

I watched a terrific show on *The Learning Channel* the other night about urban legends. The program debunked several of these unverifiable but true-sounding stories that periodically bubble to the surface of the public's consciousness. One in particular — the traveling businessman who succumbs to a beautiful woman's charms only to awake the next morning missing a kidney — can be traced back hundreds of years. Fascinating stuff.

Golf's urban legends are equally fascinating and just as hard to snuff out. The latest example of their persistence was in a hatchet job — er, article — on the online magazine, *Salon.com*.

If you're not familiar with Salon, you should know that, politically, it flies farther to the left than a John Daly duck-hook. Think I'm exaggerating? The title of the piece in question is "Poisoned Fairways."

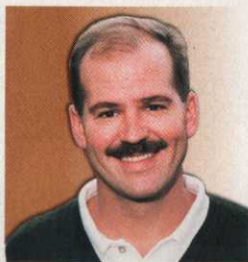
The article did a wonderful job of reviving several of golf-related urban legends repeatedly discredited by science, law and good journalism. For starters, it revives the now infamous 1982 "EPA study" of golf course pesticide use. This piece of wild extrapolation, actually done by the AARP, claimed golf courses used more active ingredient per acre than farming.

That's a stunning statistic, until you scratch the surface of the methodology. The "science" behind the study involved surveying a couple of dozen Northeast U.S. courses about how much active ingredient they applied to putting surfaces annually. Then that number was taken and multiplied by the total acreage of the average golf course — 150 acres or so. The result was a ludicrously high number based on the idea that every course in America applied chemicals wall-to-wall as often as possible. Good science, huh?

Next up, predictably, was yet another appearance by the industry's one-and-only ghost, Navy Lt. George Prior. Prior died "suspiciously" after playing a round of golf on a course that had been treated with a fungicide. His now famous habit of placing his golf ball in his mouth between holes was cited as the contamination method. The wrongful death suit was settled out of court, leaving an information gap that's caused Prior to pop up like a poltergeist in a bad horror movie for two decades.

A Witch's Brew of Misinformation

BY PAT JONES



SALON.COM

ARTICLE REVIVES

URBAN LEGENDS

REPEATEDLY

DISCREDITED BY

SCIENCE, LAW AND

GOOD JOURNALISM

All you need to know about this case is that the real facts behind it drove John Stossel of ABC News to convert from leading antipesticide crusader to leading skeptic of unsupported activist claims.

The famed University of Iowa Mortality Study also reared its ugly head once again in the story with the suggestion that superintendents died from higher rates from pesticide-related cancers. The article omitted the fact that the study's lead scientist said repeatedly that no cause-and-effect relationship could be inferred from the results.

Just to cap off this witch's brew of bias and misinformation, *Salon* claims that the golf industry gets away with all of this skullduggery because it has a powerful federal lobby whose campaign contributions rank somewhere between the NRA and Big Tobacco.

Pardon me while I laugh uncontrollably for a few minutes. Powerful? The golf industry couldn't lobby its way out of a wet paper bag. Influence federal legislation? The industry couldn't get a parking ticket fixed. Contributions? The average Congressman finds more spare change under the cushions of his couch than the industry gives annually.

Nonetheless, another urban legend is born. Thanks to the Internet, the myth of an all-powerful golf lobby will soon have the same resilience as the tale of the wayward businessman who loses his kidney. Pretty soon we'll be receiving e-mails about how President Bush has secretly conspired with Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus and Tim Finchem to turn all of Yosemite National Park into a giant driving range.

Hey, it must be true. I saw it somewhere on the Internet.

Pat Jones is the publisher/editorial director of Goldfdom. He can be reached at 440-891-3126 or pjones@advanstar.com