

**T**odd Hamilton, the unflappable champion of Britain's Open Championship at Royal Troon, said he played "ugly golf" to win the Claret Jug. By most American golfer standards, he also played on an ugly golf course.

But one man's ugly is another man's utopia. One of golf's amazing paradoxes is the expensive pilgrimages Americans make to Great Britain to play Scottish golf courses. But once home, they prohibit architects from building such aesthetically challenged golf courses in *their* backyards.

When did English rose gardens become models for golf course architecture in America? Instead of low wind-cheating, ground-hugging shots that carom off the humps and bumps of grassed-over sand dunes, Americans began hitting shots over trees and ponds on courses that look like cemeteries.

I'm not sure where the American fetish for "all green, all the time" began. Unfortunately, it may be impossible to go back. Most American golfers grew up only knowing that version of the game and anything less verdant than a botanical garden with the consistency of a pool table seems to be a cause for concern.

As I look back over the past two months, I can't help but recall the rainbow of turf colors at Troon and Shinnecock Hills. The swirling blend of purple, tan, straw yellow, gray, brown and sometimes light green was a sight to behold. I wonder if American golfers were gagging at the gorse or captivated by the competition. I will claim the latter from the vantage point of an armchair superintendent, but I would be less than honest if I didn't say I was squirming in my chair during both those telecasts because the turf looked like it was under incredible stress.

I admit that I've been "taught" to expect 7,000 yards of unblemished emerald green turf on a golf course. On more than one Sunday, I watch in empathetic agony as putting surfaces wilt and appear near death in the afternoon sun. It's an instinctive reaction from having lost grass as a superintendent and having hosted PGA Tour events, only to have golfers expect my course to be open for resort play the next day. But for sheer golf drama nothing beats a player plying his skill against the rub of the green on an undulating, firm and fast golf course.

## A 'Pretty' Ugly Situation for Golf

BY JOEL JACKSON



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While the conditions at Shinnecock were perhaps too far over the top on the last day, the contenders all played the same conditions. Retief Goosen played the course as he found it. The same can be said for Hamilton at Troon and Ben Curtis at Royal St. George's in 2003. I'll guarantee you they weren't concerned about color. They were only focused on results. It is infinitely easier for a golfer to adjust his game to the current course conditions than for the superintendent to adjust 150 acres of turfgrass to the whims of golfers.

Why can't American golfers accept that challenge? We could save more water and use even less chemicals and fertilizers than we already do. What do immaculately manicured curbs, cart paths and landscaped tee sign complexes have to do with golf anyway?

It seems the intent of a lot of our courses is to become a cover story in *Better Homes and Gardens*. The reason for having golf courses compete to see who is the prettiest is that selling real estate around the clubs has forced superintendents to blend the golf courses to look like the members' own private property. When flash and window dressing obscure the core values of the game, which is creative shot making, then we have issues — and we may have already started down that slippery slope. We will also know the end is near when 99 percent of TV golf is played on lush, green courses.

As long as Americans only perceive style over substance as the essence of golf courses, they will never be satisfied with playing Royal Troon. They will only want to play "perfect" parkland courses that rob the game of its flavor and interest.

That, my friends, is a truly ugly situation.

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