

CUTT

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Good News, Bad News

There is a good news/bad news scenario playing out for golf course superintendents. A recent survey asked golfers who play at least twice per month what are the most important factors that contribute to their enjoyment during a round. It suggests that more than the score they shoot or who they are playing with, good greens, well maintained bunkers, tees and fairways make their experience worth coming back for.

We are no longer the “overalls and work-boot gopher chasers”. It appears that golf superintendents are now recognized as key people in the game. Nevertheless, I am worried that we could become a victim of our own success and we are missing a chance to grow the game.

Who Says?

The “core golfers” who were surveyed for the Golf 20/20 Study represent less than five percent of the entire U.S. golfing community. Clearly these people are the economic drivers of the game. They are folks who buy expensive equipment, pay high-end greens fees and watch golf on television.

However, many of these folks are the golfers at our facility who complain endlessly about slow greens, bunker conditions, fairway roll, etc. These are the vocal minority who we invest a disproportionate amount of time catering to and whom we lament at every chance.

I argue while providing high quality course conditioning is our goal, we must be realistic. I am concerned that while we are “patted on the back” by one hand, the other hand pokes us for increasing (and unrealistic) course quality at a time when we are pushing the biological limit of our system.

The pursuit of fast greens and perfect bunkers is not sustainable. Now that we know what pleases our customers and they know we are the ones who provide it, shouldn't we start

a dialogue with them? I believe there is a happy medium that will keep them satisfied and also be realistically achieved. By reaching this balance, we will not only maintain our support but expand it as well.

If the golf industry intends to be healthy and hopefully expanding by 2020, we need to attract more new golfers. Now that we know we are pleasing our core customer base, it is time to start asking why more people are not playing golf. It's time to see if there are aspects of golf course management, such as environmental stewardship and faster play, that will attract new golfers.

What?

Honestly, I am as confident as ever that the golf industry is improving its environmental stewardship every year. Just like the ubiquity of high quality conditioning previously reserved for high-end courses, environmental stewardship is everywhere as well.

One way to start marketing our environmental stewardship is by adopting an “organic” label. Yes I said it. I think we need to have organic standards at various levels and have courses labeled organic. Will this path be wrought with peril? No more so than production agriculture was and is now co-existing as traditional and organic.

In fact, I think golf can do it better than agriculture because, with Audubon

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Feature Story

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International, we already have a mechanism that looks at the entire environmental cost, not just the use of organic products. We can keep high quality conditions and tap a whole new sector or society.

The other factor stopping the growth of golf in my mind is time. Less people, especially guys like me raising a family and working too hard, spending four to five hours playing golf is the issue. Make the greens too fast as well as other conditions that cater to the core golfer and I'm outta here.

I want smooth, not fast greens. I want my ball to roll a long way after I drive it and I want short rough. As far as bunkers, I wouldn't know a bad bunker from a good bunker so

superintendents should not waste time and energy killing themselves to make them perfect. Plus, I know this may be a secret, but shouldn't I be penalized for hitting into the bunker?

The news from Golf 20/20 is good for superintendents but I'm not sure it is good for the game. I think any activity where you can walk around a beautiful landscape for a couple of hours, hang out with friends and family and get exercise ought to be the most popular activity in the world. It's time for golf course superintendents to use our new found credibility to grow the game.

Frank S. Rossi, Ph.D.

Clippings - Sherwood Moore

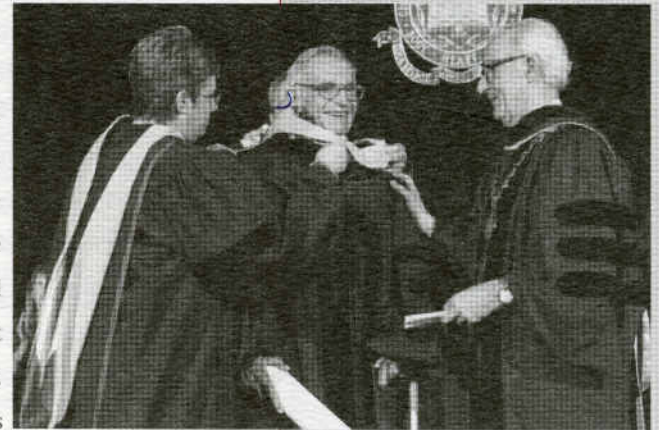
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nation and is still offered at UMass Amherst. He has achieved numerous awards and honors throughout his life including GCSAA's Old Tom Morris Award which is named after Tom Morris, a greenskeeper, golf professional, four-time British Open winner, and topped ranked links designer of the 19th Century. This award, which has been given to such luminaries as Gerald Ford, Bob Hope and Jack Nicklaus, was presented for his continuing lifetime commitment to the game of golf conducted in a manner exemplified by Tom Morris.

In addition, Moore was honored in 1984 with NYSTA's most prestigious award, the Citation of Merit, because he has demonstrated all of the necessary criteria: dedication to turfgrass research and education; involvement in and support of association activities; interest in promoting careers in the turfgrass industry; community involvement; and admiration and

respect of peers and colleagues. Two Citation of Merit award winners, NYSTA President, Michael Maffei, CGCS, and former NYSTA President, Mel Lucas, CGCS, attended the award ceremony at the Stockbridge School commencement. Past NYSTA board member, Ted Horton, CGCS, was also in attendance.

In his career, Moore was employed as a superintendent at several New Jersey golf clubs before moving on to Winged Foot Golf Club and then to Captains Golf Course in Brewster, Massachusetts. He served as president of both the New Jersey and Metropolitan Golf Course Superintendent Associations.



I want smooth, not fast greens. I want my ball to roll a long way after I drive it and I want short rough. As far as bunkers, I wouldn't know a bad bunker from a good bunker so superintendents should not waste time and energy killing themselves to make them perfect. Plus, I know this may be a secret, but shouldn't I be penalized for hitting into the bunker?