

Golf course debate goes by the book

by TERRY McIVER / Managing Editor

The common bond at the GCSAA Environmental Forum in Orlando was the understanding that there is a right way and a wrong way to manage a golf course. No blood was drawn, and no one changed his mind, but it was an interesting evening nonetheless.

The debate over the relative environmental value of a golf course—moderated by TV's professional "man-in-the-middle,"



Debate moderator, Arthur Miller: 'Would I want to be a superintendent?'

Arthur Miller—was a highlight of the association's annual conference Feb. 5-11.

During the forum, a nine-man panel made up of environmentalists, university professors, golf course superintendents and a golf course designer went back and forth for 90 minutes over the pros and cons of

golf. Each panelist made a point, and some points were made often, especially the belief that superintendents are genuine environmentalists.

Golf is not a game

"It's a job of challenges," said Tim Hiers, CGCS, manager of Colliers Reserve in Naples, Fla.

"You work with nature, but it's difficult to deal with the perceptions of people who don't understand our business. If you see what

golf courses are doing around the country, you'd change your mind" about golf being bad for the environment.

"Keep in mind that there are genuine water, fertilizer and resource management concerns," countered Curt Spalding of Save the Bay, Providence, R.I., whose main concern was that many superintendents—such as those in his state—can be better stewards and more responsive to an inquiring, concerned public.

"Not everyone is going to be a national award winner," agreed Spalding. "They don't have the resources to do it or the aptitude to do it. But certainly everyone can do better than they're doing now. You can save money, use less pesticides, use less water, and that's going to make your profit margin better."

"Most superintendents are already resource managers," coun-



▲ Hiers, right, and Hurdzan: Superintendents are environmentalists, and easy targets for uninformed critics.

tered Hiers, "and they care deeply about the environment. They're also business people. They have to account for every penny. To say it's an exceptional few [who are good stewards] is not accurate. Most people don't stay around long if they've got dead fish, dead birds or something's over budget."

No more courses!

Sierra Club spokesman Mark Massara said he would like to see at least a temporary moratorium on all golf course construction.

"From the lay perspective, the legacy of golfing in the United States is one of agricultural conversion, real estate speculation, destruction of wildlife habitat, loss of water quality and wetlands, and massive bird kills," asserted Massara. "Do we really want to concentrate on building new and better and more environmentally-sensitive golf courses," asked Massara, "or should we go to work on the 17,000 that exist already and try to improve them?"

"The golf course is a symbol of population growth that's easy to attack," replied Hurdzan. "If we use emotional arguments to try to deny the expansion of a golf course, maybe they won't build that extra road, or urban area [to go along with the course]."

According to Hurdzan, golf courses probably represent less than one or two percent of the entire landscaped area in the U.S., "and they're managed by college-educated professionals who are devoting their lives to a safe environment." **LM**

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