

CUTT

2006 Issue 3 • Volume 17 • Number 3

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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CUTT, “CORNELL UNIVERSITY TURFGRASS TIMES” is published four times per year by the Turfgrass Science Program at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14853. Address correspondence to: CORNELL UNIVERSITY, TURFGRASS TIMES, 20 Plant Science Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853; phone: (607) 255-1629; email: fst3@cornell.edu.

Editor: Frank S. Rossi, Ph.D.

Design & Production: NYS Turfgrass Assn.
Latham, NY

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