

**A**s I write this, our June issue is in the mail, so the testy letters about Geoff Shackelford's pointed parody of the "USGA of the future" have yet to start arriving. But I know they will — we'll probably have several of them in our August issue.

Whenever we run a tongue-in-cheek piece like this, we always get letters from readers who:

- A. Didn't get the humor or the point.
- B. Got the humor but hated the point.
- C. Got the humor and liked the point.
- D. Think that if we can't say something nice, we shouldn't say anything at all.
- E. Call us "lame" for not being tougher.

In short, receiving and responding to a bunch of letters is the price (or perhaps the reward) for letting Shackelford or any *Golfdom* columnist push the opinion envelope. We knew Shackelford's column would irritate some people, but we ran it because he has a valid point of view.

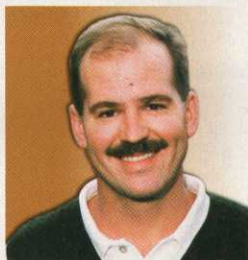
That said, it doesn't mean that I agreed 100 percent with him. Shackelford made it eminently clear that he feels passionately that the USGA has fundamentally failed to address the ball-go-far issue in golf. I agree with him to the extent that the folks in Far Hills have clearly been slow to draw a line in the sand with the sticks and balls suppliers. I also acknowledge that they're loath to get the daylight sued out of them again (and most likely lose) on a restraint-of-trade claim. Do the words "square grooves" ring a bell?

Still, I'm more inclined than Shackelford to cut the Blue Blazers some slack on this because I know that when they finally go to the mats on equipment limits — and I think they eventually will — it'll be the courtroom equivalent of Ali vs. Frazier. It'll be an ugly, long, bloody fight and the only real winners will be bazillion or so lawyers who will feast on the corpse of the case.

But as the distance debate rages on, a sad and disturbing event slipped under nearly everyone's radar: The USGA decided to end publication of *Golf Journal* in favor of an e-

## Cutting the Blue Blazers Some Slack

BY PAT JONES



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newsletter. The USGA said the *Journal* "no longer fulfills information needs the way it once did nor supports our mission at present or in the future." Our translation: It was too expensive.

*Golf Journal* went through many ups and downs over the years, but it was always a source of great writing, wit and interesting news from USGA. That alone makes it a loss for all who love the game.

But what's disturbing to me is that the *Journal* was an important and believable voice for superintendents and sound agronomic practices for the 750,000 or so avid golfers in the members program. Each issue would usually feature at least one piece of subtle propaganda about green speed, frost delays, ballmark repair or other hot-button issues penned by one of the leaders from the agronomy staff.

Can you think of a more credible and valuable public relations tool? Can you believe that we've lost an important pipeline to those club presidents, green chairmen and other golfheads who need education the most?

Believe it. Absent an outcry from members, *Golf Journal* is history.

USGA is an outstanding organization staffed and led by tremendous people. Should it decide to finally take a stand and say, "Damn the lawsuits, full speed ahead!" in regards to distance? That would be a courageous and risky stand, and we'd all applaud it.

Should it reconsider the decision to dump *Golf Journal* just to save a few bucks? We can only hope.

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