



## Time for Superintendents to Get Out in Front of This Topic

The mainstream media loves to haul out the dirty laundry. But newspapers, magazines, television and radio enjoy stories that offers "good" news, too.

Considering the environment is a hot topic these days, golf course superintendents would be wise to get on the offensive in regard to the topic to tell their stories about the "good" environmental initiatives they're doing at their courses. Watering wisely is under that category.

Maybe this means these superintendents should make presentations about their irrigation tendencies at city council meetings, which reporters often cover, to get the word out that they're not wasting water.

Maybe it means they should invite the press to their courses for a media day. They can provide the press with lunch, offer everyone a polo shirt and tell them how watchful they are not to over-irrigate for the sake of their communities and the environment.

It's time these superintendents step forward and dispute the public's assumption that all golf courses waste water.

— Larry Aylward

and to the point if a superintendent was speaking to a radio reporter. But a superintendent could speak more in-depth about water use if a newspaper or magazine reporter was interviewing him or her.

Lyman suggests that four or five courses within a local chapter unite for a media event to discuss the proactive approach they take collectively to irrigate efficiently.

"If we can just peel back a couple layers of the onion and show people what we have and how we operate, I think they would be amazed at the level of technology and control we have with irrigation systems, especially when you compare that to other irrigators, such as home lawn systems," Lyman says.

The first group of people to be targeted locally should be the people with the power to regulate the resource, says Mike Hughes, executive director of the National Golf Course Owners Association. "I would hone a very tight message to them to show a couple of things: one,

that we don't waste resources; and two, that there's a tremendous societal benefit from the use of the resource in a golf context," he says.

Regarding the latter, industry people agree golf courses also need to send the message that the water they use is for good reason — to provide recreation and generate revenue to local economies. The golf industry, after all, is a \$65 billion industry.

Hughes predicts there will be heavy competition between freshwater users in the future and that golf courses must prove their worth to get their due.

"How do we best position ourselves to win the competition for the resource?" Hughes asks. "We have to work with the regulators and the legislators and educate them so they understand the issue and understand how golf works in that context."

Whether it's a local or national message, Lyman says superintendents can use new GCSAA data that proves superintendents are responsible irrigators. In its report, "Golf Course Water Use and Conservation Study," the GCSAA reports that golf courses use about 1.5 percent of all fresh water dedicated to irrigation nationally. Golf courses use 0.5 percent of total fresh water consumed.

The NGCOA also recently issued a special report entitled, "Troubled Waters: Golf's Future in a Thirsty World," that urges golf courses to act proactively in face of the freshwater shortage.

"We conducted the study because we think golf is a little vulnerable in this issue," Hughes says. "We needed to shore up our position."

Hughes says some golf course owners have been slow to realize the issue's importance. "Like a lot of things in life, unless it's something that's biting at your heels right now, it's something you can easily put in the background and not think about too much," he says.

### The PGA factor

Earlier this year at the Golf Industry Show in Orlando, professional golfer Greg Norman told reporters that the PGA Tour could help educate people about golf and its role in the environment during its television broadcasts. In fact, Norman, who is a board member and the past chairman of the Environmental Institute for Golf (EIFG), said the EIFG talked to the PGA Tour about having golf television announcers, including Gary McCord and Ian Baker Finch, wax about golf's role in the

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Thanks in part to Mark Esoda, the certified superintendent of the Atlanta Country Club, Georgia superintendents are considered irrigation experts.



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environment during weekend broadcasts. Obviously, this would be an excellent opportunity to get out the message to viewers that superintendents are responsible water users.

“We have to get networks and the mainstream media behind this,” Norman says.

Superintendents have an ally in Norman, who says golf courses “get a bad rap” for using too much water. So you can bet he’s spreading that message to the right people when he gets the chance.

Sage Valley’s Green is all for the PGA Tour helping the cause. Not only can announcers and professional golfers drive home the point that superinten-

dents are responsible with their water use, they can also make the point that a little brown on a golf course from lack of water isn’t so bad.

“People listen to what the PGA says,” Green adds.

Green also says a PGA Tour player could get involved, possibly through a sponsor, to help superintendents convey the message. Being a superintendent, Green says he would like to believe that people would listen more to a superintendent than a touring professional on this matter. But with no offense to his peers, Green says a pro would be a bigger draw.

Longtime superintendent Cal Roth, vice president of agronomy for the PGA Tour, says he would love to see his employer get more involved in getting out the message. Contrary to what many golfers and non-golfers might believe, Roth says television stations don’t direct the PGA Tour to “green up” its courses for televised events.

“I’ve done hundreds of tournaments, and I’ve never heard a director or producer come to us and say that we need the golf course greener,” he says. “We try to get by with as little water as we can leading up to the tournament.”

Roth says he would welcome the opportunity to be a television spokesperson to spread the message that



**Greg Norman says golf courses “get a bad rap” for using too much water. “We have to get networks and the mainstream media behind this,” he adds.**

“The message that superintendents and golf courses are responsible water users must be more than a one-shot deal. A once-in-every-10-years campaign isn’t going to help much.”

superintendents are responsible water users. In fact, Roth says he plans to bring up the idea to the PGA Tour’s communications department.

“I would look forward to that opportunity,” he says. “It would be fantastic.”

**A prolonging effect**

The message that superintendents and golf courses are responsible water users must be more than a one-shot deal. A once-every-10-years campaign isn’t going to help much.

Industry people agree the message must be conveyed repeatedly. Rick Slattery, superintendent of Locust Hill Golf Club in Fairport, N.Y., says a recurring message is necessary so it has time to take hold.

“This isn’t going to be like flipping on a light switch,” he says. “The message has to be repeated and repeated and repeated. That’s how you drive home a point.”

Only then will it be a point well taken. ■

**Did You Know . . .**

**1.5%**

of all fresh water dedicated to irrigation is used on golf courses.

**0.5%**

of the nation’s total fresh water is used on golf courses.



## In Their Own Words:

# Why Superintendents Use **Water** Wisely

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

**J**oe Homeowner, the guy who irrigates the concrete sidewalk along with his lawn, doesn't hesitate to point his finger at golf courses for wasting water. But golf course superintendents say Joe Homeowner should point his finger at himself.

"I can't tell you how many times I drive by people's residences and their sprinklers are running while it's pouring down rain," says Chuck Green, director of golf course operations for Sage Valley Country Club in Graniteville, S.C.

Green, on the other hand, turns off his irrigation system when he sees the dark clouds coming. And he says he keeps it off until his course's turfgrass needs a drink.

"Superintendents are one of the most responsible groups around when it comes to water consumption," Green contends.

Many superintendents, Green included, resent being labeled as water wasters by golfers and non-golfers alike. Most superintendents agree that the majority of their brethren are responsible irrigators. Sure, there are some superintendents who admit to watering away to achieve the greenest and lushest

turfgrass possible. But most superintendents say there are too many reasons to apply water responsibly, from doing the right thing economically to doing the right thing environmentally.

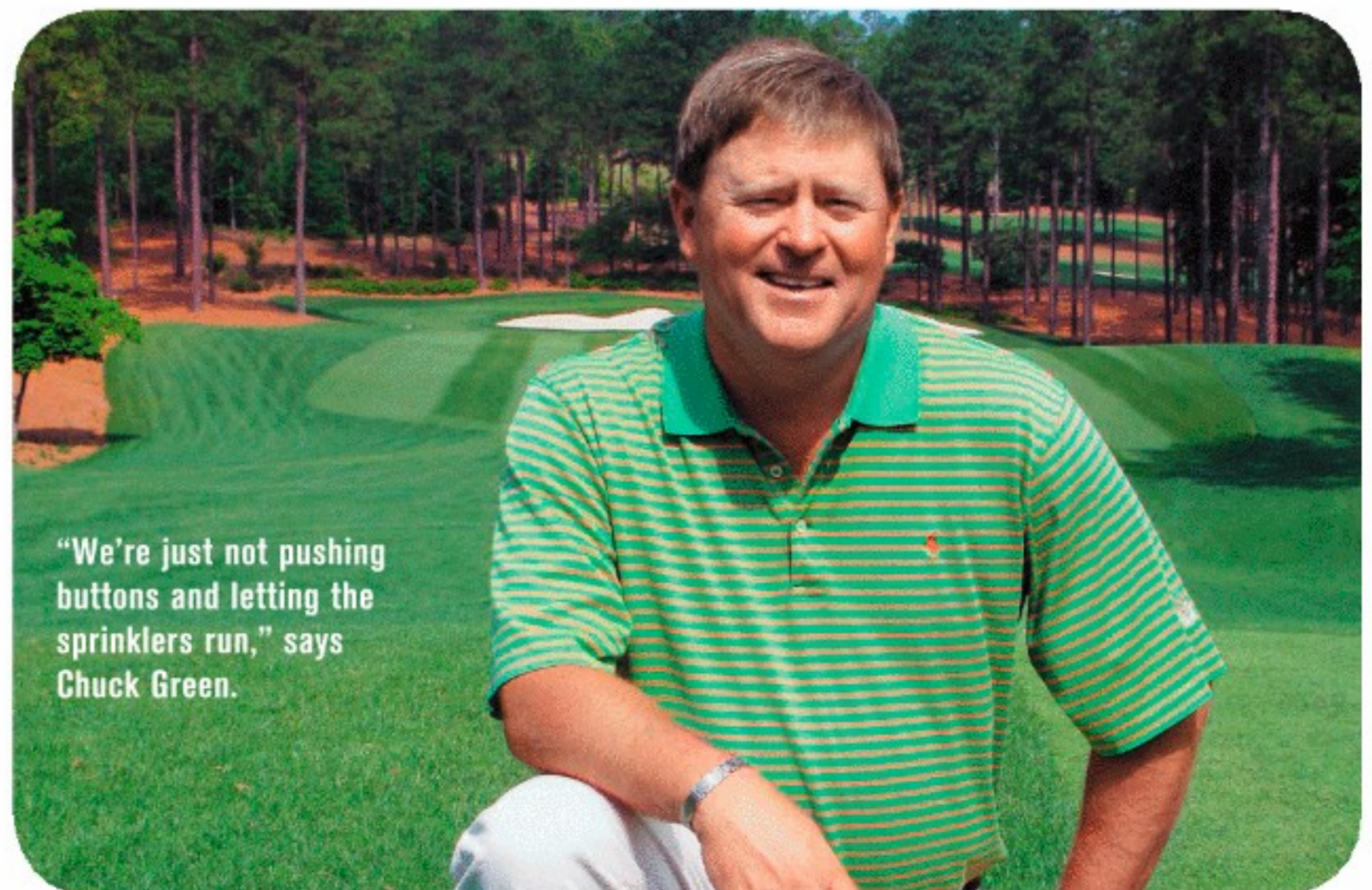
"I believe superintendents overall are diligent about being good stewards when it comes to water use," says Mark Jarrell, the certified golf course superintendent for Palm Beach National Golf

and Country Club in Lake Worth, Fla. "Why wouldn't they be?"

Jarrell quickly answers his own question with a list of reasons why superintendents do not over-water:

- They don't want to create disease problems.
- They don't want to waste money — from the cost of the water itself to the cost of the power used to irrigate.
- They don't want to attract bad press.

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"We're just not pushing buttons and letting the sprinklers run," says Chuck Green.



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“It’s just not in any superintendent’s best interest to waste water,” Jarrell says.

Joe Hubbard, director of golf course maintenance for the Broken Sound Club in Boca Raton, Fla., says golf courses are easy to pick on because they are so visible.

“[Golf courses] take up such a large area,” he says.

And golf course irrigation heads are more widespread, which give people the perception they use a lot more water.

But what those blamers don’t understand is that those irrigation heads are running on 20-minute cycles, Hubbard says. And they don’t realize that the courses with the big irrigation heads might not be watering with fresh

water at all. If it’s in Florida or Arizona, there’s a good chance it’s effluent water. “People blame golf courses all the time,” Hubbard says. “But they just don’t get it.”

Shawn Emerson, director of agronomy at the six-course Desert Mountain Golf Club in Scottsdale, Ariz., says some superintendents are under pressure from their members and their employers to use more water to green up courses because “green sells.”

“But most superintendents want to use less water,” Emerson adds. “Agronomically, using less water is better.”

Longtime superintendent Cal Roth, vice president of agronomy for the PGA Tour, says most superintendents realize that too much water causes poor play-

ing conditions. “I think everybody in the business who’s striving to produce quality playing conditions is going to work to keep the amount of water they put on the golf course to a minimum,” Roth says.

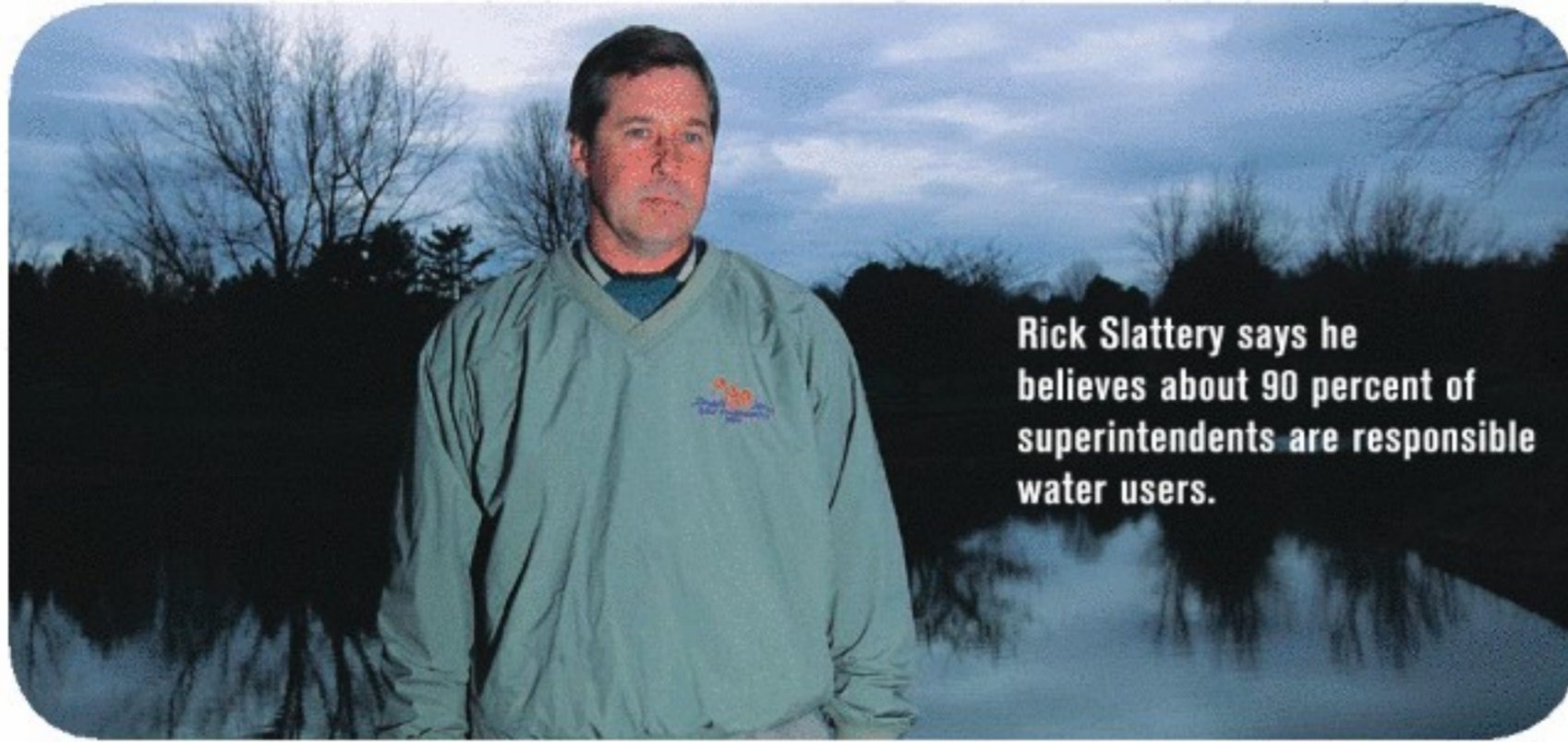
Case in point: At Sage Valley, Green says his maintenance staff hand waters areas so they don’t waste water. “We’re just not pushing buttons and letting the sprinklers run,” he adds.

Rick Slattery, superintendent of Locust Hill Country Club in Fairport, N.Y., says he believes about 90 percent of superintendents are responsible water users. The other 10 percent are under pressure to over water from members or golfers or they are just inexperienced about irrigation, Slattery adds.

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Rick Slattery says he believes about 90 percent of superintendents are responsible water users.

use 0.5 percent of total fresh water.

Lyman cites the increased cost of water, especially in the West and Southeast, as good reasons for superintendents to use as little as they can. "It behooves those superintendents to be careful with the resource because it's just good business," he adds.

It troubles Jarrell that the critics don't realize that the almost 1,500 golf courses in Florida use only about 3 percent of the state's fresh water. On top of that, Jarrell says much of the water put on the golf course makes its way back into ponds and ground water. Yet, golf courses continually face water restrictions in south Florida.

"I'm collecting water that's being filtered and cleaned," Jarrell says. "I'm part of the solution." ■

Greg Lyman, director of environmental programs for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, says statistics prove that most superintendents are efficient irrigators.

According to "Golf Course Water Use and Conservation Study," a recent study conducted by the GCSAA, golf courses use about 1.5 percent of fresh water used nationally for irrigation. Golf courses

PHOTO BY: WILL WALDRON

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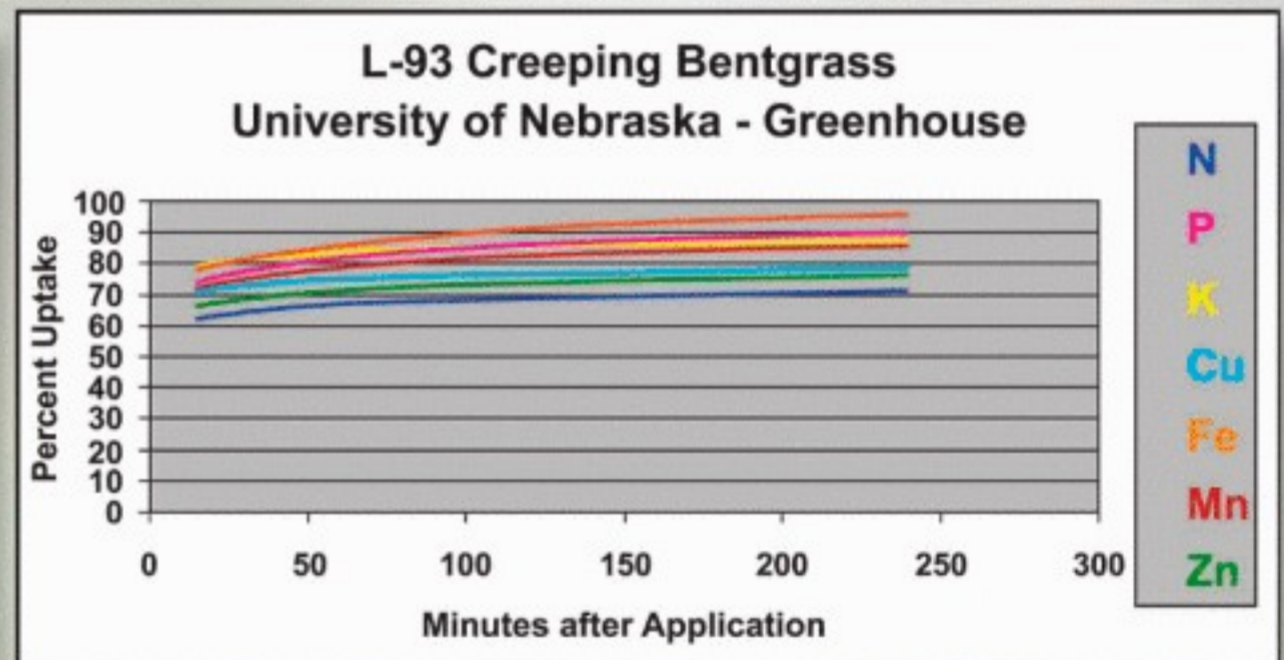
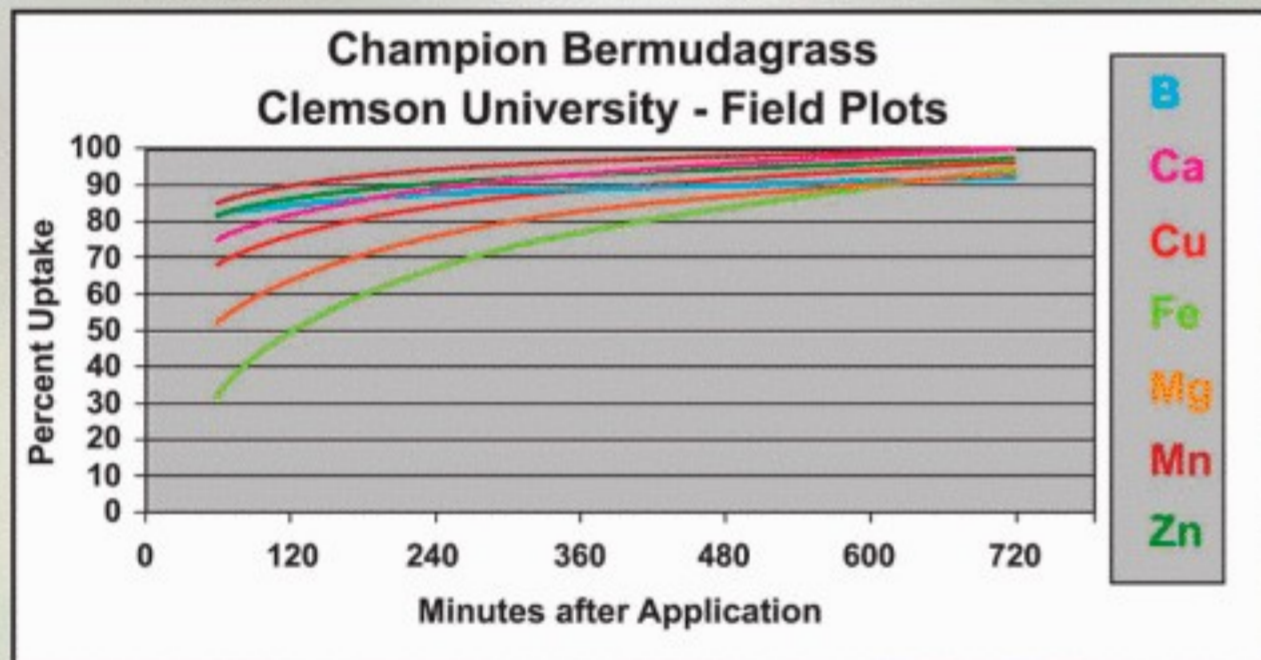


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# Time for Cha

The golf industry must modify

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**F**ollowing the 9/11 attacks, *Golfdom's* editorial team asked me to contemplate golf's place in a vastly different world. I railed on about the need for more native golf, questioned how high-end golf properties could lead to a successful future, and I touched upon the disastrous influence of club technology on the game.

Six years later, we face a collapsing economy and dismal news about the health of our sport. Rounds are down this year — several percent in some regions. We're looking at year three of a net golf course loss, with the trend perhaps halting next year only because there is no financing to pave over courses to build shopping centers.

Rising fuel costs and the demise of the financial markets will directly impact the sport for years to come, while television rat-

ings for professional golf plummeted after Tiger Woods' knee injury.

Yet, golf is slowly becoming aware that it still has the potential to thrive. Even amidst all of this gloom and doom, reminders come both in the thrilling Woods-Rocco Mediate duel during the U.S. Open at Torrey Pines, the epic Ryder Cup at Valhalla and baby boomers heading toward retirement with too much time on their hands. Clearly, opportunities to grow the game remain, or at least golf can sustain its place as a viable business and an essential American pastime.

But that will only happen if the sport changes its ways in a couple key areas.

The first area is time. Three PGA Tour golfers take about five hours on a typical weekday to play 18 holes. When fields are cut to 70 or so players for the weekend, they generally play in twosomes and take four hours to play.

Yes, they are playing for a lot of money and need to take their time, particularly with





more safety concerns. That confluence of negatives has trickled down to the everyday course, where houses once deemed safe are now in reach. Holes designed beautifully by their architects are not functioning properly, and worst of all, they are holding up play or even endangering lives.

Golf takes way too long to play and everyone knows it. Few can or want to make the five- or six-hour commitment away from family and work to whittle away so much time on the links. Today's attention spans just can't handle that long outdoors. Life is too short to spend it on the golf course, no matter how beautifully maintained it may be.

The game's administrators have done a miserable job addressing the issue on the professional level, which is vital in setting an example for the recreational level. The governing bodies shrugged off the effects of farther driving distances until it was too late, while the PGA Tour has not issued a slow-play penalty stroke in 16 years and shows little indication it plans to do so any time soon.

Innovative folks will continue to address the time component on the recreational level without help from the elitist fools who have the power to affect real change. Because it's almost impossible to speed up people and too costly to rework a course to accommodate technology, more creative approaches are necessary.

For starters, the nine-hole round must be treated with more respect. Thanks to computer technology, the handicap system allows for nine-hole rounds to be used to establish a handicap, removing much of the stigma once attached to this shortened version of the game. In an ideal world, we'd see

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**New technology that creates unprecedented distance off the tees slows play and even endangers lives.**

green speeds pushing 13 feet on the Stimpmeter, meaning even a 2-foot putt can turn like a rail car. Regardless, the example they set is dreadful and the influence can be seen in today's fine young players, though it's not all their faults.

Courses have expanded since the 1990s to accommodate major distance gains off the tee and, as predicted in columns here ad nauseam, the effects proved disastrous with longer walks to tees, backups on holes where players are waiting for greens to clear and

**[ ABOUT THIS SERIES ]** "Growing the Game" is *Golfdom's* quarterly series – now in its third year – that focuses on how the golf industry can attract more players to create more rounds. In addition to this installment on shaking the game from its six-hour obligation, we've also explored the impact women, minorities, disabled golfers and baby boomers could have on increasing play. We've talked to golf course architects about ways they can make the game more friendly for beginners and average golfers, highlighted creative marketing programs that golf courses use to attract new golfers, explored initiatives aimed to quicken the pace of play and examined golf club mergers.

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