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# Designs on Golf

■ ARCHITECTURE

**E**ly Callaway's determination to fracture the rules of golf cannot transpire if you believe the game's tradition, as well as its future, are important. This isn't the first equipment controversy, but it's by far the most dangerous.

Equipment controversies have always been part of the game, and golf has survived — even thrived — off technological advances. For the first time, however, someone is consciously trying to undermine the USGA and put a profit-driven corporation in control of the game.

Callaway Golf's statement about the "Rule 35" ball and the ERC driver implies that the USGA is stifling free trade. The company believes the blue blazers want to prevent average golfers from enjoying this one-time, special Callaway product that will only help "recreational golfers." Of course, the ERC is only the beginning of the nonconforming products Callaway wants to introduce.

If Callaway is allowed to stretch the game further, existing golf courses will lose their strategic interest. Most layouts will not call on the interesting shots intended by the architect. Future courses will be impractical 8,500-yard monsters that will take six hours to play on a fast day. Environmentalists will turn on the game more than ever as new layouts use up more land and waste more water at a time when we need to be using less irrigation. Like a rubber band, golf can only stretch so much before it snaps.

The turnover rate of golfers entering and leaving the game will change as golf already takes too long, is too expensive and is too difficult for most people to play. Forget 3 million a year taking up the game and 3 million quitting. Make that 4 million a year quitting because they will become discouraged when they can't afford certain clubs and don't have time to spare for a six-hour round.

Ely Callaway believes the ends (his corporate profits) justifies the means (burying long-standing rules that have held the game together). Unfettered commerce is the only system that makes sense to men like Callaway, but we saw how well that has worked in the California energy market.

## Why the USGA Must Prevail

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



IF CALLAWAY IS  
ALLOWED TO  
STRETCH THE GAME  
FURTHER, EXISTING  
COURSES WILL LOSE  
THEIR STRATEGIC  
INTEREST

The power companies felt the same way about the rules governing energy distribution in California that Callaway does about golf's rules. They were a pain and stood in the way of joy, happiness and lower rates for customers. So the state deregulated, and, as we all know, things haven't turned out well for the Golden State.

The same rules question applies to the Florida recount. One could argue that both sides fidgeted, stretched and in some cases tried to circumvent the rules when they didn't like the outcome. But we had a judicial system that ultimately stepped in and order was restored.

The USGA functions as golf's judicial system. It's the only governing body in the sport that can put its personal preferences aside and do what is right for the game's present and future.


Ely Callaway has decided he doesn't like the rules of golf, so he has set out to use his marketing and financial machine to move them out of his way. Problem is, he entered the golf business knowing these rules were in place. In the late 1980s, he even supported the USGA during the Ping square-groove controversy. The language stating that a club cannot serve as a "trampoline" or "spring" have been in the rule book for a years. Now that such wording interferes with Callaway's sales and growth projections for 2001, his support for the rule has eroded.

Ely Callaway is dangerous to golf. Regardless of how you feel about our friends in Far Hills, N.J., the USGA needs the golf industry's support. Without that support, the integrity of the game we work so hard to preserve will be completely destroyed.

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*Geoff Shackelford's new book is Alister MacKenzie's Cypress Point club. He can be reached at [geoffshackelford@aol.com](mailto:geoffshackelford@aol.com)*





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Circle No 123



# Building the *(Im)*perfect

*We need more tracks  
with slow greens and  
bunkers that yield  
fried-egg lies*

**T**he demand for perfect greens, bunkers and carpet-like turf is a daily challenge for superintendents. They know they can deliver these playing conditions occasionally, but factors out of their control do not allow for this high level of management year-round.

There's no doubt that ultra-fast greens and manicured conditions can be accomplished for professional golf events and special tournaments. But does this type of golf course really make it more challenging? I've always believed that the way the course is maintained has more impact upon the game than any development in equipment, design or player skill. The ways courses are maintained today have helped to lower scores for tour players.

It has been more than six years since I was a USGA agronomist. Back then, putting green speed was often the hot topic as golfers expressed their desire for better (faster) greens. It was the belief of many green committees and those involved in tournament preparation that fast greens prevent low scores that make courses look easy — and low scores would embarrass club officials and members.

I've always preached against cutting bentgrass below 5/32 of an inch, frequent rolling and the intense management needed to achieve unrealistic green speed. Yet the quest for perfect turf continues. Recently, the green-speed issue was brought to my attention again while I visited a course where members requested that Stimpmeter green speeds be posted each morning on the first tee. This ridiculous and nonsensical request sparked me to preach again about the evils of fast greens and perfect conditions.

Golf maintenance practices are seldom discussed during televised tournaments, save the few passing comments about general turf conditions. Viewers would rather hear how the titanium liquid-balanced ball and the mass-inertia energy-transfer shaft can improve their games.

Maybe most golfers don't care about grass, but they should. They should also care about bunkers. The way grass and bunkers are maintained (mowed, rolled and raked) has a big effect on scores at the professional level and, to a lesser extent, at the amateur level.

BY JIM CONNOLLY

## Golf Course



According to the PGA Tour, the average number of putts per round by the top 10 golfers decreased one stroke in the last 20 years from 28.96 in 1980 to 27.96 in 1999.

Either golfers are better putters or the surface is getting easier to putt. Let's start with the surface, which has been improving for some time. Greens are much truer than 20 years ago, and golfers can thank superintendents for that.

A flawless green with a smooth, predictable putting surface offers the best chance of getting the ball in the hole. Advancements in mowing equipment, motorized rollers, the increase in maintenance dollars, and, of course, skilled superintendents make his possible.

However, golfers' putting skills can't be overlooked, and today's pros have every resource available for improving them. Their motivation to succeed is obvious because they play for millions of dollars and high-profile exposure.

Still, the condition of the golf course plays a bigger part than given credit.

Let's look at total scoring. In 1980, the average score on the Tour was 70.63, compared to 69.39 in 1999. The difference is 1.24.

Considering that scoring average has dropped 1.24 strokes over the last 20 years and putting scores have dropped one stroke per round, it can be assumed that 81 percent of improvement is in putting.

Let's study sand saves from greenside bunkers. In 1980, sand saves were 56.13 percent. They improved to 65.48 percent in 1999, a whopping 9.35 percent.

A bunker is barely a hazard for today's pros. Bunker maintenance today is designed to make sure that sand is a uniform 4-inch depth and firm to avoid the unpopular fried-egg lie. But what's wrong with the occasional fried egg? Approach shots that miss the green from a short distance should occasionally plug.

Driving distance has improved 15.79 yards since 1980 to an average of 286.49 yards in 1999. I'll leave the equipment improvement debate to the USGA. Golfers are stronger, healthier and hit the ball further. However, they are only slightly more accurate than golfers of the past, improving just 2.46 percent in fairways hit over the last 20 years.

There's not much change in greens hit in regulation. In 1980, 70.44 percent of greens were hit, compared to 71.08 in 1999. Some

say pros are hitting closer to the hole because they're 16 yards closer to greens and hitting from perfect fairways. That may be true, but I say that most of the improvement to scoring is realized on greens and bunkers.

Interestingly, greens and bunkers happen to be the two areas of maintenance that superintendents receive the most criticism from golfers and TV commentators. Superintendents have responded wisely, for the sake of job security, and given golfers what they want. Scores are lower because of these refinements.

But are fast greens always better than slow greens? Excluding the job security issue, no. The Stimpmeter has become our thermometer of healthy and sick, good and bad. Somewhere in the last 25 years, fast greens have become synonymous with good greens.

However, that raises some questions. What if greens were mowed higher, say at 3/16 of an inch instead of 1/8 inch? Would it make any difference in scoring?

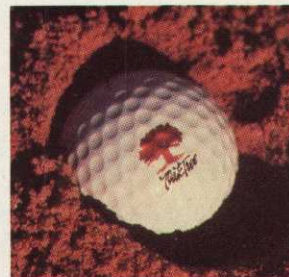
If greens were slower, the best golfers would still win.

Consider this story: An American golfer comments to a sage Scottish golfer about how bad the greens are and that his ball might bounce away from the hole. The Scot replies, "Aye, but it just as well might bounce in!" The moral of this story: The element of luck has been eliminated from American sports because we have grown to believe that luck is a bad thing.

Accepting the reality that good and bad luck is gone forever, there is another factor that is equally, if not more, important. How much energy has been expended in the last 25 years for the development of better grasses, pesticides and equipment so turfgrass can be maintained at higher green speeds? What decrease in maintenance costs and input would be realized if cutting heights went from 1/8 of an inch to 3/16 of an inch? Would pesticide applications and irrigation costs decrease?

To the best of my knowledge, there are no scientific studies comparing the cost to maintain a green at higher cutting heights or the effects on pesticide use. But this research would provide some interesting comparisons because

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MIKE KLEMMÉ

*Approach shots that miss the green from a short distance should occasionally plug.*



## Building the Imperfect Golf Course

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all the energy expended to maintain fast greens has resulted in a decrease of one stroke per round for less than 1 percent of the world's golfers. The rest of us sub-golfers have not improved our scores at all.

Slower greens will also add an element of golf course design that is in danger of becoming extinct — that is, greens with

character and contour. The famous golf architect, Alistair MacKenzie, wrote his rules for golf design during the early 1900s. His ideal golf design principle No. 4 states:

“The greens and fairways should be sufficiently undulating (contour), but there should be no hill climbing.”

If we follow the current pattern of

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# ROMTEC

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Greens mowed continually at 1/8 of an inch force an architect to design one style of green – flat.

MIKE KLEMM

thinking that fast is good and faster is better, we will soon be playing on greens that are flat or impossible to putt on if undulating.

I'll never forget playing the first hole at The National Golf Links in Long Island, N.Y. The first green had so much undulation you could not see your opponent's feet if he was standing 10 yards away on the same green. I'm not saying every course needs greens shaped like the Himalayas, but I miss playing on greens that offer interesting breaks and rolls.

Undulating greens add character to design. But greens mowed continually at 1/8 of an inch force an architect to design one style of green — flat.

Professional sports and the money they generate will make it difficult to change the way greens, bunkers and turf-grass are manicured. I doubt the PGA or USGA would want to deal with the controversy that would result from raising cutting heights on greens or roughing up the sand in bunkers for professional events. Many of the touring pros would protest vehemently, exclaiming the course conditions were terrible.

I always feel like a voice in the wilderness when writing about fast greens and perfect conditions. I can only hope that I will occasionally have the opportunity to play golf on a course where the greens have character, and I'm playing with a group that appreciates the same. ■

*James Connolly, an agronomic consultant in Spokane, Wash., can be reached at [jim@jcgolf.com](mailto:jim@jcgolf.com)*





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Circle No. 134





## Golf in the Corporate World

BY BRIDGET FALBO

**R**ush Creek GC in Maple Grove, Minn., is nestled in a Minneapolis suburb, a 30-minute drive from the corporate headquarters of hotel giant Carlson Cos. and equipment manufacturer Toro Co., as well as other large companies. It's no wonder that the golf course focuses its energies on landing corporate clients to host events there. In fact, the course recently added meeting rooms and a ballroom to the Scottish-style clubhouse to highlight its focus on business-oriented events.

Superintendent Greg Christian understands the course's mission and how it affects his duties. Since the course must continually impress new clients who have never been to the course, Christian is always on marketing duty.



Whether it's double-cutting the greens for a corporate tournament, setting up catering equipment for a group event or directing

**"We can do 99 percent of the job correctly, but it only takes a small blunder for a customer not to come back."**

—GREG CHRISTIAN



**The course, including the 6th hole, must always look its best for corporate events.**

puzzled-looking visitors to the clubhouse, he's providing personalized customer service in the hope that the same corporate events will be booked again next year. Christian is also hoping his efforts will help the course snag new corporate clients by impressing visiting golfers who work for other companies.

"We often don't get a second chance to impress corporate clients," Christian says. "We can do 99 percent of the job correctly, but it only takes a small blunder for a customer not to come back. While small mistakes might be OK at a country club where you have a built-in clientele, it's not acceptable here."

Customer service is the main marketing tool for the 4-year-old club, says Jenny Trendera, golf event coordinator. The course has a Web site and a

marketing packet to send to potential clients, but what sells it is extraordinary service.

"We run corporate events [the way] clients want," Trendera says. "We do everything we possibly can to make it the best [for them]."

Although corporate events only amount to 25 percent of play, there are such events held at least three days a week throughout the season from May to October. It's those events that make the most money for the course, Christian acknowledges.

But the course is also public, and Christian says his greatest challenge is managing public traffic so the course is in ideal shape for corporate events and tournaments. While all tournaments — with the challenges of accommodating spectators, corporate pavilions and the ever-present television crews — provide maintenance headaches, they also provide proven

*Continued on page 60*





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## Money Shot

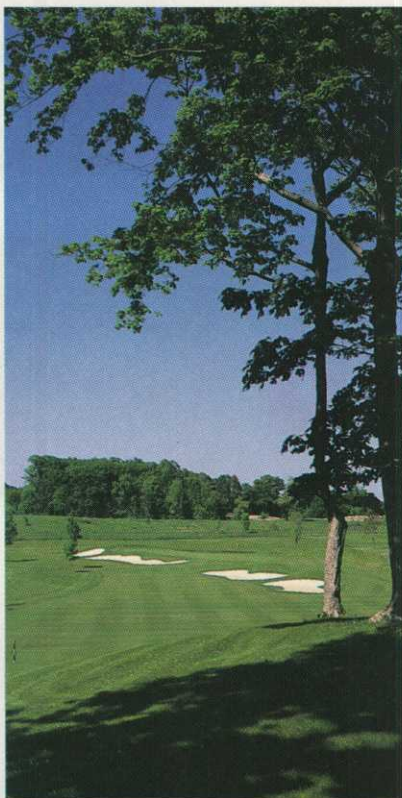
*Continued from page 58*

marketing tools for the course. In that spirit, Christian welcomes those challenges.

In fact, when Michael Jordan played in a charity event at the club last year, he drew plenty of onlookers, which eventually turned into more corporate business, Trenda says. The idea is to get corporations thinking that if the course is good enough for Michael Jordan, it's good enough for them, she adds.

The concentration on marketing to corporate clients often conflicts with renovation and new building projects, since the course must always be at its best. That's why good communication between the executive management and course maintenance department is crucial.

The course is booked throughout the season, so when maintenance has to rebuild tees or redesign bunkers, it



**Management support is a must if course maintenance will be used as a marketing tool.**

has to fit into a schedule that inconveniences as few customers as possible, Christian says.

Christian appreciates the support he receives from course management when he asks for extra help to achieve its goals. But he says it's simply not an ask-and-you-shall-receive policy.

"Before the support is the challenge — 'Can you get this done with what you have?' " Christian says. "If you have a dependable crew, good relations with management and an understanding of how to put the course and yourself on stage to serve customers, marketing corporate events becomes just another facet of a superintendent's job." ■

*Falbo is a free-lance writer who lives in Albertsville, Minn.*

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