

Did you hear the PGA Tour's finest howling like babies when Jack Nicklaus and Paul B. Latshaw Jr. unveiled furrowed bunkers for Muirfield Village Golf Club's Memorial Tournament last month?

Davis Love was so mad about the furrows that he wouldn't talk to reporters after the first round. Jeff Maggert, a notorious expert when it comes to the art of bunker raking, said the harrowing hazards were "Mickey Mouse" and that we'll "see players looking to pop this event off [their schedules] if they keep doing it."

While the folks at Muirfield deserve praise for trying to punch up the hazardless hazard, it's hard to imagine how the return of furrowed bunkers — long thought to have died at Oakmont Country Club after they were born in the early 20th century — will do anything but create more headaches for superintendents and golf committees.

The bunker, already overraked and primped because of what golfers see on television, may now have to be furrowed for the club invitational or the local amateur qualifying event. Or even on a daily basis at those courses where golfers love to be tortured.

So you're saying, "That's not so bad except for the cost of extra rakes and some golfers griping."

Oh, but it gets worse. At Muirfield, the fairway bunkers were more severely furrowed while the greenside bunkers' furrows had to be raked in a certain pattern. The PGA Tour is analyzing these directional raking issues to determine in the future which way the raking must go.

Now I bet you're thinking, "Good luck trying to get an underpaid, overworked employee to do this correctly in the morning darkness!"

The list of negative ramifications is endless, when the problem here really starts with courses being under fire to react to unregulated distance and to mimic the PGA Tour conditions.

Another more subtle influence is this ridiculous idea that bunkers should be manicured daily, creating the bizarre situation that has players begging for their balls to end up in the sand.

The PGA Tour would do a great service to the game by shelving the furrowed concept and instead announcing that they will rake bunkers

A Dangerous Bunker Mentality

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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Wednesday night of tournament week and then not again for the rest of the event, except in the case of a rain washout. This would put bunker maintenance at the mercy of players and caddies, while raising the stakes each day as conditions get more and more unpredictable.

As the Muirfield saga was playing out, I heard from certified superintendent Jerry Coldiron, who oversees 45 holes at Boone Links/Lassing Pointe in Florence, Ky.

"The game and expected conditions have simply gotten too expensive for the average facility to sustain, and bunker maintenance is a very expensive part of most budgets," Coldiron said. "Golfers expect what they see on TV tournaments on a daily basis."

Working with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America staff and superintendents Kerry Satterwhite and Sandy Queen, Coldiron is attempting to develop a public golf forum at the Golf Industry Show next year that deals with ways to help public course superintendents who are bearing the brunt of a struggling game.

"Although Muirfield and the tour are doing this furrowing for different reasons, the return of bunker maintenance to a more reasonable level will help make the game more affordable in the long run," Coldiron says.

The group wants to address how the pressures of reduced revenue and increased cost have put undue pressure on many superintendents and their operations. But instead of beating a dead horse, Coldiron and friends want to offer insights, ideas and hopefully support to the unique situation faced by many public golf operations.

He would like your advice on topics and speakers who can lend ideas to struggling facilities. E-mail him at turfman@one.net.

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