

I could probably get an interview with Tiger Woods easier than I could get an interview with Brad Owen. And that's a cryin' shame. Owen is the superintendent of Augusta National GC, where Woods has won three Masters. But Owen may be tougher to get on the phone to talk turf than it is to get Tiger on the horn to talk about the art of getting up and down after missing a green.

I wanted to interview Owen for a story I researched and wrote on superintendents who tend classical courses. After all, Owen is superintendent of one of the most classic classical courses in the world.

I wanted to talk to Owen about what it's like to tend turf at such a revered track. I wanted to ask him about the agronomic challenges on the course. I wanted to ask him about the political pressures he faces in dealing with such an esteemed membership.

I wanted to interview Owen so *Golfdom* readers — Owen's peers — could learn from what he had to say. Some superintendents would probably hang on every word Owen would have to say about tending turf at Augusta in the 21st century.

I interviewed several other superintendents of classical courses for the story, which appears in this month's issue on page 58. Certified superintendent Mark Kuhns, director of grounds for Baltusrol GC, put me up for the night in the club's historic clubhouse before giving me a guided tour of the club's two courses the next day. Matt Shaffer, director of golf course operations at Merion GC, also gave me a tour and was as candid as a person could be during our interview.

When I tried to call Owen for the story to see if he was interested in a phone interview, I was cast into his voicemail. I left him a message telling him about the story and asked him if I could have 15 minutes of his time. I received a call back from someone, presumably the Augusta maintenance facility's receptionist, who spoke rapidly and in a monotone voice: "Brad Owen wanted me to call you and thank you for considering to include him in the article you're writing, but he's simply not available to talk to the media. He appreciates your understanding of this. Thank you very much. Bye."

I wasn't surprised that Owen declined

Augusta and the Sounds of Silence

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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because of my similar past experiences of trying to get an interview with him. But this time I wanted a worthy explanation as to why he wouldn't talk. So I called the woman back, and she referred me to Glen Greenspan, Augusta's communications director. Greenspan told me I couldn't talk to Owen because "it's our long-standing policy" not to give interviews.

"But I only want to talk to Brad about turf," I said in a bewildered tone.

"It's just our policy, regardless of whether it's a trade magazine, the national media or a local radio station," Greenspan said, noting that chairman Hootie Johnson is the only one who can talk. "It's just the way we do things." (After the Martha Burk fiasco, maybe Augusta should put the clamps on Hootie's vocal cords, too.)

Well, the way Augusta handles media relations is a joke. The club is taking itself *way* too seriously. What's Augusta's rationale? Is this all part of the club's mystique? Is the club wary that some important information will be leaked? Whatever it is, Augusta comes off as arrogant and ignorant.

I believe Owen would gladly consent to an interview if the Augusta brass loosened its reins on him and allowed him to talk. Owen is obviously abiding by the club's inane rule.

Rarely does a superintendent decline to talk to me or probably any other reporter. And the superintendents who decline interviews give solid reasons for doing so.

Most superintendents enjoy being interviewed and like to share information they think can help their peers. That's precisely what's so great about this industry — that brotherhood factor. It's also what this magazine is all about.

Isn't it a shame that the superintendent of arguably the most famous course in the world can't participate in the process?

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