion there would be less need for winter rules, less need for players to touch the ball anywhere but on the tee and green. In my experience I have found that the membership does exert influence on the superintendent's program. Such influence comes in many ways but especially through association and discussions with members during his term of employment at a given club. This is a natural outcome of long association with members. Most superintendents today have a finer rapport and certainly many have a lot more contact with their members than superintendents of the past.

As regard the need for better grasses in the future, this is definitely a goal of turfgrass breeders now. Several have changed direction with the major turfgrasses used on golf courses. Tough turf is the call of the future. Turf that will persist under adversity and the restrictions placed on it by rulings of regulatory agencies as well as the increased shortages projected which can only mean higher prices for materials.

As regard your comments on The Rules of Golf and the Decisions of Golf being responsible for the superintendent's dilemma in his quest for consistency, I discussed this with P.J. Boatwright since these are not my prime fields of endeavor and these are his main points of comment:

When I was growing up, golf courses did not have the sophisticated watering systems that now exist and therefore golf courses in the main were not overwatered. In other words, it seems to me that overwatering became commonplace when modern watering systems came into existence and certainly not because of the Rules of Golf.

The Rules of Golf have changed very little since modern watering systems came into effect. In 1959, the Rules were changed to allow the repair of ball marks on the line of putt and to allow cleaning of the ball on the putting green. These two changes were

perhaps the most significant changes in the Rules in many, many years and why were the changes necessary? I would guess it was because greens were becoming too soft from overwatering and it made it impossible to play the game fairly if ball marks could not be repaired and the ball could not be cleaned on the green.

Mr. Bertoni says that the Rules should simply require that you play the course as you find it and you play the ball as it lies. Of course, that would be ideal, but it is impractical. There must be provision at least for a ball unplayable. Otherwise, many players could not finish a round.

Mr. Bertoni refers to the great amount of lifting of balls that takes place now under the Rules. Of course, there is a great amount of lifting in tournaments on television, but much of this lifting is due to television equipment. Certainly, it would be unfair to require a player to play a ball from under a television tower, which was there purely for the purpose of documenting the event for television audiences.

Most other lifting of the golf ball is probably due to ground under repair and, in my experience, most ground under repair is a result of overwatering or poor drainage and the subsequent tracks or ruts caused by vehicles passing over the overly-wet area.

Jim, I can't agree with your statement that the use of water as we know it today is due to the demand for turfgrass consistency. I respect your position because I know you believe in it but I must confess I am on the other side of the fence entirely. Grasses that are managed just to keep them alive are, in my view, more consistent for golf than grasses that are forced for purposes of aesthetics.

We have a lot to discuss when we meet again. Thank you for writing as you did. There's a lot of food for thought involved and I trust that it will benefit our common goal, which is better turf for better golf!

Sincerely,
Alexander M. Radko
National Director

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