

**W**e work in a wonderful world, this small sphere known as the golf course industry. Yet, sometimes we aren't on the same planet

when it comes to some of the industry's most vital issues. Consider golf and the environment.

And consider this year's U.S. Open, played in June at Pebble Beach Golf Links. I'm convinced the United States Golf Association was determined to make an agronomic environmental statement with the course's look and setup. But the message hit home like a Big Bertha driver over the head.

New USGA President Jim Hyler talked up how golf needs to be a better environmental steward during NBC's telecast of the tournament. Hyler seems to be the catalyst behind the USGA's ramped-up environmental approach. He's on record as saying that "brown can become the new green" and that he prefers "firm and fast" conditions. Pebble Beach, especially the course's greens, looked brown, all right, and they were as firm and fast as a pool table's new felt.

But the brown greens made for a lot of negative water-cooler talk, and not just among the Joe Golfers of the world. Golf course superintendents were talking, too. And many of them didn't like what they saw.

*Golfdom* recently surveyed about 100 superintendents and asked them their opinions on how the greens looked. A whopping 38 percent said, "I think the greens looked awful."

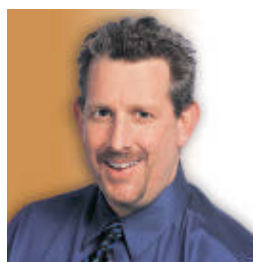
It's safe to say that most golf fans watching the U.S. Open on TV couldn't believe their eyes when they saw Pebble Beach's greens. It wasn't the Pebble Beach they'd seen on TV in the past.

Now, this is not to pick on Pebble Beach (although I wouldn't want to work in its marketing department right now). The course's superintendent, Chris Dalhamer, and his experienced crew consistently turn out one of the best golf courses in the world. What people saw during the U.S. Open was a dictate by the USGA to provide a tough test of golf.

Don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with firm and fast conditions. And there's nothing

# The Golf Industry's Mixed Message

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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ing wrong with saying turfgrass doesn't need to be as green and lush as a rain forest. But it's obvious to me that what people saw on TV at Pebble Beach was just too much "brown" for them to stomach at one time.

The USGA's Pat Gross, an agronomist with the association's Green Section who was involved with getting Pebble Beach ready for the tournament, said "cosmetics and appearance were not high on the priority list at Pebble Beach." But the problem is that cosmetics and appearance *are* high on the priority list at most golf courses that host televised professional events. That includes the mother of all picture-perfect golf courses, Augusta National, seen by millions in its emerald-green glory during Masters week in April.

Alas, the golf course industry is sending a mixed message. It's no wonder people were asking, "What happened to Pebble Beach's greens?"

I'm all for golf courses getting away from their super-model looks, but this transformation must occur slowly and subtly. Golfers have been conditioned to *expect* perfect-looking golf courses, and superintendents have been conditioned to *provide* perfect-looking golf courses. This dynamic isn't going to change overnight.

Hyler and the USGA also need to come up with a better word than "brown" if they want to replace the word "green." Many people, including superintendents, believe that "brown" turf equates to dead turf.

And, by the way, what's wrong with green turf? Why are so many people determined on taking the green out of golf?

I guess that's another story for another day.

*Aylward can be reached at [laylward@questex.com](mailto:laylward@questex.com).*