

What's Your Batting Average?

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An Opinion on Unreasonable Expectations

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Golfers are well known for making comparisons. They seem to take pride in telling anyone who will listen how a course down the road does something this way or that. They compare budgets, acreage maintained, soils, grass types, green speed, the amount of labor and many other facts. Sometimes, the comparisons are accurate, sometimes not.

Let's take this comparison one step further. It's not really valid, but is interesting nonetheless.

Baseball: A .250 batting average is just that—an average. A ball player hits safely one at-bat in four. A “star” bats .300 and an immortal like Ted Williams bats .400. If you are keeping score, and you should be, that's four out of ten.

Basketball: Superstars shoot just over 50% from the field. They shoot a ball into a hoop at a distance of zero (a dunk) to 18-22 feet or more.

Golf: A par round of golf is normally about 72. Golfers who consistently shoot less than par are found on the PGA Tour, making lots of money. Golfers who shoot consistently over par are found everywhere, and includes those people making the comparisons. The average handicap in the country is just over 18. The average golfer, therefore, shoots about 25% over par.

At what percentage do golf course superintendents produce quality turfgrass? As a basis for comparison, golf courses contain about 30 acres of fairways, 2.5 acres of greens and 2.5 acres of tees. This equates to about 100,000 sq. ft. of greens and tees and 1,320,000 sq. ft. of fairways. Thus, if a superintendent “bats” .400, which would put him in great company in baseball, it

means your superstar would lose the equivalent of 10.8 greens and tees out of 18. On fairways, he would lose about 18 acres of turf.

While this .400 batting average might get you into the Baseball Hall of Fame, you would probably lose your job as a golf course superintendent.

All of this may sound ludicrous, but the fact remains that golfers have set such high standards for their golf courses that maintaining these standards is difficult, expensive and sometimes impossible to achieve. To keep alive every blade of grass on every green, tee and fairway regardless of the conditions, and not being willing to accept anything less, is wishful thinking and a mistake.

Everything cannot be perfect on every golf course every day. Even if it were possible, what would it cost?

So, look at your golf course. My message to course officials reading this opinion is not to be so concerned if the golf course superintendent bats only .998. After all, this equates to losing about 200 sq. ft. of turf, a 10 ft. by 20 ft. area of greens or tees and 2,640 sq. ft. of fairways, or .06 of an acre.

Anyone who bats this percentage or better deserves a pat on the back, not a kick in the pants. After all, what other industry which deals so closely with Mother Nature can boast a 99% average of better? Not many.

Therefore, the next time you read about a professional athlete making \$2,000,000 a year to achieve only a 30% batting average, be proud. . . because golf course superintendents are batting 99%, or better.

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