

BACK to the FUTURE

Perhaps it's time to look back across the Pond, where superintendents have been nurturing the game of golf for centuries. Maybe they have been ahead of the game all along while we have been digging our own graves.

Can you remember watching the British Open on television this year? Can you remember how brown the golf course appeared?

I remember asking my green committee chairman the next day what he thought about the conditions and he quickly responded, "Deplorable!"

That adjective sounds a little harsh, but let's face it: courses in America are commonly wall-to-wall green and kept in impeccable condition.

Perhaps a little too impeccable.

Maybe our Scottish forefathers are ahead of the game, while we are out there digging our own graves. Just how long can we continue to overproduce?

Let's be honest. American golf courses are maintained too well and everyone's at fault. We as superintendents strive to make our golf courses better every year. When will we reach our limit? What about American golfers? Are they getting spoiled? We hear them complain about those things we do for our own good like aerifying, top dressing, verticutting and so on.

Those Scotsmen do far less and are far better off. And I mean no disrespect: they've got this business figured out far better than we do.

Many American golfers travel from place to place, playing each golf course at its peak level of maintenance. Our members travel from north to south, expecting perfection at each stop along the way. Member-guest tournaments compound the problem.

If the course down the road has something special, you can sure bet that your members will have you doing the same thing in the very near future.

And what about touring pros?

Is there such a thing as a silver spoon? Is the American touring pro spoiled? We hear of foreign pros playing more competitively because they are more familiar with normal world conditions. Again, are we spoiling our pros with fast greens, tight fairways and so on.

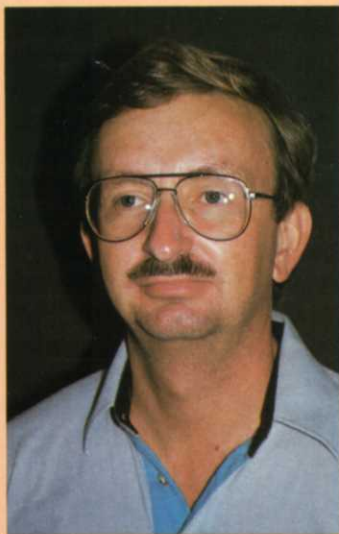
It's got so bad that now we hear TV commentators discussing "roll of the *fairways!*"

Where is it going to end? Even the commentators are spoiled. Sure, they give us a lot of respect and credit when they compliment the golf courses, but the point is, they are calling attention to the very best-conditioned courses in the world.

Is this whole golf business heading in the right direction? Have you ever really thought about what golf will be like in the year 2010? I'm not talking about laser golf with high-tech clubs; I'm talking about the green stuff we play on. We dream of drought-tolerant, heat-resistant, special grasses that we haven't even seen yet. In reality, things might be completely different from what we now envision.

First, let's assume money always will be available to support the top-level clubs. Twenty years from now, money might not even be an issue anywhere.

Instead, the issues might be water



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availability and banned chemicals. Golfers may have to adapt to brown, dry turf, weeds, and insect damage.

In 20 years, we might be irrigating greens and tees just three times a week and fairways only once a week. Perhaps by then man will have consumed or polluted so much of his fresh water sources that the precious remainder will not be available for golf courses at any price.

Lush, wall-to-wall green may be a

distant memory.

You've heard of organic gardening. What would it be like to manage a golf course the organic way? That's right; no pesticides of any sort! Environmentalists and government regulations will have virtually eliminated all the current pesticides except those which are so safe as to be ineffective.

If for no reason other than political reality, the current restricted pesticides that combat nematodes and

mole crickets will be long gone and these insect pests will abound in numbers we have not yet seen. (The Rules of Golf may even permit a golfer to knock down mole cricket mounds in his line.)

And as for weeds, they will be prevalent everywhere. The current herbicides on the market will be long gone. We could contemplate pulling weeds by hand, but labor costs make clean golf courses prohibitively expensive. It will be easier just to let the weeds grow because, after all, everybody will have them.

As a matter of fact, we might even play winter rules and roll the ball onto a clump of weeds because at least they offer a better lie than sand.

What about these new so-called low-maintenance golf courses that architects currently are creating with abrupt mounds, huge bunkers, and excessive fields of love grass? Somebody out there is going to get rich modifying all these modern monuments to the way they should have been constructed in the first place.

On the other hand, maybe we can prepare for the future now, since the change is inevitable and superintendents will be virtually powerless in its wake. Pesticides will be banned no matter how many lobbyists we employ. Golfers are going to have to accept that fact.

Those Scottish chaps have not nurtured the game of golf for centuries by accident. They have something to teach us. Perhaps the way back to the future lies on the other side of the Big Pond.



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