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Golfdom

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Customer Service

22 Golf courses can boost business — and grow the game — by serving their clientele to the max.

BY LARRY AYLWARD

Growing the Game [PART 2]

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Online Exclusive

Read these stories only at "The Ticker," located at www.golfdom.com



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Here's more of the up-to-date technology that companies showcased at the Golf Industry Show in February.



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The buzzword (and it doesn't have much zip) in golf course conditioning these days is "brown." People in the industry, from golfers to architects to superintendents, say, "We need more *brown* and less green on golf courses."

Of course, the request for "more brown" in golf is the result of the "green" movement that has infiltrated, not just the golf industry, but many parts of the world. It's smart and fashionable to "go green." Hence, "brown" has become "green" in the golf course industry. (Did I just write that?)

I don't know about you, but I think brown is a hideous color. Examine any 6-year-old kid's box of well-used Crayola crayons, and you'll find the brown crayon still has its pointy tip — if the kid didn't already break the crayon in half. Even at an early age, we're repulsed by brown.

How many brown-colored cars do you see on the road? How many brown shirts do you own? (Your mother-in-law doesn't think much of you if she gave you a brown shirt for Christmas.) Brown is a hue the golf industry shouldn't touch with a 10-foot bunker rake. Yet, we keep hearing industry people — big-named people like Greg Norman — insist American golf courses need to be tinged with more brown.

When he gave his keynote address at the Golf Industry Show in 2008, Norman, chairman of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's Environmental Institute for Golf's Advisory Council, told thousands in the audience that "there's nothing wrong with the brown look."

But there's a lot wrong with the "brown look." And the wrong begins with the word "brown." Brown conveys an image as dark, dreary and depressing as the word itself.

When people say, "We need more brown grass on golf courses," that communicates to me they want golf courses to look like my neighbor's lawn — the half-acre eyesore wiped out by pythium and billbugs last summer. It's brown, all right. And it looks pitiful.

'Brown' Is Not The New 'Green'

BY LARRY AYLWARD



I DON'T KNOW
ABOUT YOU, BUT I
THINK BROWN IS A
HIDEOUS COLOR

I don't think we want golf courses to look like my neighbor's lawn. I mean, who are we kidding? American golfers, who adore premium conditions, will never play disease-laden and bug-eaten courses. Nor should they.

To chemical companies that manufacture and market pesticides, "more brown" also insinuates a notion to stop using their products. Of course, reducing pesticide use is a huge component of the "green" movement.

This is troubling because chemical companies are investing a lot of time and money to make pesticides less toxic and more environmentally friendly with incredibly low use rates. And they are succeeding.

I realize that "more brown" is also associated with less water use. I'm all for that, as I'm sure are most superintendents, who would rather reduce irrigation and sport firm and fast golf courses. But, again, "brown" is not the right descriptive word. It's one thing to let turfgrass go dormant with the idea of it coming back. It's another thing to let it go "brown," with the idea it could contract disease and die.

I think what Norman and others are urging is that American golf courses are too hung up on having every dang blade of grass in place to appease golfers. I agree that golf courses can be less perfect-looking.

But "the brown look" is not "the look" courses want. Courses can still be green and natural-looking without looking like something from an Edgar Allen Poe poem.

The moral of this column: The turfgrass on your golf courses doesn't have to be perfect, but it surely doesn't have to be brown.

Aylward, editor in chief of Golfdom, can be reached at larryward@questex.com.

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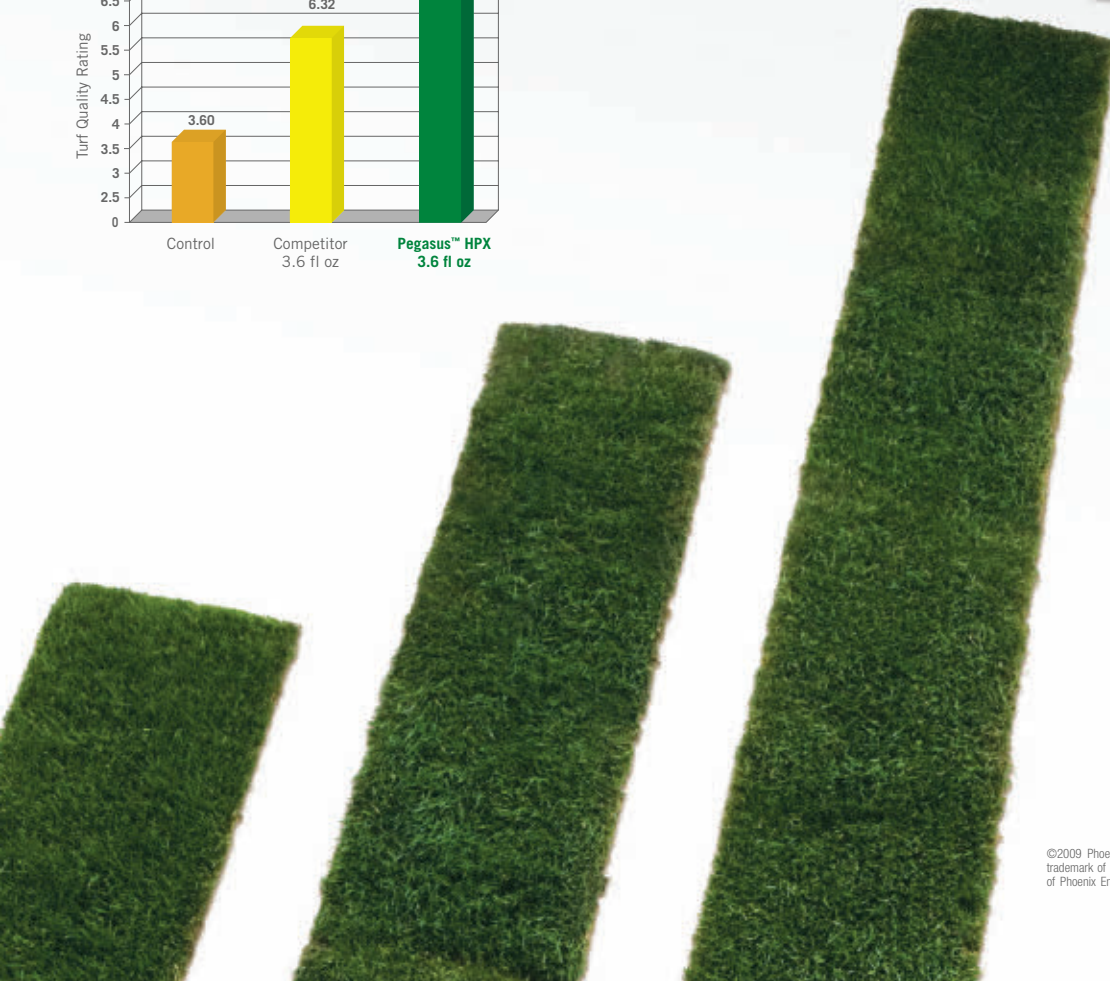
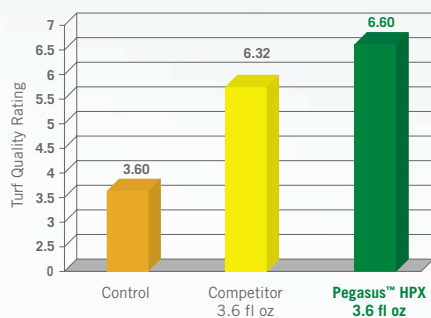
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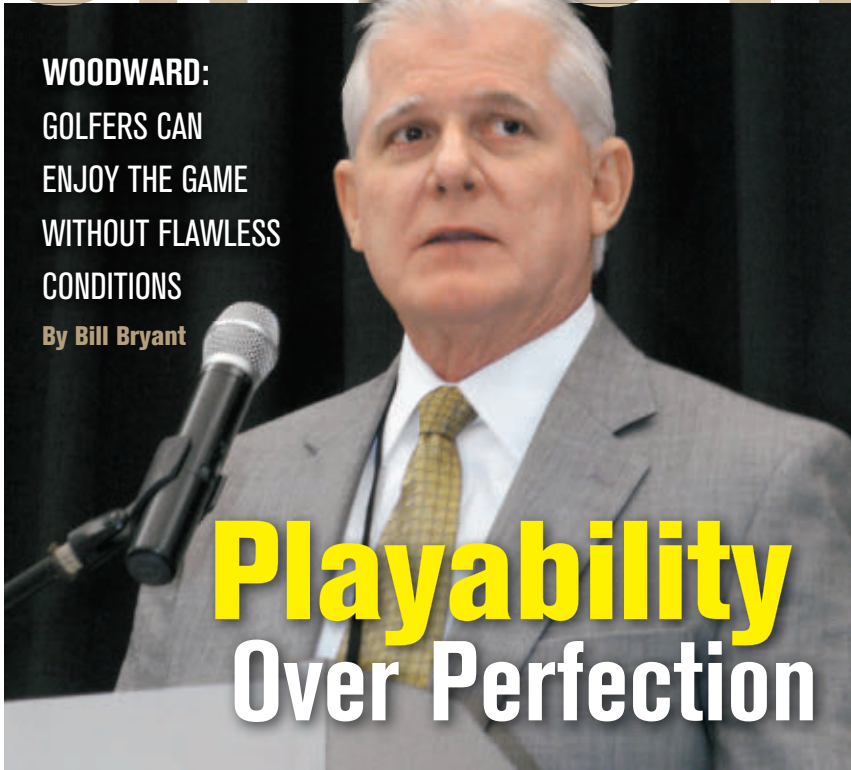
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Off The Fringe

**WOODWARD:
GOLFERS CAN
ENJOY THE GAME
WITHOUT FLAWLESS
CONDITIONS**

By Bill Bryant



Playability Over Perfection

Mark Woodward appreciates the pristine splendor of the Augusta National Golf Club, site of last month's Masters Tournament, and other professional tour venues as much as anyone. But the CEO of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America knows those are not the agronomic standards by which his 21,000 members should be judged. Nor are they right for the times.

"People see what they see on TV, and they see the conditions we produced at Torrey Pines (the course Woodward prepared for the 2008 U.S. Open in his role as manager of golf operations for the city of San Diego), and they think that should be translated back to their local golf courses. But that's truly an aberration. It's not

reality," Woodward told a crowd of golf course owners, operators, architects and developers at the Golf Inc. Conference at the World Golf Village in St. Augustine, Fla., recently.

Those conditions might be required for demanding PGA Tour professionals, but Woodward said they're not essential for most players.

"We can still have a quality playing experience and playable conditions and have fun at it without going to the extremes of championship golf," he said. "There just needs to be a balance between expectations and the resources we have to produce those conditions."

Woodward encouraged owners, operators, designers and developers to help take the message of balance and playability back to their clubs and courses, many of which are struggling in a challenging economy.

"There is a lot of pressure on (superintendents and their staffs) to continue to improve (conditions), and expectations continue to rise," he said. "I'm not sure that's the direction we need to go in light of the economy. A big part of our (environmental efforts) is to promote playability, and you all can help us tell that story. We think golfers can go out and have fun without every blade of grass being perfect."

It's ironic that some of the world's most revered courses do not go to the extremes that U.S. courses do to present flawless conditions, Woodward said. "You go to other places in the world, and golf courses aren't maintained to the degree they are here," he said. "But when we go over there to play, we think we've died and gone to heaven. And then we come back here, and we think every blade of grass has to be perfectly green and perfectly in place."

Woodward was asked if he thought "brown was the new green?"

"We don't say brown is the new green," he shot back. "We just talk about the fact that it needs to be playable, but it doesn't have to be perfect."

Woodward is also aware that courses must be sensitive to the expectations their members and customers have for quality playing conditions or risk losing them. "Surveys show that golfers choose to play a particular golf course because of conditions at that course," he said. "So if we let that go down too much, we could shoot ourselves in the foot because golfers may not want to come to that facility for that reason." ■

Bryant is a golf writer from Alpharetta, Ga.