



The Muddy State of the Game

I was introduced to golf in 1956 at a little poor man's golf course in Quincy, Illinois, and have been involved in one way or another ever since. Currently, as an owner of a small golf course management company (and at times larger entities during my career), and having had the opportunity to visit and assess golf facilities in nearly every state in the U.S., I find the current state of the game unsettling.

Exceptional maintenance has favorably advanced the game, but often leads to expectations by the golfer that are nothing shy of ridiculous. For example, the pursuit of bunker maintenance—why aren't bunkers a hazard anymore? Most of the time, bunkers are purely aesthetic, and, if you get in one, it had better be as smooth as silk with no grooved rake marks.

My opinion is (and I am being hypocritical because my livelihood depends on golf's success) that golf has become too much a business pursuit and has deserted its roots as a passionate form of recreation.

This involves all facets of golf's development and operations agenda. Golf is big business now and with serious consequences. The game's emphasis is no longer focused on fun, recreational exercise with a mix of competition—it is now too often focused on competitive, high-energy, serious activity with “the bottom line” in mind.

Some comments regarding the current arena of the golf business follow for your consideration.

Golf Development

Some golf course architects/designers receive fees of \$150,000 to \$2,000,000 to design an 18-hole golf course—these same architects/designers advance the theory of “we need to provide inexpensive courses.” Low-cost development is not going to happen anytime soon. Great courses are being built everywhere and I do not begrudge these fees, but let's get realistic. How many new courses, however, require creative golf shots—not just “air mail” golf expertise.

Golf Club/Ball Manufacturers

The ball and clubs are out of control and have removed much of the charm of golf from the equation. What was that charm? Perhaps creativity, mystery, occasional blind shots, not knowing how the ball was going to bounce on hard, dry fairways. Today's balls and clubs have reduced spin, club shaft deflection, you name it. The name of the game is “wind the body up as coiled as possible and release these clubs,” and the ball will fly 250-300 yards with little sidespin. With such technology, a relatively good golfer with a fair swing can really perform, and this may be good for the game. However, we (0 to 40-handicappers) have always measured our games against the PGA Tour professional—and, with few exceptions, what we see now is driver, 8-iron to pitching wedge, putt, firing the ball at indisputably well-tucked pins that are, however, located on nearly perfect putting surfaces. Heaven forbid, though, if that green is not perfect. We golf nuts aspire to the majors because the courses

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and pressure test skill, creativity, shot-making, course management and fortitude. Where are the leaders who must step forward and put a limit on technology before all of our courses are outmoded and we can no longer measure our skills versus the best? These leaders have disappeared. Why? Think economics.

Golf Course Maintenance

Please note that the past 25 years have seen tremendous advances in every aspect of the golf course maintenance profession and any new course built in the past 10 years is expected to be perfect or its chance of economic success is limited. Whatever happened to the “rub of the green”—many of today’s golfers will find that an objectionable phrase. Exceptional maintenance has favorably advanced the game, but often leads to expectations by the golfer that are nothing shy of ridiculous. For example, the pursuit of bunker maintenance—why aren’t bunkers a hazard anymore? Most of the time, bunkers are purely aesthetic, and, if you get in one, it had better be as smooth as silk with no grooved rake marks. Of course, just pull out your specially designed, \$110 sand wedge and you’ll have no problem. The Tour players must almost

laugh at bunker placement—we would have to reposition fairway bunkers every year to keep up with technology. Greenside bunkers—a Tour player gets in them only rarely—but they look great, don’t they?

Fairways are now groomed better than greens were in the 1960s. Lest I sound dated, do 10- to 40-handicappers enjoy hitting more off 1/2"-cut grass or moderate 1-1/4" intermediate rough? Not all participants appreciate manicured to perfection, from a golf perspective.

Golf Course Operations

In the name of customer service, new and regular players are marshaled and approached so often it is annoying. But if we don’t provide this attention, we are poor operators. The four-hour round of golf philosophy is a dinosaur. We can all play a golf course in four hours if it measures 6,000 yards, next tees are within 50 yards’ walking distance and we aren’t trying (or need) to have 200-250 players/day to make enough money to pay the bills. Don’t you just love the idea of a warm, heated towel at the turn to cleanse your hands so you can partake of that \$4 to \$7 bottle of beer and \$8 cigar? You can

probably guess what I’d like to do with that towel, but if we don’t create the best possible situation, facilities may suffer.

The aforementioned are merely a few examples of the state of the game—a mere speck on a muddy golf ball. There is no need to write a diatribe, but the book could be at least one volume, with conflicting and hypocritical comments throughout. Golf is a great game and will survive, but there is going to be some pain inflicted on those of us in the business.

Despite all of the opinions expressed by all interested in the purity of the game, perhaps we will have to adjust to Power Air Mail Golf. For me, it will be sad, because so much will have been lost from this unique, wonderful game—that is perhaps not so much a game anymore as much as a business. Unless really influential people can reverse the trend, I am afraid we have all lost the opportunity to experience many of the creative and imaginative thrills and disappointments of a game grown too modern.



FROM THE GCSAA

2003 Chapter Delegates Meeting Scheduled for September

The 2003 Chapter Delegates Meeting will be held Saturday, September 6 and Sunday, September 7 at the Kansas City Airport Marriott in Kansas City, MO.

At a meeting prior to the Atlanta conference, the GCSAA board of directors discussed the timing of the delegates’ gathering and decided to resume a September schedule. The goal is to ensure that chapter delegates have time to relay the outcomes of the meeting to their boards and members at chapter annual meetings and other venues. It also provides chapters and members with more time to discuss and formulate their opinions regarding issues

that are voted on at the GCSAA annual meeting and election.

The importance of the Chapter Delegates Meeting will continue to grow, as the association and its members look toward the future. The opinions and ideas shared at this annual meeting guide the GCSAA board in making decisions that serve the best interest of members, and help superintendents advance in their profession.

Affiliated chapters are required to send one representative—either their voting delegate or an officer—to represent their association at the Chapter Delegates Meeting. The representative should be an actively involved and experienced chapter leader who has a greater awareness of the association initiatives and issues that will be discussed at the Chapter Delegates Meeting.

