

## Golf's Hope for Change

**H**o, ho, ho! It's just another happy holiday season in golf. There are course closures and bankruptcies galore. There are job cuts and decreased spending. Raises seem non-existent, and there's more pressure on golf course superintendents to raise standards with depleted maintenance budgets.

And the whipped cream atop this melting sundae? A bunch of lavishly paid folks in seats of power who dream of "premium" pricing and "value delivery" schemes to save the game.

Go ahead, have another glass of eggnog.

At least the day seems to have arrived where folks are angry enough to speak their peace and brainstorm for a new future. It helped that for every major issue facing the game the last few years, a boondoggle of some sort erupted in 2010 to remind the world of our most glaring problems: from slow play, to lack of participation, to bloated rules, to spoiled tour pros, to the demise of the design business.

Every week there seemed to be another embarrassing story that made us forget all of the great things about golf. But clearly these little imbroglios happen for a reason.

Now we just need a forum for the grievances to be aired and solutions to be proffered. That's why it's time for a golf summit.

All overpaid CEOs of non-profit golf organizations need to share stages with the greedy CEOs of golf equipment manufacturers and tell us what they're doing to move the game into the future. It will be illuminating, if nothing else, to

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realize few of them have any answers.

Side seminars would need to be scheduled where we hear from a variety of folks — preferably no C-level types — who have insights into the current state of affairs. We could hear ideas to help golf courses re-imagine business plans, to kick around cutting-edge ideas, and figure out what will excite golfers about playing the game again.

Essential to this would be cooperation from the Golf Channel to televise these seminars. That's right, no more behind-closed-doors lectures from the suits telling everyone that everything will be A-OK.

It's time to have these discussions in the open for all to see, even if they are only broadcast online. And it'd make better television than most of the stuff they air.

Unfortunately, the super-conservative nature of the golf business makes such an event all but impossible. Concerns of "loss of face" seem to override all rational thought in golf, even as everyone agrees the sport and business needs to talk.

Yet, what could bring more "loss of face" than losing your high-priced gig because your job is eliminated after contraction or outright failure?

And that brings us to the real

problem: Everything in America is about the short term. While it's easy to blame so much on the wretched economy, much of golf's problems, like America's problems, stem from minimal foresight and planning for when times would be leaner.

If an organized summit with the same-old tired dealmakers spouting the good ol' boys' company lines isn't your thing, maybe it's time for golf's version of the Tea Party. Perhaps there could be rogue gatherings at the PGA Show and the Golf Industry Show. Golf pros and superintendents could dress up as Old Tom Morris, wield hickories and signs (minus the misspellings) and plead for a return to another time.

Admittedly, it's a fantasy. But what else would you ask Santa for Christmas? Another \$500 driver? A \$60 box of a dozen balls?

We now know consumables aren't the key to the future. It's time to talk. It's time to scream. It's time to stop hoping for change and time to start barking about it.

Are you with me?

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