



John Walsh
Editor

WHERE THE POWER SHOULD BE

There's a plethora of information disseminated and endless gossip bandied about during the Golf Industry Show and its related conferences. As an editor, attending and covering such an event can be overwhelming. During the show, you absorb and process a ton of stuff. Your noggin works overtime. Some things you've heard before, some material is technical and difficult to understand, a few announcements are newsworthy, and some gossip is juicy. Afterwards, you're physically and mentally exhausted.

Reflecting on the show each year – amid all the conversations, interviews, speeches and presentations – there's usually one comment from somebody that sticks out in your mind and strikes you as more thought-provoking than anything you heard during the show. This year, that comment came from a shark – Greg Norman.

Speaking to a group of editors and reporters before the general session, Norman spent a considerable amount of time discussing golf and the environment and the bad rap the general public gives golf when it comes to environmental stewardship. As a trustee of the Environmental Institute for Golf, he emphasized the course maintenance data being collected at golf facilities throughout the country that eventually will be put into a "bible" that can be presented to legislators to help debunk the myth that golf course maintenance is harmful to the environment.

But listening to Norman's comments about intertwining the environment with course conditioning, this stuck out like a patch of zoysia in the middle of a bentgrass green: "We need to start backwards," he said. "Superintendents should be going to the members to tell them how the course should be, not the members going to the superintendent to determine conditions. We need to put the power where the power should be. Superintendents should be allowed to control how golf courses should be set up."

Wow! Imagine if that were true. What a difference it would make with your jobs. Think of how many superintendents would be working with different attitudes. If this were true, we'd see more brown grass during certain times of the year. Ask Norman or some of his European counterparts – there's nothing wrong with the brown look. Here in the States, Norman cited ChampionsGate Golf Club in Florida as an example of a course that's not wall-to-wall green all the time and values healthy turf and great playing conditions more than aesthetics.

We all know that because members pay dues – and, in many cases, own the club – what they want, they get. It's a simple concept to understand. But how about the concept of members paying for the expertise of a superintendent who dictates course conditions because he has the in-depth knowledge to make those types of decisions. If that were the case, superintendents would garner a deeper respect from members because they would trust you more than they do now.

If you work at a private club where you think you have more control over course conditions than what's considered the norm, let me know. I'd love to hear about it. It's definitely worth a story (or 12).

Superintendents should act on Norman's proposition. Think about how you can gently tip the balance of power for controlling course conditions in your favor more. For some, it's out of the question, especially in the hotly contested arena of club politics. But for others, it might be possible, so why not try? It would be good for the environment, your budget and your sanity. In a larger scope, it would be good environmental public relations for the industry. The trick, though, is explaining convincingly to members why it's good for them, too. Just tell them Greg Norman says that's the way it should be. What golfer can argue with a legendary pro golfer who's an ambassador for the game worldwide? **GCI**

We would like to hear from you. Please post any comments you have about this column on our message board, which is at www.golfcourseindustry.com/messageboard.



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