

**I** remember the day I was offered this gig in 1998. And do you remember one of my first columns in 1999? It was the one that made you give me dirty looks at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's conference and show.

Yes, the "10 stupid things superintendents do" did generate plenty of discussion. Come to think of it, that column set off quite the firestorm on the GCSAA's then-new online discussion group. That's right, when *Golfdom* started, the Internet was just moving into the mainstream.

By now you've probably learned that I'm just an equal-opportunity tweaker of every interest group in golf. And, often, I hear about it from you. That's all right, though. I welcome your tweaks.

Architects still send the occasional preachy e-mails about how I don't understand the many horrors of their jobs, or they just moan on GolfClubAtlas.com when this space is used to revere the work of designers who left courses that stand up over time (as opposed to way too much modern stuff that falls apart at the seams before reaching their 10th birthdays).

In the past 10 years, I've done plenty of consulting and spent more than 200 days on-site of a new course project, so I've lived through the horrors of green committee meetings and regulatory agency nonsense. That still doesn't prevent architects from lecturing, but it has cut down on the mail.

Over the last decade, we've seen a remarkable embrace of the environment and designs that respect Mother Nature's handiwork. I remember many a superintendent suggesting that those rugged, natural courses embraced by me in this column were actually a lot harder to maintain than ones groomed like a robber-baron's backyard.

But that talk doesn't occur much anymore. The nature-inspired movement has gained traction with golfers, media and PGA players, and was embraced most of all by many talented superintendents who tool the visions of architects to new heights.

## Shack Looks Back — And Forward

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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Without question, this shift in the golf course industry is the most heartwarming to have watched. Due to water issues and continued public interest in emphasizing natural golf, we have only begun to see just how beautiful and artful golf courses can look and play.

Not all is right with the industry, though. After Tiger Woods won the 1998 Masters, I began to crusade for something to be done about rapid distance advances so that great old-tournament venues and everyday courses would not be butchered in a quest to offset technology.

You can see how well my crusading worked.

Hundreds of millions have been spent, courses have become narrower and more unsafe, and the governing bodies haven't done a damned thing. Yet.

In 10 more years, I hope I'm not still ranting about the ball. I hope we will have moved on to more productive topics. Because if not, the mug you see accompanying this column will look like a "before" shot for Hair Club For Men.

Actually, it'll probably look that way no matter what happens on the distance issue.

I just hope *Golfdom* and I are still here getting to be part of such a fascinating industry. I suspect we will be, though you may be reading us on a cool little digital tablet as you wait for the Havercams to finish the eighth hole.

Some things never change.

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*Geoff Shackelford can be reached at [geoffshac@aol.com](mailto:geoffshac@aol.com). You can read many of his past columns at [www.golfdom.com](http://www.golfdom.com). Just type "Designs on Golf" in the search engine.*