

An opinion on unreasonable expectations

‘Everything cannot be perfect on every golf course every day. Even if it were possible, what would it cost?’

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Golfers are well known for making comparisons. They seem to take pride in telling anyone who will listen how a course down the road does something this way or that. They compare budgets, acreage maintained, soils, grass types, green speed, the amount of labor and many other facts. Sometimes, the comparisons are accurate, sometimes not.

Let’s take this comparison one step further. It’s not really valid, but it is interesting, nonetheless.

Baseball: A .250 batting average is just that — an average. A ball player hits safely one at-bat in four. A “star” bats .300 and an immortal like Ted Williams bats .400. If you are keeping score, and you should be, that’s four out of ten.

Basketball: Superstars shoot just over 50% from the field. They shoot a ball into a hoop at a distance of zero (a dunk) to 18-22 feet or more.

Golf: A par round of golf is normally about 72. Golfers who consistently shoot less than par are found on the PGA tour making lots of money. Golfers who shoot consistently over par are found everywhere and includes those people making comparisons. The average handicap in the country is just over 18. The average golfer, therefore, shoots about about 25% over par.

At what percentage do golf course superintendents produce quality turfgrass? As a basis for comparison, golf courses contain about 30 acres of fairways, 2.5 acres of greens and 2.5 acres of tees. This equates to about 100,000 square feet of greens and tees and 1,320,000 square feet of fairways. Thus, if a superintendent “bats” .400, which would put him in great company in baseball, it means your superstar would lose the equivalent of 10.8 greens and tees

out of 18. On fairways, he would lose about 18 acres of turf.

While this .400 batting average might get you into the Baseball Hall of Fame, you would probably lose you job as a golf course superintendent.

All of this may sound ludicrous, but the fact remains that golfers have set such high standards for their golf courses that maintaining these standards is difficult, expensive and

sometimes impossible to achieve. To keep alive every blade of grass on every green, tee and fairway regardless of the conditions and not being willing to accept anything less is wishful thinking and a mistake.

Everything cannot be perfect on every golf course every day. Even if it were possible, what would it cost?

So, look at your golf course. My message to course officials reading this opinion is not to be so concerned if the

golf course superintendent bats only .998. After all, this equates to losing about 200 square feet of turf, a 10-foot by 20-foot area of greens or tees and 2,640 square feet of fairways or six-one-hundredths (.06) of an acre.

Anyone who bats this percentage or better deserves a pat on the back, not a kick in the pants. After all, what other industry which deals so closely with Mother Nature can boast a 99% average or better. Not many.

Therefore, the next time you read about a professional athlete making \$2,000,000 a year to achieve only 30% batting average, be proud... because golf course superintendents are batting 99% or better.

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What's your batting average?

“A good superintendent is his own toughest critic.”

Perfection is only a perception. It is often desired and seldom attained. If idealistic perfection is sought but not achieved, then perhaps realistic excellence will be the result.

who have rescued, renovated, and rehabilitated turf maintenance operations at club after club only to be faced with threats of dismissal when things aren't perfect. Imperfections don't have to be tolerated, but they should be understood. Focusing on a small problem can magnify it out of proportion to the overall excellent job being done by the superintendent.

No golf course is ever perfect

Perfection is not likely ever to exist on a golf course. One man's fast greens are another man's three-putt nightmare. A tall rough is the low handicapper's challenge and the high handicapper's double bogey. One member shoots par and thinks the course is

“perfect” and the next person can't break a hundred and thinks the course is terrible. And so it goes.

It seems that even accomplished golfers can't quite comprehend that golf turf is a living, growing carpet of vegetation that endures use and abuse by people, machines, and mother nature. It is likely that during periods of poor growing conditions combined with heavy play there will be thin or worn turf areas. Trying to maintain 100 percent perfect putting surfaces at 1/8, 5/32, or even 3/16 of an inch day after day is an impossible task.

A good superintendent is his own toughest critic. He doesn't need someone who doesn't really understand the complex nature of golf turf conditioning to nitpick the golf course. A good superintendent with adequate resources at his disposal will address and correct the flaws that exist if it is possible to do so.

Green Side Up



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Golf course superintendents should strive for perfection as they groom and condition their courses. They may never reach absolute perfection, but competent professionals will develop programs that produce overall excellence and improved playing conditions. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln: *You can grow some of the grass all of the time, all of the grass some of the time, but you can't grow all of the grass all of the time.*

It is very frustrating to hear of excellent dedicated superintendents,

This is the season to be thankful for all the good things in our lives. If you have a superintendent who has obviously demonstrated his professional skills, be thankful and appreciative for the changes and improvements he has made to your club. This is a good time to be realistic and charitable in your perceptions about the level of excellence at your club. After all, no one is perfect!