

# The beauty is a

# BEAST

What does a *Playboy* bunny have in common with golf on TV?

Far too much, argues one superintendent.

**T**elevised golf is to the game what *Playboy* magazine is to women. Hear me out.

The connection to *Playboy* and TV golf may not seem obvious at first, but the similarities are scary. Let's reflect for a minute on what the core of *Playboy's* business plan is. It takes a natural beauty, puts her through hair and makeup, augments parts of her body, sprays her, then snaps countless pictures of her.

But even with her natural beauty and all of that work, the photos still aren't good enough to be published. *Playboy* asks its Photoshop experts to clean up the images and make this beauty somehow sparkle even more.

Is that process all that different from what the professional tours do to a golf course for

a tournament? They take a nice golf course, spend months (if not years) preparing it for a tournament, bring in dozens of volunteers to help maintain it, haul in plenty of equipment to mow it, and spend thousands of dollars to make it perfect for a five-day event.

But that level of beauty still isn't good enough, so the TV cameras install green filters to make it look even better!

A golf course — just like a 5'10" 23-year-old who enjoys long walks on the beach and likes a good sense of humor — is a living, breathing organism. Living things are subject to weaknesses and illnesses. Golf courses get diseased, are subject to environmental stress, deteriorate from lack of care, and age. They're also each remarkably different from one another, just like people. When golfers compare their



course to the one down the street, it's about as fair a comparison as sizing up Tiger Woods to Seth Jones! This quest for perfection doesn't end following the *Playboy* photo shoot, nor does it end when the final putt is dropped. Young women all over America strive to be as "perfect" as women in magazines. Likewise, the "perfect" conditions that golfers see on TV spark questions about the condition of their home clubs, but without the benefit of an unlimited budget, volunteer force and handy camera filters.

We might like to admire what we see on TV and what we see in the magazine. But let's be clear: What we're seeing isn't perfect and it's far from real.

### Keep it real

Don't get me wrong, I understand that professional golf (and golfers) drive interest in our business, generate funds and are a critical piece of our industry. I also understand that competing for a prize in the hundreds of thousands of dollars is much different than partaking in the Friday pot game at the local course.

But there are countless examples of how TV golf has unnecessarily, and often negatively, affected everyday golf. Where did the concept of painting edges on cups come from? It was done so that viewers could better see the hole on TV while the player is putting. Now painting cups has become an everyday standard on clubs all over the country. Why?

Green divot sand was used so divots wouldn't stand out as much in aerial shots on TV. Laying green divot sand is expensive, time consuming and has no impact on playing conditions. Yet how common is green divot sand on courses that don't ever see a single TV camera?

I'm not saying that a desire to improve is a bad thing. My point is, we need to show Mr. Smith that Tiger gets a bad lie in the fairway every now and then. If the course is dried out to make it firmer and faster for the golfers, don't alter the picture on the TV to hide that from the viewers. Here's another suggestion: Within reason, keep the rounds to 4.5 hours. How do we as an industry convince golfers to play in 4 hours when the guys on TV take 6?

There are more questions than answers at this point, but unless we commit to re-educating golfers about expectations, clubs will continue to experience the same self-esteem problems that women do when sizing themselves up to the "perfect female body" in magazines. We don't need to convince our customers that playing on dirt fairways is acceptable, but can we convince them that bunkers don't have to be "consistent" every day?

Let's keep golf real. Let's put the focus back on what the game's all about — having fun. **G**

Our author, a superintendent on the West Coast, asked to remain anonymous. He said it was because he didn't want to damage his career, but we also think part of it was because he didn't want his wife to know he never cancelled that subscription to *Playboy*.

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