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# Golfdom

JANUARY 2004 • VOLUME 60 • NO. 1

## *Do Fast Greens Have You on the Run?*



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A sweet little old lady owned a home beside the fifth fairway, and stray golf balls were constantly landing in her back yard. Instead of getting angry, she removed the fence along the boundary, invited the golfers onto her property, showed them where their balls were located, and encouraged them to take their next shot from that spot. Even when they missed and dug deep divots in her lawn, she would tell them to go ahead and take another swing.

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The little old lady replied with a wink, "I'm planning to turn my yard into a garden, and I figure within another month those bozos will have it plowed for me."

Golfdom's



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**F**ive years ago this month, I was sitting in this same chair staring at this same computer screen thinking the same thing: “What the heck am I going to write about?”

But back in January 1999, I was nervous — scared to death in fact — about the idea of setting a good tone for the premiere issue of *Golfdom*. After all, I’d pretty much bet the farm (and a lot of our parent company’s money) on the notion that superintendents wanted a new magazine.

So I decided to steal an idea from William Randolph Hearst (the publishing magnate who was the model for *Citizen Kane*) and write a mission statement that outlined what *Golfdom* would attempt to be for readers. Five years later, here’s a second look at those promises (in bold) we made back then with a few comments (below them) about how I think we’ve done along the way. I’ve edited some for length, but the original version is still online at [www.golfdom.com](http://www.golfdom.com) if you’re interested.

***Golfdom* will assume its readers are smart people. We won’t talk down to you or insult your intelligence.**

The biggest thrill of this job is opening my e-mail after a new issue is mailed and finding that we’ve hit a hot button with you by opening some Pandora’s Box of a topic. It’s gratifying to know that, even when we do something challenging or controversial, the great majority of readers “get it.”

***Golfdom* will focus on solutions. You want results, not a laundry list of techniques you could try if you had infinite time and patience.**

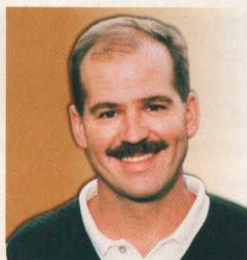
We’ve tried hard to keep this focus on the “takeaway” from every article. And by adding the *TurfGrass Trends* section a few years ago, we’ve expanded to include applied research studies and other more technical information that’s hopefully useful to you.

***Golfdom* will be designed for busy people. Our layout style and story structure is intended to help you efficiently harvest the knowledge you need.**

I was delighted recently to learn that *Golfdom* was identified as “easiest to read” in another industry magazine’s competitive readership study. In our time-compressed world,

## *Golfdom*: Five Years in the Realm

BY PAT JONES



I WAS DELIGHTED  
TO LEARN THAT  
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IDENTIFIED AS  
“EASIEST TO READ”  
IN ANOTHER  
INDUSTRY  
MAGAZINE’S  
READERSHIP STUDY

that’s among the highest compliments we could receive.

***Golfdom* will look great and be fun to read. It’s a magazine, not brain surgery.**

Even though we’ve expanded our technical coverage and now have more pictures of dead bugs and mysterious patch diseases, we haven’t forgotten the words of wisdom offered by the rather tipsy former Redskins great John Riggins to Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, “Loosen up, Sandy baby, you’re too tight.”

***Golfdom* will have an attitude. (Forget) political correctness.**

I don’t know if it qualifies as political correctness, but I’ve toned my occasionally salty vocabulary down over the years thanks to good guidance from our editors and readers. That said, we’re still not afraid to print stuff we know will irritate some folks. Frankly, there are times when people just don’t like hearing both sides of a story. So be it.

***Golfdom* will take stands on behalf of its readers. We won’t shy away from controversy, and we won’t pull punches.**

Thanks to Editor Larry Aylward, Managing Editor Frank H. Andorka Jr. and a great staff of contributors, we’ve regularly taken on the status quo with stories and opinion pieces that simply didn’t get written before we came along. If we’ve helped you and other readers deal with issues in your professional or even personal life, we’re accomplishing our goal.

Well, that’s definitely enough self-congratulation in one column, but I’m proud of what our team has done. With that, I’ll end this the same way I ended five years ago by asking you what you think: You’re the judge. I’d love to hear your verdict.

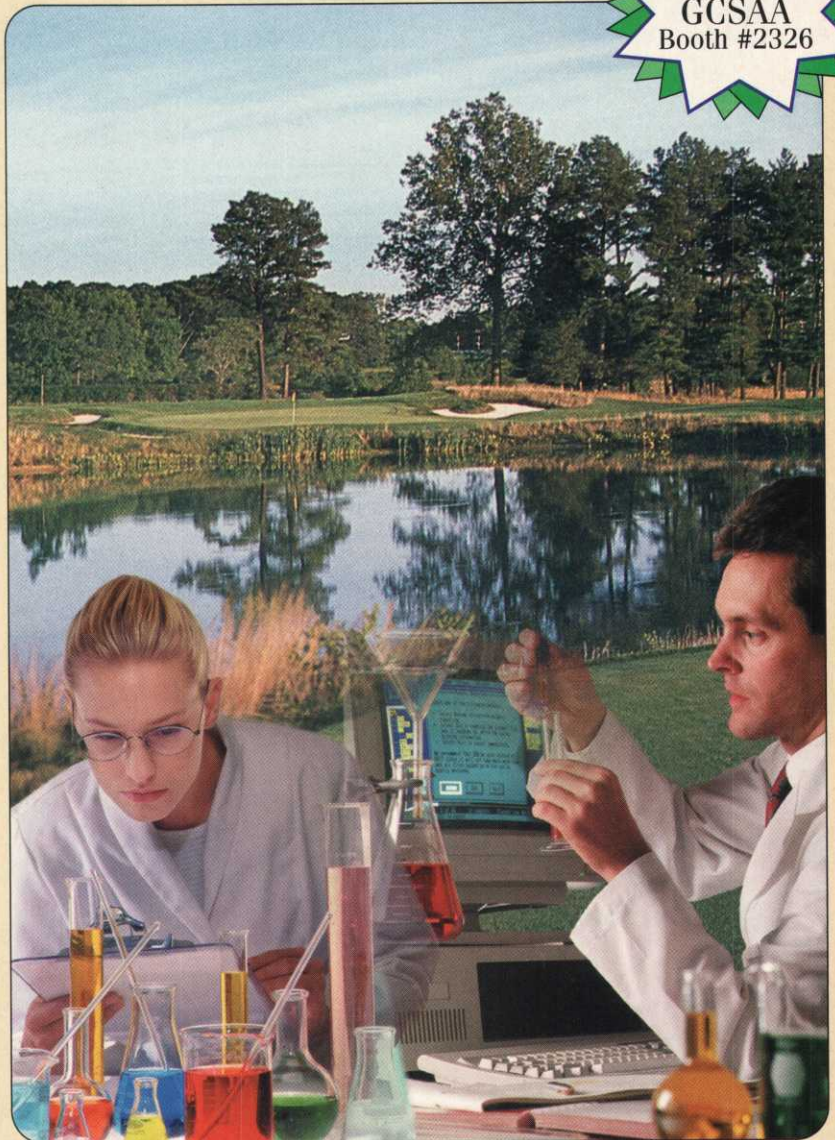
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**W**ord on the street is there's a dangerous game of chicken going on between some superintendents. It seems these superintendents, mostly from private clubs, are competing against each other to see whose course can have the fastest greens in town.

I've often heard superintendents say that they are their own worst enemies when it comes to the self-induced stress involved in managing and maintaining golf courses. But having an informal contest to see who can have the most suped-up greens is lunacy.

It's one thing to be a perfectionist when it comes to golf course maintenance — tidying up the course so splendidly that members can't find anything to complain about — and having to deal with the consequences in the form of pressure-packed expectations. But it's another thing to be foolish when it comes to golf course maintenance — playing Russian roulette with your greens — and having to deal with the consequences in the form of dead turf. The superintendents pushing their greens to the max for sake of speed and impressing members could end up getting themselves fired.

Tim Moraghan, director of championship agronomy for the USGA, says this foolish gamesmanship is happening more frequently in the industry than people think.

"Are superintendents under tremendous pressure from their memberships, or are they under tremendous pressure from their peers?" Moraghan asks.

Here's how this monkey business begins. Members of Club A, who are also members of Club B on the other side of town, play a round at Club B and conclude that the greens there are a half foot faster than the greens at Club A. A few days later, they play Club A and complain to the superintendent that the course's greens are too slow. In fact, they have the nerve to tell the superintendent that the greens at Club B were faster.

Well, superintendent of Club A takes the news personally. He gets it in his mind that he'll show the members — and the superintendent of Club B — who has the fastest greens in town. So he cuts them closer — twice a day —

## This Game Is Fast, Furious and Foolish

BY LARRY AYLWARD



IT'S A CLASSIC CASE

OF MEMBERS

PLAYING THE

SUPERINTENDENT —

NOT TO MENTION A

SUPERINTENDENT

LETTING HIS EGO GET

THE BEST OF HIM

and rolls them to boot. He does this even when the temperature soars into the 90s, and the humidity takes your breath away. The members hail him for his actions — and then they stab him in the back.

They return to Club B and tell the superintendent there that the greens at Club A make his course's greens look as slow as syrup running from a maple tree on a cool spring day. So what does the superintendent of Club B do? You guessed it.

It's a classic case of members playing the superintendent — not to mention a superintendent letting his ego get the best of him.

Not only are competing superintendents hurting themselves, they're hurting their peers, too. They're setting a precedent that calls for faster greens in general.

I hear a lot of superintendents talk about how members and golfers need to be educated to understand the agronomics of golf course maintenance, such as the stress placed on turf when greens are stimping as fast as a concrete sidewalk. The superintendents vying for the quickest greens in town have turned their backs on this responsibility.

Golf faces myriad problems these days — few new players, slow rounds, expensive green fees — all of which can be traced to the headaches created by fast greens. Why would superintendents want to contribute to this mess?

I've talked to many superintendents who cite green speed as a problem at their courses. They say golfers need to be educated to understand the problems that fast greens can cause.

But it seems that some superintendents have to educate themselves and their peers first.

What's that adage about responsibility?

Oh, yeah. "The buck stops here."

---

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