

Unless you've been living under a fairway mower for the past month, you've heard about Golf Digest's "How Green Is Golf?" report in the magazine's May issue. Golf Digest billed the 30-page section as "The Most Important Article We've Ever Published."

If you haven't read the piece, which focuses on golf and the environment, please take the time to do so. Some parts are very good. The piece is posted on Golf Digest's Web site.

But after reading the report, written by John Barton, you might conclude that Golf Digest doesn't do golf course superintendents any favors when it comes to promoting their image as environmental stewards.

In the article, Barton takes Augusta National Golf Club to task for its alleged conditioning practices. Barton writes: "Like the fur coat and the SUV, the 'Augusta look' — freakishly green wall-to-wall grass on a life-support system of too much water and toxic chemicals, greens running at virtually unplayable speeds, ornamental flowers all over the place — will become less admired, and even stigmatized."

Ouch!

Before I comment on Barton's take on Augusta, let me point out that Golf Digest ranked Augusta National No. 3 (behind Pine Valley Golf Club and Shinnecock Hills Golf Club) in its 2007-2008 America's 100 Greatest Golf Courses list. One question: Just what does Golf Digest admire about Augusta to rank the course so high?

Back to Barton's comments. In his rant against Augusta, Barton basically accuses Augusta superintendent Brad Owen and his staff of over-irrigating and spraying loads of dangerous chemicals to achieve abnormal-looking turf. How does Barton know this?

The bet here is that Owen, like all responsible superintendents, uses chemicals safely and water judiciously. Regarding his pesticide use, it can be assumed that Owen is using the best brand-named products money can buy because his massive maintenance budget can afford it. Many of the new pesticides, by the way, are also safer and have much lower use rates.

Golf Digest Does Supers No Favors

BY LARRY AYLWARD



SUPERINTENDENTS

ACROSS THE

COUNTRY

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UPON READING THIS

Regarding irrigation, who cares if Owen may have went to the well a little more than he should have for Masters week? Let's not forget that the Masters equates to dollar signs with many zeroes attached to them. It's big business for golf, not to mention the local economy of the tiny town of Augusta. If Golf Digest wants to single out an entity for wasting water, it should point the finger at the guys who wash their SUVs twice a week — and leave the hoses running while doing so.

In his article, Barton also suggests that golfers turn into activists at the courses they play and lobby superintendents to reduce water and pesticide use. Superintendents across the country probably cringed collectively upon reading this.

Yes, if Carl Spackler is turning a golf course into a noxious dump by applying fungicides, herbicides and insecticides daily, the golfers ought to talk to him about cutting back his pesticide use. But I would hate to see golfers cornering someone like Merion Golf Club's Matt Shaffer, one of the best and brightest superintendents in the business, to grill him about his pesticide use on the golf course. That wouldn't be fair to Shaffer and other alike superintendents, who should be trusted in such capacities, not questioned.

Barton also writes that golfers should "support your golf course superintendent, who too often is treated as a second-class citizen, sequestered somewhere out of sight in 'the shed.'" Come again? This statement might have been true 25 years, but not today. Most superintendents are much more respected in 2008.

The moral of the Golf Digest story: While Barton calls superintendents "experts" and advises golfers to get to know them, he inadvertently bashes them throughout the piece.

Like I said, the Golf Digest article does superintendents no favors. So much for the industry getting a boost from the mainstream media.