

# ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

## When Perfect Is Not Perfect

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Photograph by © ROBERT WALKER

*The mid-April look at Augusta that makes golfers more demanding and sends chills down the spines of golf course superintendents throughout the world.*

ABC television is broadcasting the PGA Tour, the LPGA can be seen live on ESPN, and I can view the Senior Tour on the USA Network, all at the same time — a golf fanatic's dream. Each weekend, I grab my remote control and punch my way into golfing nirvana, witnessing precise swing planes on finely manicured golf courses across the country. Television brings into our living rooms fabulously conditioned golf courses each and every week of the entire year. I sometimes wonder if this heavy exposure is in the best interests of golf.

On one hand, television exposes a great game to lots of people. By doing so it encourages non-golfing viewers to participate and broadens the base of support for the game. Television demonstrates the well-mannered honesty, integrity, and sportsmanship of those who compete. It is a venue for golf organizations such as the USGA, GCSAA, and the PGA of America to showcase their involvement in the game

for our benefit. Finally, television promotes the various charitable causes on whose behalf the tournaments are held.

On the other hand, televised golf is a poor representation of the real world, especially with respect to golf course maintenance. How so? Consider that the three professional Tours play a total of 130 events each year, and that 50 percent of these events are televised. Therefore, we see at least one perfectly manicured golf course each week for 52 weeks. Does the average viewer realize, though, that the host club's maintenance staff plans and prepares for 51 weeks, and do viewers realize the agronomic sacrifices that each club endures while striving towards perfection? What does all this televised perfection each week lead to, and how does it affect your club?

To begin with, it can lead to an intolerance among golfers, at both public and private courses, for anything less than the perfection they can see on

TV. These golfers' demands are formulated without consideration for the high budgets, equipment and labor costs, logistical problems, outside contractor assistance, guidance from the event's professional organization, and the hundreds of volunteers who help bring off a one-week extravaganza each year.

What is it about television golf that prompts golfers to demand so much? Consider the following:

1. Television commentators know almost nothing about and never mention the work and time it takes to agronomically prepare turf to peak for an important event. Fast greens and uniform rough don't appear overnight; they are planned for and gradually brought into existence.

2. Revenues generated by playing host to such events allow clubs to budget for the overtime and extra equipment necessary to produce the pristine conditions we see. Also, high expectations from the professional golfer, combined with the superintendent's pride in his own performance, cause many long hours to be spent in preparation.

3. April is a fine time for the Masters and a fine time to watch golf, especially if you live in the North. Don't forget, however, that your course and superintendent are just beginning to emerge from winter and that a brief taste of early spring warmth doesn't bring the golf course into mid-season form. Mother Nature still calls the shots, after all.

4. The TV camera's eye has the ability to show the perfect lie, stemming in part from the fact that television follows the leaders, who are playing well and are hitting the ball to the middle of the fairway and then to the green. In addition, we hear announcers rave about conditions without explaining how they got that way, and when they do explain, their information is often wrong or misleading.

The road to solving this problem is a long one, but it could begin by television commentators explaining to the home audience what they are seeing and why. Allow the golf course superintendent to have his/her say about how the course is maintained. Show a picture of the course at the midway point of preparation, possibly six months prior to the event, to indicate that it is not perfect year round. Golfers must realize that no course can be kept in peak condition throughout the year. Peaks can only occur once in a while.