

**A:** Here in the southwestern United States, where I live, I've just proven a theory that the industry has been struggling with for a few years, and that is, "Brown is not the new green."

Let's go back several years when a high-ranking industry official commented to the media that "Brown is the new green." I believe his intent was to support sustainable environmental practices on golf courses, which all superintendents do, but the comment was interpreted wrong and naturally the media latched onto it and took it to another unintended level. This comment made quite a stir in the golf industry at the time and eventually the interpretation of the words was changed to "Firm and Fast."

I had totally forgotten about this phrase until the other day, when I was flying from Phoenix to San Diego on Southwest Airlines. I never read the airline magazine in the pouch in front of me, but I didn't have my iPod and had nothing else to read. So, I reached down and pulled out the airline's *Spirit* magazine and began flipping through it. Lo and behold on page 71 there was an interesting article about Pinehurst. As I was reading it, I turned the page a couple of times. Then, on page 75, there it was at the top right corner of the page: "Brown is the new green." The author called it the catchphrase of the USGA.

I was fortunate enough to be involved in working very closely with my friends at the USGA in prepping for the 2008 United States Open Golf Championship, and the concept of "Firm and Fast" is what we strived for and accomplished. It truly was a team effort, and the golf course (Torrey Pines) was far from being brown.

Now back to the southwestern United States. During September and into October most superintendents there (and throughout the South) are busy overseeding their golf courses with winter ryegrasses and other cool-season turf varieties, prepping for the region's peak golf season.

Typically, one of the main steps in the overseeding process is to scalp the leaf blade off the summer turf and take it down to the stubble prior to seeding. Guess what happens? It turns everything brown. Most golf courses close for

## Q: Was Brown Ever the New Green?

BY MARK WOODWARD, CGCS



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a short period of time while they complete the overseeding process for two reasons: 1) They don't want golfers getting wet as they run the irrigation germinating the grass seeds and 2) Golfers don't like to play on brown turf.

The odd thing about growing turfgrass in some southern states is that cool-season grasses are grown for close to nine months while warm-season grasses are only grown for three months. To the layperson, this may seem counterintuitive, but we do it because golfers want to play golf on nice, green turf.

On top of this, most members at country clubs I'm familiar with wouldn't tolerate brown turf. Yet just last month, I saw that the phrase "brown is the new green" is still being thrown about in discussions.

How many thousands of people who fly Southwest Airlines read the same article I did? It doesn't matter if they're golfers or not, it seems to me that we need to get this phrase out of our vocabulary and take every opportunity to correct people when it is used. It's obvious the phrase is easily misinterpreted, and I personally don't think it does the industry any good.

When I was with the GCSAA, we talked a lot about how superintendents manage all of their resources responsibly with the thought of continuously improving to make golf courses sustainable businesses. Under normal circumstances, golf courses do not need to be brown. Facilities should focus on playability and being good stewards of the environment.

So in my view, "Brown is still not the new green."

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