



The "DISSERVICE TO GOLF" Award

By Monroe S. Miller

Ask almost any Golf Course Superintendent to nominate a candidate for an award that recognizes unfair, unjustified, uninformed and unconscionable harm to America's golf courses and you'll find a hands down winner for last year. He's one Bob Condor, author of the article "Killer Courses" that appeared in the December 1986 issue of Golf magazine.

I don't know what Mr. Condor's credentials are, but I do know for certain that he is no environmentalist nor is he a very good investigative reporter. And it is for certain that he is no friend to our country's golf courses. If you cannot register as a friend to golf courses, you can't proclaim or even pretend that your interest is that of golf. My guess is that the man probably doesn't care one way or the other. What I do conclude, after reading his article a dozen times for even a shred of evidence that might support his frightening title, is that his bottom line is selling magazines.

The article is presented as a "Special Report". In fact, it is anything but special and reports absolutely nothing. It is the employment of subterfuge to disguise an editorial by a person who obviously is ignorant about how pesticides are used on golf courses and how absolutely essential they are to the production of golf turf for the players of America. Further, I believe it is maligning to the professional Golf Course Superintendents of the country. I resent that more than I'll be able to convey in these few paragraphs. Rather than turning the other cheek, we all must clench our fists for a fight to defend our right to continue the safe use of agricultural pesticides on the golf courses that are so important to our country's environment. Golf is counting on us.

Mr. Condor's article is a classic in the study of how environmental extremists operate. Their most obvious tact is to generate fear and horror. It is easy to generate this emotion, but extremely difficult to dispel. Responses like this

one I am writing are merely drops in the bucket of defense that will be required to right the harm done by Condor to golf courses. He refers to "headaches and nausea", skin that is "festered and swollen", and warns of "memory loss, fatigue, nausea and dizziness". He tells of failing internal organs and heart attack, and amplifies that fear with the tale of a \$20 million lawsuit. Such things scare me as much as anyone else. Fear works for journals - it makes news because fear is interesting to read. And if you doubt his intention of peddling fear, take one look at the graphic in the middle of the first page of the story - a bottle fronted with a skull and crossbones placed over a serene picture of a golf player. If his story didn't scare you, the graphic alone most certainly would.

Another characteristic of this and similar articles is that they make use of bad news. Condor's whole story is bad news and takes advantage of the fact that bad news is big news and sells at the newsstand. Nevermind the good that pesticides do - good news is either boring or not even news at all.

To better understand the environmental extremist writers, I've extensively read articles and books by them. There are several other features of almost all of them that Condor used in his article. As a rule, they are composed by journalists with some experience in constructing stories. They are able to fashion these passionate and emotional pieces without evidence to support their premise. I'd like to ask Mr. Condor, "Sir, where is your data?" There are no statistics of any kind presented in his discourse - no blood test results, no figures stating how many players actually have experienced confirmed illness from pesticide exposure and no impartial data generated by investigators that might support his claims. I'm sorry, but one player's use of vitamin and mineral supplements to "stay stronger on sprayed courses" is not valid research support! Condor is a typical "generalist" who

does not deal with any specifics that are essential in building and substantiating a legitimate case for his point of view. The reason, quite simply, is because such evidence just doesn't exist.

Writers of this ilk tend to quote, re-quote and quote again and again the same old worn out opinions of a distinctively small number in the scientific community who have similar views. In Condor's case, it is one Sam Epstein. Of all the environmental extremists I've seen quoted, Epstein's name crops up most often, usually as a quote for the 17th time from some other non-technical piece. Epstein's the one who arrogantly claims that "a golf course is essentially a hazardous site and it's time golfers realize they are captive to an industry that is indifferent and ignorant about public health." This whole situation where the fraternity of extremists quotes one another all of the time was brought home recently as I read the briefs of one of Wisconsin's Public Intervenor's. These are briefs submitted by that office and by attorneys representing the Wisconsin Forestry/Rights-Of-Way/Turf Coalition to the Circuit Court in Washburn County. The Public Intervenor's analysis of the case was irrelevant and inappropriate for several reasons, but one in particular stands out. He submitted no affidavits, no certified copies of regulations in question and no references which were subject to prior court judgement. Instead, he sent forward excerpts from and references to government reports, some of which he had written! That is even worse than we normally experience; such ploys are so outrageous that they are nearly comical.

The negative impact of Condor's article is already hemorrhaging. A biased little newspaper from the backwoods of Michigan has picked it up and featured it twice - once as a "news" story and once as an editorial. Despite the fact that this is an irrelevant, and disgusting article, it demonstrates clearly what happens when this kind of journalism gets loose. Nothing but harm can come to golf, Mr. Condor.

Nowhere in Condor's article does he consider the advantages and benefits of pesticide use on a golf course. A lit-

tle investigation on his part would reveal that golf as it is played in America today would be impossible without them. Neither does he give even a word of credit to those of us managing golf courses for our outstanding and responsible record in the use of pesticides. He gives no attention to what impact his writing might have on golf (and golf players) should those paragraphs lead even one golf course to try to provide playing conditions without pesticides. The economic impact of such an experiment would be substantial - golf requires reasonable turf conditions and without them golfers will not pay the green fees or membership dues required to maintain a golf course.

I have been unable to determine what Mr. Condor's purpose is, beyond that of selling more magazines. Careful

reading and deliberate thought have not yielded an answer. His title is a rhetorical excess. His article is not analytical and plays on the emotions of his readers. He exaggerates a couple of isolated incidents that lead to flawed conclusions. And most importantly of all, he makes no reference to the risk/benefit equation that must be solved for everything we do in our society; the risk to golfers from driving a car to the course, from smoking while playing and from using table salt in the 19th hole are greater - much greater - than the risk posed them by agricultural chemicals used on their courses. No one, probably including Mr. Condor, would propose closing swimming pools at golf clubs that have them, yet my guess is that swimming pools represent more risk than do pesticides used at those clubs. If the

incidents presented by Condor are taken at face value, they demonstrate very clearly to me that Golf Course Superintendents are doing a *good* job in the responsible use of pesticides on golf courses. None indicate any failures in the use of these materials in the way and for the purposes they were intended and approved.

Mr. Condor's article, in my view, has no significant or demonstrable bearing on the issue of pesticide safety. It has proven nothing, given us nothing new and accomplished little more than creating unfounded fear among our golfing public. I think that makes it irresponsible journalism. His qualifications for a "Disservice To Golf" award stand alone and are not likely to be challenged. I wonder if he will step forward to accept?

If I were him, I'd be too ashamed.

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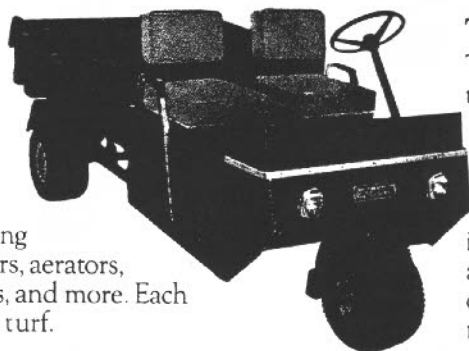
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