

Score One for Supers

After one of the least agronomically friendly summers in decades, this probably isn't the time for golf course superintendents to open up a second-story clubhouse window and scream at unsuspecting golfers, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take 12 on the Stimp meter anymore!"

Such an outburst, while emotionally cleansing and the only appropriate way to communicate with some golfers, may not be ideal for job security. But after a prestigious list of courses lost parts or all of their greens in dreadful growing conditions and at today's ultra-low mowing heights, it's impossible not to revisit the tiresome and seemingly never-ending chase for green speed.

Because, as is always the case, it's not the golfers taking the blame for pushing the internal organs too hard. Instead, it's their doctors — superintendents — who are blamed for not keeping the hearts pumping even after ingesting the golf maintenance equivalent of a 12-pack a day topped off by a six-pack every night.

It's rather comical how most Americans take doctor's orders so seriously, popping pricey pills without a trace of skepticism. Yet, when golf course superintendents want to do some preventive care or back off the chase for speed, they're depriving the patients of fun and not doing their jobs.

I suppose superintendents shouldn't be treated with the same respect as doctors — after all, this isn't a life-and-death business. But short of donning white lab coats for their daily house calls around the course to inspect all 18

CHAMBERS BAY'S DAVID WIENECKE PUT HIS FOOT DOWN AND LET THE WORLD KNOW THAT HE KNEW HIS COURSE BETTER THAN ANYBODY ELSE

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



holes, there's only one way to make golfers understand who knows best. It's time to start screaming out of clubhouse windows. Or, at least, offering strong defenses when given the opportunity.

This summer, at least one superintendent did just that — David Wienecke, superintendent of Chambers Bay Golf Course in University Place, Wash., and site of the 2010 U.S. Amateur. After years of agronomic struggles brought on by tough Pacific Northwest winters and the arduous task of growing in fescue fairways and greens, the course was just where David Wienecke wanted it. But the week prior to a 36-hole stroke-play qualifier, the United States Golf Association arrived and said the course needed to be faster and firmer. It turned out to be the first real blunder in Mike Davis' otherwise impressive run of setting up courses for USGA tournaments.

"When Mike told me not to water at all, I got a little concerned," Wienecke told *Cybergolf's* Tony Dear. "The irrigation system had been turned off for nearly a week already at that point, but we hadn't been hand-watering the greens. I was worried that drying them out any more might cause a problem. I thought the course might

become unfair because good shots wouldn't be rewarded, and I was worried we might lose some hole locations."

Wienecke turned out to be a prophet, as the stroke play portion of the U.S. Amateur produced an appalling 79.25 scoring average in benign weather. The best amateur golfers in the world were humiliated and, worse, most left Chambers Bay with a bad taste in their mouths.

While the USGA's quest to turn off the water and promote firm and fast golf is noble, the cause surely took a hit. But, admirably, Wienecke scored one for superintendents by putting his foot down and letting the world know that he knew his course better than the visitors.

Whether this episode translates into a wake-up call for golf's elite to listen to their superintendents more carefully is really up to the doctors themselves.

The only way to put an end to the madness is to speak your piece before it's too late. And, failing that, you can pick up white lab coats at any medical supply store.

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