



# Would our Jobs Be Easier?

*Friday during The Open Championship, there was a lightning delay here at the course, and I happened to be in the Pro Shop. The Open was on TV. A group of us were watching while waiting for the all clear signal. Mrs. Fitzgerald said "Look at that course, isn't it just ugly."*

"No, I think it looks really great," I replied.

"But it's not green. It looks like our course in Arizona during the winter," she said.

The conversation continued with me explaining that the course was playing the way golf was intended to be played, and that you have to play a different game on courses like the ones in the Open Championship rotation. I said, "When you play courses like that, you have to play a ground game, not an aerial game like the one we are used to playing here in America."

Mrs. Bulthuis heard me say that and asked, "You mean I'm supposed to hit the ball on the ground and not in the air?"

I explained to Mrs. Bulthuis what I meant by the ground game: how you have to play shots anticipating how the ball will roll after hitting it to a certain area. I still don't think she was buying into what I was trying to explain. She is probably still thinking: *why do we let someone who's telling me to hit the ball on the ground take care of our golf course? He doesn't seem to know anything about the game of golf.*

Then Mrs. Koch said "My husband and I played over there and I didn't like it. When we finished the 9th hole we weren't anywhere near the clubhouse;\* it was really windy; and some of them didn't have any water coolers on the course."

"And I bet you didn't see many beverage carts over there," I said.

"Yes, you're right," she replied.

This whole conversation made me start to think about many things. I'm not picking on Mrs. Fitzgerald, Mrs. Bulthuis or Mrs. Koch. They are great members, very supportive of our operation, and cause us no problems. But, are they a reflection of what the American golfer thinks? We all realize how much the game has changed over the years, how the game is played differently here in America than it is in other parts of the world, how we strive for perfection in our golf courses, but I never realized what the golfers' thoughts were until I had this conversation.

It made me wonder whether our jobs would be easier if we were to condition our golf courses differently; or would we be dealing with another set of problems. With our expertise and wealth of knowledge, I am sure we would be able to adapt. We would still have to deal with Mother Nature. There would be droughts and periods of heavy rainfall, wind, cold, heat, etc. What would our members or customers think if we were to let the course go completely dormant during the summertime? Like Mrs. Fitzgerald they would probably think the course was ugly, but would it be healthier? Would our revenues be down because we have no beverage cart? Would we have no players or members because our courses are brown and deemed to be dead, not dormant, by the golfer? Probably. Would we even need the beverage cart to produce more revenue if we were spending less on maintaining the golf course?

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Or, would we be spending the same money dealing with a different set of problems?

Would there be a huge debate about how far the golf ball travels if the ground was firm? Perhaps technology in ball and club design would take a backseat to course conditions when the ball flight is not all carry. Sure, the long hitters would still hit it farther, but would it be as big a controversy as it is now? Maybe. Tiger Woods used his driver only once during The Open Championship. I think there are a hundred questions we could ask. There is probably no right or wrong answer, but it is fun trying to think about how things may be different. Would our jobs be easier, harder or about the same?

We have all had to deal with significant weather extremes this summer. Nighttime lows in the 80s, heat indexes of 108-110°, thunderstorms at the wrong time, no rain at all, have made it a very interesting and trying summer to say the least. I have been fortunate to have a Green Chairman who is very understanding

and supportive of our operation. He is one of the few that really understands and appreciates what it takes to produce the conditions we maintain (he likes to cut down trees even more than I do). He thoroughly reads every piece of literature I give him. At this time of year, I really believe that he reads more of the magazine *Golf Course Management* than I do. When I speak to Mr. Lowrie and update him on things happening around the course, and he senses that I may be a little down or worn out, he always ends our conversation with the phrase "Keep the Faith." For whatever reason I kept this saying in my head during the extreme conditions we have had. It always seemed to ease the pain and frustration just a bit and help me think that things were eventually going to be better.

Another little thing that keeps me going is something I picked up from Oscar Miles when I worked for him. Every morning when we would sit down to plan out the day's work, I could read the words Oscar had on the wall behind his desk:

*God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I can not change  
the courage to change the things I can  
and the wisdom to know the difference*

These words have helped me to understand and get through some tough times, and this summer was certainly a tough one. I hope everyone has a very enjoyable and successful rest of the year, and remember, Keep the Faith.

*\*In the book, The Anatomy Of A Golf Course, by Tom Doak, "Links" is defined as "A seaside golf course constructed on naturally sandy ground with undulations formed by wind and receding tides. The first golf courses in Britain were all links. Frequently the term is misused in America to describe a) any course, b) any seaside course, c) a course which does not return to the clubhouse at the 9th hole (as many authentic British links do not.)"*



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