



# Just Shut Up and Play!

*At the PGA Championship, held in August at Medinah C.C., Tour players had barely "stepped out of their courtesy Cadillacs" when they began maligning course conditions.*

*John Gurke, CGCS  
Aurora C.C.(?)*

John Philp is my new hero. For those not familiar with the name, he's the greenkeeper at Carnoustie—you know, where the British Open was held? The one chastised by Tour professionals for being "an out-of-control" greenkeeper because the rough was...rough? Why, then, with all those big names in the world of professional golf kicking this guy around, is he my new hero? He answered them. He actually had the nerve to call it like he saw it. It is obvious that this is a man who thinks of his golf course as his baby, and someone called his baby ugly, so he punched 'em in the mouth. Good for him!

The comments by many players during television coverage of the British Open are what started my blood to boil. Granted, players have been critiquing and criticizing Tour

stops for years, but lately it seems to have become personal; the superintendent is now responsible for the design of the course as well as its condition in the small minds of pampered Tour pros. Did John Philp make the fairways as narrow as 11 yards? Did he install the recently renamed "Jean and Justin Burn?" It doesn't end here, though. Once bored with

"super-bashing," these poor young lads turn to the governing bodies—in this case, the Royal & Ancient—to ventilate a bit more built-up gas. Did the R & A actually TAKE the driver out of Tiger's hands? I can picture it now—an oak-walled boardroom filled with cigar-chomping men in crested R & A jackets saying (in their best

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Groundskeeper Willy accent), “Argh! We’ve gut ta teyk the drrraiyyurrr oat oov Taiygurrr’s ‘ahnds, laest ‘e sheoots oonderrr pahrrr. We joost cah’n’t allooo it!” Last I checked, the decision of which club to use is, and always has been, the player’s. If a course has narrow fairways, brutal rough and bottomless bunkers, TOUGH! Every contestant plays the same course, and if some choose to hit driver and hit it crookedly, they’ll be playing the same gorse, too. It’s called COURSE MANAGEMENT, fellas. I simply can find no compassion in me for anyone, in any line of work who says, in effect, “The reason I only made \$400,000 this week instead of \$600,000 is that the course was lousy.”

Okay, I’ve vented a little of my own pent-up steam. The British Open is history, and I can relax, right? Just when I thought I was out, they pulled me back in! Today is Tuesday, August 10th, and I’ve just read the back page of the *Chicago Tribune* sports section. Not surprisingly, taking into account the above comments and those regarding the U.S. Open, the Tour pros are at it again. This time, it’s the PGA, and even before they’ve stepped out of their courtesy Cadillacs, the guys are carping. We are all too familiar with what Mother Nature wrought upon us this past July, and I think anyone in this business whose course looked beautiful after that is a freak of nature. That notwithstanding, Lee Janzen—who is obviously an agronomist as well as a golfer—spouts, “They [the greens] are hard, and I don’t think the weather has anything to do with it....I don’t think heat should be an excuse for the lack of a perfect surface.” Two paragraphs later, Fred Cou-

ples opines, “The greens are soft.” Which is it gonna be, guys? If I may, I’d like to make a suggestion—take your private jet to West Virginia and tell the first farmer you see that weather is no excuse for failed crops. Once you’ve extracted the rock salt, pitchfork or whatever implement

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of pain and destruction he chose from your skull (the one you sit on and think with), we’ll chat. I feel like a doughnut, because all I can think to say right now is, “Bite me.”

The PGA is now a memory, and all is well again. Almost. The

Ryder Cup looms on the horizon, and—from the mouths of babes—another controversy has arisen. “Pay us!” they’re shouting. When that was thrown back in their faces, they performed the quintessential backpedal (a Tour pro’s version of Bruce Serling’s “Superintendent Shuffle”) and said, “We meant pay us and we’ll give it to charity...yeah, that’s what we meant.” STOP IT! At least there will be no soft-spike/metal spike controversy on the PGA Tour—with so many feet in mouths, they’ll be barefoot.

Professional golf is a HUGE business—millions upon millions of dollars are available to these select few, incredibly fortunate members of the lucky sperm club. Is it too much to ask that they comport themselves with the same gentlemanly respect for others that the Game prides itself on? Have we as superintendents truly become our worst enemies by using every high-tech tool and every iota of knowledge and experience to provide premier conditions regardless of Mother Nature’s moods? And in those rare cases when She wins, have we set ourselves up for this type of verbal assault? Like my hero, John Philp, we all see our courses as our babies, and we all take offense when someone bad-mouths that which we spend our lives nurturing. It is their prerogative, but I still can’t resist the urge to say, “Just shut up and play!” 

*Author’s disclaimer: The above sentiments in no way apply to the club members or public tee-timers who pay our salaries.*