

Nevertheless, it appears that the golfer, especially the competitive golfer, is demanding these qualities. With the territory—comes the price. So far, it seems that the golfer is willing to pay the price. Golfers are now apt to make more comparisons than ever before. Their “standards” rise annually, especially as more and more of the “super-courses” are being developed. Though these courses are extremely expensive to play, the golfer uses them as his guide to “standardization,” and he becomes more and more vocal about his “regular” golfing facility. How many times we witness some of the golfers holding “court” and talking about how nice the conditions were at “XYZ” golf course. . . and, why couldn’t “our” golf course be taken care of like that one. Apparently, when this type of conversation takes place, the other golf course always happens to be the “standard” one. I guess that it’s necessary for all golf course owners and operators to take a good, hard look at their golf course and listen a little to the people who play it. . . not the “bitching”, but the constructive comments offered.

It appears to me that this “up-swing” in golf playing characteristics is a reality and is with us. The course that fails to recognize this need to “upgrade” will not share in the continued growth that is being forecast for our industry. In fact, there is the danger that a decline in golf activity could be felt by the course that remains complacent. I believe this attitude is being felt by some of the municipal courses that haven’t dealt with the times, which includes upgrading.

One of the positive benefits that upgrading can bring forth is the justification in raising the price “. . . to play upon the product.” Most golfers recognize the inflationary trend of the “ideal”—which is commonly referred to as “. . . ‘The American Way.’” But whenever increases are not reflected by improvements, he’s likely to rebel. If constant improvements in playability are evident—naturally followed by increases in the price to play—the golfer usually is supportive and willing to pay an acceptable, justifiable increase. Hopefully, this increase will not only absorb the additional expense involved in upgrading, but will afford a more realistic return to the owner/operator on his investment.

I have been directly involved in guiding the affairs of the Wisconsin State Golf Association for 14 years now.

Prior to that I spent 17 years in the public links sector, conducting tournaments and administering the affairs of and for the public links players of Wisconsin. I recall the first time that I passed through the entrance gate of the hallowed Milwaukee Country Club. It was to witness and give encouragement to the invited public players who were participating in the 1960 WSGA State Amateur Championship. I was watching four or five public links players, in particular—Jim Levenhagen of Greenfield Park and Bob Mueller, Allan Daeda and Archie Dadian of Whitnall Park. Each of them had easily qualified for match play, and they were embraced in individual competition when I arrived upon the scene. I hastily parked my car and raced to the first tee to catch some of the action. As I prepared to follow my very close friend, the late Bob Mueller, I walked down the hill in front of the first tee approaching the first fairway. As soon as I stepped upon the magnificently groomed bentgrass fairway I stopped and immediately the thought entered my mind to remove my shoes. After all, this was the custom that my meticulous mother had established in our home whenever we were about to enter our carpeted front parlor. This fairway at Milwaukee CC was the finest piece of prepared turf that I had ever seen. . . or, set foot upon. I remember reaching down and fingering through the finely groomed, plush strands of grass. I was truly mesmerized by it all—I had never seen such plushness before. Boy, if I could ever have the opportunity to play upon fairways this fine I’d pay whatever it would take—maybe even up to \$5.00! After all, I was paying 90 cents for an 18 hole permit at Whitnall Park at that time.

I also watched other legendary players who were participating in that event, hall of famers. . . Harry Simonson, Steve Caravello, Bob Brue, Dick Sucher and eventual champion Steve Smith. I noticed that whenever any of them would fire shots onto Milwaukee CC’s satin-smooth greens, as they would take one bounce and come to an abrupt halt or even virgorously spin backwards. I just had never seen a golf ball consistently react like this before, at least not at Whitnall or Greenfield Park. Later on, as I had the opportunity to play at a high-quality country club, I too was able to generate golf shots that reacted similarly when they landed on the green. As I became more knowledgeable about the game I

realized that the closely manicured fairway grass was the leading contributor to the stop-spin action of a well-struck golf shot.

One other incident comes to my mind relating to fairway conditions and how they involve the expert player. In 1964 the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Co. sponsored an exhibition at the Brown Deer Park G.C., featuring Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, Doug Sanders and I believe Doug Ford. I was an official for that event and I remember the participants meeting with a group of Schlitz people and a group of officials prior to tee-off. They unanimously requested and received permission to play “Winter Rules.” Gary Player vigorously exclaimed that he wouldn’t be able to execute the shots to “entertain” the spectators, of which there were about 10,000, without improving the lie. Apparently, he knew what he was talking about because he established a then course record of 66 that day. Palmer shot 71 and Sanders had a 72. I don’t remember what the other score was.

I do vividly recall that one of Brown Deer Park’s stalwart members of the men’s club yelled out to Gary Player on the 13th hole, something like. . . “Hey Player, you’re nothing but a ‘cop-out’ fraud professional for not owning up to playing the ball down; we public links players here at Brown Deer always play it down when we play every day in our outings.” Player looked over at me and asked if I knew the guy who was harassing him. I said, “Yes,” and Player said, “Then, why don’t you go over and tell him to ‘shut-up.’” So, I walked over and told Mr. Al Roth to keep his comments about the golf course to himself. I won’t mention to you what Mr. Roth responded to me.

I guess the point that I’m trying to make is that even professional players expect to have conditions that best enable them to display their talents. Peter DeYoung, the WGA tournament director, commented to me recently that years ago he had difficulty in getting the top players to enter the Western Open before they moved the event to the fantastic Butler National GC. Some of the courses that they used before that did not have the fairway quality that these players required. This only goes to show that as a player’s ability improves, their requirements become a lot more selective.

In summation, I would go on record to state that the competitive golfer is actually searching for improved play-

ing conditions and is willing to pay the price, assuming that it is justifiable and affordable. The casual golfer and the "sophisticated dude" who passes himself off as a golfer, appear to be already supporting the "super-tracks." Just count the cars in the parking lots of Blackwolf Run GC, Sentryworld GC, and the soon to open Geneva Lakes GC, then look at Pebble Beach, PGA West and the Florida syndrome.

So, my suggestion to those of you who have some input into the direction that your facility may be exploring is to "think positive." Go bent if possible! But upgrade for sure!

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Gene Haas first presented these thoughts as a speaker at the 1990 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium. They are reproduced here with Gene's permission.*



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# A SYMPOSIUM TEST

By Monroe S. Miller

Here it is—a test to see how much attention you paid during the 1990 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium. Although it would take a far more lengthy exam to really measure your attention quotient, a short quiz like this will gauge if you were there in body AND mind.

For those who failed to attend this important meeting, an "F" grade will be automatically recorded, even if you got lucky and guessed your way to a passing grade. The "F" is for 'failure to attend'! Don't miss the 1991 Symposium.

1. Name three people who have attended all 25 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposia.
2. Who invented the golf course aerifier?
3. Where were the first golf course out-of-bounds?
4. How many states, including Wisconsin, were represented at the 1990 Symposium?
5. Who named the Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium?

1. Jim Latham, Lois Latham and Sam Fugasco.
2. Tom Mascara, one of the speakers at the 1990 Symposium.
3. As pointed out by Bill Whitley, one of the speakers at the 1990 Symposium, the first golf course out-of-bounds were staked at the Chicago Golf Club.
4. Eieven.
5. Charlie Wilson, former Chief Agronomist and Sales Manager of Milorganite.

## ANSWERS



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