



A Golf Course Run By The Players

By Monroe S. Miller

Did you ever get the feeling on your golf course that, sometimes anyway, you just cannot win? It happens to me on occasion and I am usually dumbfounded by it, despite over a quarter of a century in golf turf management.

Don't misunderstand. This isn't a daily emotion, although I will bet the locker room and bar talk concerning golf course issues is constant. Once in awhile a player gets the courage to ask me something like "why are you handwatering that green? Didn't we just spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on one of those computer operated systems? It seems like a waste of time to be out here with a hose and nozzle."

The chronic comment is "you'd never do that on men's day." Also heard too often from the irrational crowd is carping about the course being closed due to rain or frost or

whatever. If you listen too closely or take it too seriously, you'll become a case for the local insane asylum.

Maybe even more frustrating are the comments levelled at young golf course employees. They are intended for me, of course, but I suspect there might be some reason they don't want to bring it up to me personally. Who knows?

It's not that you can ignore complaints; you have to react to those that are legitimate. But a lot of what golf course superintendents hear has to be ignored. Failure to do that is guaranteed disaster.

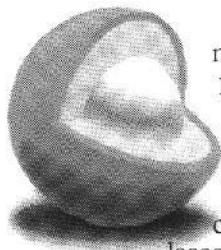
That got me to thinking what a golf course run by the players—these players—would look like. I distinguish them from the thoughtful players who serve on the green committee and the board of directors and who get involved in problem solving at the

club. Nor does this reference those rational, thinking individuals who thank you for "doing what has to be done." I am talking about the complainers who occupy the highest seats in the peanut gallery and criticize nearly everything that goes on while they are "enjoying" a round of golf. Maybe they actually enjoy the complaining more than they do the game.

A golf course run by the players would always be open, assuring them they would never be inconvenienced by the weather. Since they are short term thinkers—"now" is what concerns them most—there is never a concern about ramifications of playing when it is too wet. Or frosty.

Oh, and since the course is always open, golf carts are ALWAYS running. Go ahead and throw away those
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NO CARTS signs. You won't need them on a course run by the players.

Another thing you won't need on a golf course run by the players is one inch hose and syringe nozzles. They don't like the aggravation and think it is a waste of labor to have someone doing something of such low technology.

These folks will greatly influence the machinery found in the golf course shop. For example, you will never see an aerifier there—not a GA-60, no Toro Greens Aerators, no Ryan Greensaires. Few things irritate these players more than aerifying. They loathe the greens for a week after aerification, and they curse the soil from fairway coring. Seldom will you get a "it has to be done" from them. Instead, it is a disgusted "why do they have to make such a mess on our golf course all the time?"

The subject of aerification brings up the issue of topdressing. You'd never see a course run by the players disrupted by topdressing. After all, this is another one of those practices that bugs the daylights out of them, one they see too often and one they'd cancel in the stroke of a true putt on a smooth, fast green.

These players would have their greens cut short, short, short, too. And with no regard for the weather, green contours, plant health, stress or anything else.

Since there is more controversy these days about sand bunkers, it would be an easy decision to fill in all bunkers on the course run by the players. No sand—no problems.

You have to wonder about pin placements on a course run by the players and how they would be handled. If I were to guess, my money would go on a "center of the green" placement for all eighteen. Not much to complain about with a flag flying from there.

A common complaint from players of this sort is that the staff is always in the way. How would a course run by the players manage this dilemma? I theorize they would have a crew of 50 report at daylight, work for three hours and go home for the rest of the day. I wish them good luck in finding 50 kids in Madison who'd work circumstances like those!

It would be fun to visit a golf course run by the players. I would expect to see ice water on every hole by 7:00 a.m. every day. Housekeeping would likely take precedence over turf man-

agement. The impulse some of them have to "nuke" every pest problem would have to be dealt with. The budget would be halved, since we spend too much now. Somehow all programs would be executed so no one was inconvenienced in any way whatsoever. Nobody wants their ox gored!

I am kidding in all of this, of course. The vast majority of the golf players I deal with agree with my theorem "you cannot expect excellence through neglect." Aerification is aggravating, but necessary. So is topdressing.

They know handwatering and a dozen or two other similar time consuming chores are essential. Some even do thank us for doing these unexciting jobs. Maybe the unreasonable attitude of a tiny minority is exacerbated in a tough year like 1995.

The good news is we have all winter to put golf course issues back into perspective and to chuckle at some of the silliness we hear day to day. Then, in four short months, it starts all over again.

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