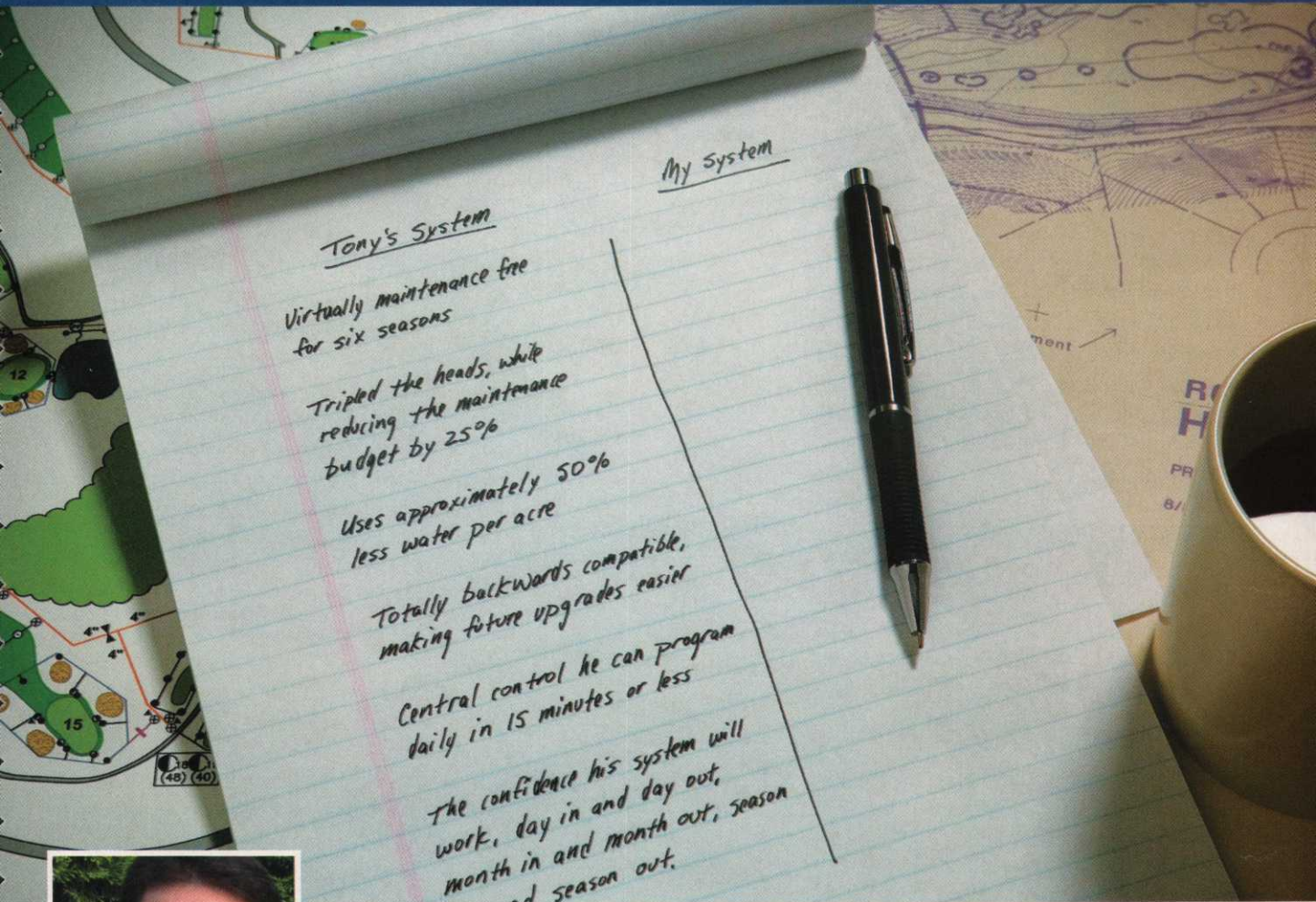


# Doing your homework still pays off.



Tony Girardi, Certified Golf Course Superintendent (CGCS), Rockrimmon Country Club, Stamford, CT

**There is a difference in irrigation systems — just ask Tony Girardi, CGCS.**

In 2001, Tony began a complete course renovation. After experience with two previous installations with competitive systems, he decided to look at Rain Bird to find out the difference for himself. "I started doing a lot of homework, and realized the tremendous benefits of Rain Bird, like the ease of central control and a satellite irrigation system that's fully backwards compatible. We're now in our sixth season, with no major breakdowns, and I've cut my irrigation maintenance budget by 25 percent. With Rain Bird I run virtually maintenance-free season after season, I just don't have to worry about it."

If your system doesn't stack up to Tony's, call 1-800-RAINBIRD or visit [www.rainbird.com/golf](http://www.rainbird.com/golf).

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**A** well-regarded American golf course recently lost much of its finishing par-5 hole to the ocean. Mother Nature left behind just enough room to play a one-shot hole, therefore cutting the course par to 70 from 72.

Scouring the Internet soon after learning of this unfortunate, uh, sea change, I found a local news piece complete with the video report that aired the night before. In it, the local reporter dutifully questioned the head professional about this sad twist and what it meant for the future of the course.

His response?

Many of our finest courses are played at par 70, including the U.S. Open every year where the United States Golf Association lowers par to eliminate red numbers, effectively compensating for other areas where they are lacking.

OK, he didn't say that last part. But, yes, the entire interview revolved around the new par 70 and how that was not a negative. It was noted that 70 is alright for our national championship and in other parts of America, so it'll be fine here, too.

Mind you, they just lost a hole to the sea — one of two holes that played along the ocean. Yet the spin is not that the other 17 holes are just as wonderful as before.

No, it was all about par.

Initially, you might think, wow, how absurd. But we live in an idiocracy after all, and it would not surprise me if the course in question had already heard from golfers leery of tainting their self-importance by cow-towing to a measly par 70, as opposed to the holier than-thou par 72.

Most of you reading this have been nodding your head and asking, "What's the big deal? We've listened to this ridiculous argument almost daily at our home course. Yes, golfers are irrational. Move on!"

Unfortunately, if you haven't had to sit through one of those painful debates over the merits of par 72 versus 70, you better prepare yourself.

The short par 5 is all but dead thanks to the modern ball conspiring with land-locked

## Par 70 Isn't Exactly Chopped Liver

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



THE ONLY WAY TO  
RESTORE DIGNITY  
IS TO LOWER THE  
PAR ON THE  
SHORTEST OF THE  
REACHABLE FIVES

courses. The only way to restore dignity is not through added rough or more bunkering, but by lowering the par on the shortest of the reachable fives.

I used to subscribe to the belief that this was an absurd abdication in the name of protecting ball manufacturers and cowardly governing body types who seem to think their job is to protect the business interests of only one portion of the golf industry.

Well, I still feel that way. But there are rare examples of par switches that actually improved a design. Most notably is St. Andrews' Road hole, which became more interesting when it was reduced in the 1960s from a par 5 to a par 4.

This simple scorecard switch did not eliminate any options nor did it alter the second shot decision that had to be made for those hitting a decent tee shot. A case could even be made that the par reduction added a sense of urgency to the approach shot by making good players feel guilty for laying up.

Still, a lowering of par will not always be the right answer for vulnerable par 5s, but it sure beats the cost and likely headache involved in adding sand, water, hay and the other usual suspects.

Furthermore, should someone complain that the lowering of par will somehow "devalue" the course or embarrass them in front of friends and family, just remind them that Numero Uno in America, Pine Valley, is a par 70. So is Merion. And Shinnecock Hills. And Crystal Downs, and ... well you get the idea.

Thank you for letting me vent.

---

*Geoff Shackelford can be reached at [geoffshac@aol.com](mailto:geoffshac@aol.com). Check out his Web site at [www.geoffshackelford.com](http://www.geoffshackelford.com).*

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# A Little Help From His

Desert Mountain's Shawn Emerson courts consultants to propel agronomic excellence

BY DAVID FRABOTTA, SENIOR EDITOR

**I**t's hard to thrive alone. Successful people rely on family, friends and co-workers to create great outcomes.

That's why Shawn Emerson, director of agronomy at Desert Mountain Golf Club, surrounds himself with the most prolific turf team he can find. Drs. James Beard, Fred Yelverton and Rick Brandenburg converge on Desert Mountain several times each year to iron out turf troubles at the Carefree, Ariz., facility. It's a Dream Team of turfgrass consultants. Beard is a celebrated author and researcher who barely needs introduction in turf circles, and Yelverton (weed science) and Brandenburg (entomology) are noted professors at North Carolina State University. Together with the 180-strong golf course crew at the upscale property, they keep Desert Mountain's six Jack Nicklaus-designed golf courses conditioned as well as any cluster of courses in the country.

The interesting reality is that Emerson thrives on new perspectives and ideas even though it would be easy for him to rest on his laurels. After all, maintaining six championship-caliber golf courses in Arizona's Sonora Desert isn't easy. He overseeds five of them each year with a perennial ryegrass. Then, he must kill off the ryegrass to help the bermudagrass compete when it comes out of dormancy.

With five overseedings a season, Emerson has supervised about 55 of them during his 11 years at Desert Mountain, plus a half dozen more at his past gigs at the Coronado Country Club (El Paso, Texas) and La Quinta (Calif.) PGA West. He has applied about 13 billion gallons of water on his golf courses throughout his career, and he currently manages 5.2 acres of bentgrass greens.

This doesn't appear like a guy who needs a helping hand. Emerson probably has grown as much turfgrass as any superintendent in the country, and he's gone through about 70 transitions back to bermudagrass. Plus he's a superintendent's son. So why would an agronomist at the top of his game feel the need to assemble some of the most resourceful turfgrass personalities on the planet?

"Success is fleeting in this business," Emerson says. "That's why I wanted my own turf council to keep an eye on me. We don't always make good decisions, but a mistake doesn't become an error unless you refuse to change it."

It's clear that good isn't good enough for Emerson. He likes to provide great conditions, and great is what the members are accustomed to as well. These members aren't as fervent as Oakmont Country Club golfers, but they always expect the best at the upscale community. Multi-million-dollar Spanish-

*Continued on page 28*

## THE DREAM TEAM:

1) Shawn Emerson (center) passes a soil sample to his superintendents so they can feel and smell the difference between a healthy sample and an unhealthy one. 2) Dr. Jim Beard examines a healthy root system. 5) From left, Emerson works with Drs. Rick Brandenburg, Fred Yelverton and Beard to manage a pesky *Poa* infestation. 6) The hunt for *Poa* never ends. 7) Yelverton takes a closer look to determine if it's an annual or perennial plant.

*(Photos by: Stuart Buck)*



2 3



# Friends



4 5



1 7



6



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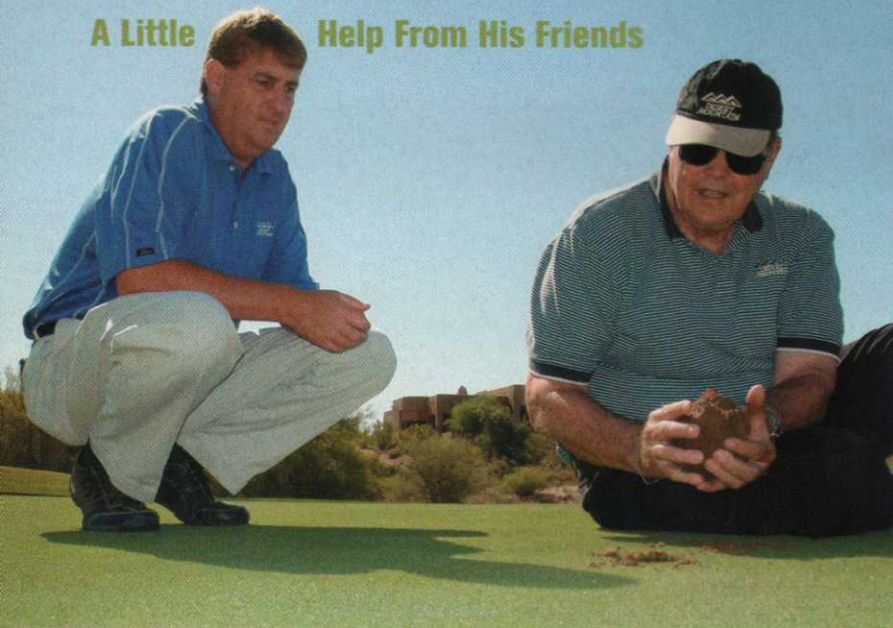
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## A Little Help From His Friends



**Dr. Beard (right) says superintendents must look below ground to get a longer-term perspective of turf health and stress.**

*Continued from page 24*

style winter homes dot the desert mountainsides along with boulders the size of Volkswagens and 200-year-old saguaro cacti. There are several restaurants on the property that cater to any imaginable culinary whim, and agronomists from Wimbledon visit the Desert Mountain Golf Club's grass courts to learn turf-growing tips.

The pace of the place is not for the faint of heart, either. When *Golfdom* caught up with Emerson on a typical 100-degree day in June, Desert Mountain was hosting the Southwest Golf Association's Mens Invitational on its Outlaw course, was closely monitoring the winter ryegrass kill off and subsequent bermudagrass grow-in on the Geronimo course, and resurfacing fairways on its Apache course — all while keeping three courses open with pristine conditions for members.

In addition to looking after 108 golf holes that day, the courses' superintendents and assistant superintendents were meeting with Beard, Yelverton and Brandenburg for agronomic consultations. At times, about 20 golf course managers were cruising around the facility checking rootzones, hunting for *Poa annua* and pinpointing other pests around the 2,000 acres that fall under the purview of golf maintenance.

But the hustle is nothing new for Emerson and his crew, who traverse the property with precise attention to every detail combined with an almost nonchalant style that leaves the impression that these guys handle stress as

well as any crew in the business. And they're as driven as any, too.

### **Architects of efficacy**

It's an obvious passion for agronomy that keeps driving Emerson and his crew to excel, and they also realize operational efficiencies as a direct result of agronomic efficacy. One of the biggest time, labor and money savers has been a result of Beard's original consultation in 1999. Beard, then president and chief scientist of the International Sports Turf Institute after retiring from Texas A&M University in 1992, was courted by Desert Mountain to improve year-round playing conditions. Beard is known worldwide for his books "Turfgrass: Science and Culture" (the best-selling reference book in the field) and "Turf Management for Golf Courses" (a staple for golf course superintendents since 1982). Needless to say, it was a coup to bring him aboard.

Beard helped Emerson determine that the ryegrass was competing with the bermudagrass while the warm-season grass was trying to re-establish itself. The result was bare spots when it came out of dormancy. The only solution was to generate a total kill — not just a die off — of the ryegrass just as the bermuda came out of dormancy.

As a result, Beard and Emerson formulated a plan that pinpointed the critical timing when chemical spraying would be most effective — slightly contingent on weather patterns — so ryegrass could be killed at the exact time that the bermudagrass ascended in the desert springtime. Then Beard brought in Yelverton and Brandenburg (I guess even consultants need consultants) to finalize the chemical program, which has been tweaked slightly in each of their visits during the past eight years. The results were profound almost immediately, and the program has eliminated at least 90 percent of the spring-time resodding for the past few years.

"We were using about 2 1/2 acres of sod at a cost of about \$40,000 to \$50,000 before we finalized our spray program," Emerson says. "Now we use about 10,000 square feet, which is about \$4,000."

Cha-ching. Emerson proudly points out



the small patches of sod throughout the golf course: "There's my sod: 2 1/2 acres to *that*," he says.

The savings is a real budget booster, and the labor once lost on laying new turfgrass now can be spent elsewhere around the facility, meaning Emerson can get more done with the same amount of people.

That's the real message here: Consultants cost money, but the investment reaps huge rewards in labor efficiencies, product optimization and the consequential financial savings.

"We might spend about 1 percent on consultant fees, but we save twice that in operational efficiencies as a direct result," Emerson says.

Emerson spends about \$30,000 to \$50,000 a year on consultations, which includes his Dream Team, various soil experts, USGA consultants and irrigation advisors.

"My whole philosophy is checks and balances," Emerson says. "Dr. Beard counsels me, encourages me and makes sure I'm staying on

track. So I make sure that 80 percent of the program is consistent and has not changed for eight years now. The other 20 percent is influenced by environmental and other changes."

Environmental changes might include the 500-foot elevation difference around Desert Mountain's 8,000 total acres, lack of rain, seasonal variances or perhaps the facility's decomposed granite soil structure might have too much salt from the poor-quality reclaimed city water. Some of the property's idiosyncrasies can create a bit of guesswork despite the well-regimented protocols for fertility, chemical use and cultural practices.

The technical speculation necessary for each course superintendent leaves a little wiggle room at the execution level, and sometimes new superintendents lack instant and complete adoption of the program.

"I remember the first time we sprayed the ryegrass, I thought I was going to get fired," says Jose Castillo, superintendent of the Co-

*Continued on page 31*

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