

Just Hit the Ball!

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A couple of years ago I visited a golf course and was shocked to find that the club had played "preferred lies" for many years because of having poor-quality fairway turf during a portion of each summer. At the time of my visit, the fairways were nearly flawless, yet the club continued to "roll the ball" because a few thin areas of turf existed (1% or 2% of the total fairway acreage), and thus it was possible to have a less-than-perfect lie in the fairway. In essence, this membership was saying that a ball landing in a fairway should be guaranteed a perfect lie and to have less simply would not be fair.

I was so shocked by the attitude of the club that I related the story to the golfers at another course the following week. To my dismay, the story was met with blank looks and embarrassed stares from the committee members, as they admitted having played preferred lies for years as well!

The account typifies what has happened to American golfers and American golf courses. Perfection is demanded, and if it can't be attained, **we cheat!** Golf isn't supposed to be fair. Golf is supposed to be a test of nerves, physical skill, and mental acuity. It should be a challenge and a lesson in overcoming adversity, not a cakewalk, and *definitely not a guarantee!*

The major objective in golf turf management has always been to improve playing conditions, the theory being that by doing so we would increase the skill factor and reduce the luck factor. Playing conditions have been improved unbelievably over the years, but the demands of golfers have increased along with the quality of the playing conditions. A well-struck tee shot landing in the fairway should not be intentionally penalized; that would make no sense at all. By the same token, neither should the golfer be guaranteed a perfect lie.

Removing the luck factor entirely also eliminates the need for the skill required to negotiate a tricky lie. I contend that luck is an integral part of golf and it adds great interest to the game. Can you imagine how boring it would be to be able to predict exactly what type of lie you would face on your second shot immediately after striking your tee shot? Do not misunderstand me; I am not advocating that we should trick up our golf courses, only that they need not, and cannot, be perfect.

Above all else, we need to play the ball as we find it, not as we think we should find it, or would like to find it.

It is time we put things into perspective. There should be no guarantees in golf. If a shot landing in a fairway comes to rest in a divot, invent a shot to get it out of the divot. If a ball plugs in a bunker, don't change the sand or raking techniques or complain to the course manager. If the greens are hard and do not hold shots as well as you would like, try landing the ball short. If the condition of the golf course doesn't suit your particular game, adjust your game.

It is not the responsibility of the golf course superintendent to tailor course conditioning to a particular golfer's desire. We do not need to trick up our courses, but neither do we need to perfect their condition. In short, play the course as you find it.

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Full season, full course disease control.



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