

Turn Off the TV and Look in the Mirror

Is televised golf really the force behind unrealistic expectations?

BY PATRICK J. GROSS

Superintendents and others in the golf course maintenance industry bemoan the unrealistic expectations for course conditioning created by televised golf tournaments. Some believe that golfers see pristine conditions every weekend on TV and expect their home course to be maintained to those same standards every day. Is TV really to blame for creating such unrealistic expectations? Although the allure of the beautiful courses seen on TV each week is undeniable, who is responsible for creating such conditions? Yes, it is today's educated, very talented professional golf course superintendent.

Beginning in the 1960s, televised golf tournaments greatly elevated the popularity and exposure of the game around the world. As a result, there was a tremendous increase in golf participation and course construction, and all those courses needed educated and talented superintendents. The golf industry as a whole grew exponentially over the past 50 years, and television was a catalyst — not a culprit.

Superintendents are innovative, resourceful, and take pride in the condition of the golf courses they manage. They also are competitive. We can blame TV all we want, but who came up with the idea of striped mowing patterns, or mowing fairways with triplex putting green mowers? How about green divot mix? Television pro-

ducers, sponsors, and the PGA Tour did not initiate these innovations; they were all generated by talented and resourceful superintendents. When the TV cameras start rolling, it is the host superintendent's opportunity to shine. His course gets the attention of the golf world for four days, and he wants his employer and the sponsors to be proud. A year or more of planning and preparation has been devoted to peaking course conditions for those four days. They want to present the very best conditions possible and look good for everyone watching the tournament on TV. Rest assured that superintendents across the country watch golf on TV just as much as golfers do, and they gather a few creative ideas to make their courses better and boost their reputation.

If there was no golf on TV, would things be different? Would superintendents feel the need to compete if golfers could not see ideal conditions on TV every weekend? Every superintendent wants his or her course to be in top condition for the city championship or member-guest tournament, not to mention being a little better than the course down the street. They don't just want to keep up with the Joneses; they challenge themselves to keep their courses in good condition at all times to improve their reputation and maybe justify an increase in pay. The 2009

GCSA survey of superintendent compensation and benefits reveals that salaries have risen 60.1% since 1995. Other surveys indicate that golfers place a high priority on well-groomed course conditions. From these surveys, it appears that superintendents have generally met or exceeded expectations and are being recognized and compensated for their talents.

Golfing great Billy Casper is credited with saying, "It seems today we are building courses for Freddy Couples instead of married couples." Perhaps we're trying to maintain them like that, too, and cater to the very best golfers while mimicking the conditions seen on TV. TV is not the bad guy. Superintendents have done it to themselves. TV has simply exposed the great talent and resourcefulness that superintendents possess. The PGA tagline, "These guys are good!" applies as much to superintendents as it does to professional golfers. Perhaps it's time for superintendents to turn off the TV and look in the mirror. Take credit for the many innovations and improvements in golf course conditioning, and quit blaming televised golf events for unrealistic expectations.

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