

**T**he battle against excessive green speed is over. The so-called progressives have won. You know them. They're the types who tell us to quit our whining and accept that equipment must go unregulated because course setup tactics have proven adept at keeping scoring in check.

Yes, in case you were wondering, it *is* a form of irony gone bad (a.k.a. hypocrisy). The progressives say there should be no rules in effect to regulate equipment, but golf courses should ratchet up green speeds — even if that means the risk of losing greens — to prevent progress in the scoring department.

I'll repeat: Low scoring must be stopped so that we can clear the way for progress.

Who let Yogi into this debate?

From Augusta National to the club invitational to the city championship, green speeds had better be pushing double digits or Old Man Par will be spinning in his grave.

This costly trend has so many ramifications for the game — not that this is a newsflash for anyone reading this. Super-fast greens were initially just a new, fun thing that came with improved agronomic practices — like a new toy.

But as better players overpower a course, thanks to improved equipment that should have been regulated, layouts look at green speed as a way to “protect” their design integrity. In other words, they want fast greens to prevent the low scores believed to be embarrassing to a course's reputation.

But based on comments in a recent story by *GolfWorld's* Nick Seitz, the prevent-scoring mentality in golf is working as well as the prevent defense works for football teams.

“The faster the greens, the more players like them because a 20-footer today is like a 10-footer in my time,” Johnny Miller said.

According to Seitz, the average putts per green hit in regulation has been tracked since 1986, when the tour average was 1.810. For 2005 it was 1.779.

That doesn't sound like a lot, but it translates to a stroke and a half improvement per tournament. Anyone following golf over that

## Life in Fast Lane Not What It Seems

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



WE KNOW THAT  
MOST COURSES  
WILL RESIST GOING  
BACKWARD WITH  
GREEN SPEEDS.  
BUT . . .

time knows that tournament greens have become smoother and more consistent but also several feet faster on the Stimpmeter.

Common sense tells you that the increased speed would negate the improved consistency, or even worsen putting stats. But Seitz reported a 1988 PGA Tour study that said players made 54.8 percent of putts from 6 feet, while in 2005 the number was an astounding 69.6 percent.

Architect and swing instructor Jim Hardy told *GolfWorld*: “My generation had to clobber the ball, the greens were so much slower and rougher. Today they're much faster and smoother, and even the worst putter can roll it. The greens have gone from 8 to 10 on the Stimpmeter in my day to 12 and higher today.”

Then there was this little ray of sunshine last fall. (You can feel free to share this one with the green chairman or your assistant pro). When asked about all of the recent changes to Augusta, Tiger Woods responded, “I can understand why they lengthen it. Also, then again, they want us to hit the same clubs that we used to hit to the holes. Then if that's the case, make the greens as slow as they used to be. The greens are running 12 and 13. They never ran 12 or 13 back in the '60s, '70s and '80s. It just wasn't that way.”

We know that most courses will resist going backward with green speeds. But if just one big-time event can show that players struggle on slower greens and scores go up, by golly, golf could be on to something.

Why, that winning combination might be just the kind of “progress” that makes everyone happy.

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*Geoff Shackelford can be reached at  
geoffshac@aol.com.*