

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

Isometimes think the golf industry exists in two distinct, parallel universes. I call them Game World and Maintenance World.

In Game World, you find highly paid golf superstars enjoying an existence unencumbered by strife. They live in a well-modulated world of courtesy cars, sponsored parties and other trappings common to the world of the professional athlete. Their lives are well-ordered.

In Maintenance World, on the other hand, superintendents deal with unpredictable forces like the weather, golfers who don't know the rules of etiquette, turf diseases and interfering club officers. Their world is the antithesis of order, with wildness ruling the day.

Inhabitants of Game World almost never cross paths with those from Maintenance World. In fact, if someone from Maintenance World transported into Game World and brought along with him the contentious issues facing the superintendent profession, then Game World might implode and disappear from the galaxy.

Isn't it strange how nothing negative ever spoils the superstar admiration golfers receive? It's as if some mystical force relegates all the dark and foreboding thoughts about golf and the environment to Maintenance World.

The celebrities and television networks make money hand over fist on the playing fields of golf, but those who tend those verdant venues bear the brunt of sensational headlines about water guzzling golf courses or fish kills in ponds.

The cash registers of clubs jingle with the sale of greens fees, tournament admissions and ever-changing golf equipment. Those revenues combine with product endorsements and sponsorships to guarantee big purses. On the other hand, the keepers of the greens must beg and squeeze suppliers for a few dollars to finance tournaments to raise a few bucks for turf research. Where's the justice in that?

Wouldn't it be nice if the lords and ladies of the game would throw down a few gold pieces to the laborers who bolster their rich kingdoms? Only a handful of golf pros give their time and (some) dollars to turf research, preaching our value to the choir instead of the general public.

Parallel Universes Divide Industry

BY JOEL JACKSON



ISN'T IT STRANGE
HOW NOTHING
NEGATIVE EVER
SPOILS THE
SUPERSTAR
ADMIRATION
GOLFERS RECEIVE?

The USGA funded turf research to the tune of several millions of dollars over the past few years, but it could do a better job of advertising the positive results during the U.S. Open. Furthermore, what roles do the PGA, LPGA and Senior PGA Tours and the PGA of America play in this story?

For all the charitable giving that those tours tout, they should include turf programs at the leading universities for a share of the loot that is plundered from Game World. If they *are* donating to turf research, it's a well-kept secret that instead ought to be heralded on prime-time TV.

Think about how decisively public opinion could be swayed if golf's superstars announced, "Hey, we spend most of our lives on a golf course and we wouldn't be out here if it wasn't safe." As an alternative, the PGA could formally announce an annual donation for turf research at the PGA or TPC Championships.

Along with presenting the cardboard check to the researchers, PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem could say, "All the scientific data to date shows that golf courses are not harmful to the environment. To prove it, we are giving \$X million to keep testing our maintenance practices and products to make sure it stays that way."

We often say that golf course maintenance isn't rocket science, but sometimes I wonder if we haven't blasted into a different solar system, far removed from the game the public sees on TV.

If Maintenance World dies off from lack of water and strangulation from government red tape, then it might implode. Where would Golf World be then?

Joel Jackson, CGCS, retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.