

# Issues in Golf in the 1990s

by **STUART F. BLOCH**

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**W**HEN I WAS A BOY, I started working on my grandfather's farm during the summer and apparently I became infected with an outdoor interest. When you add my love for the game of golf to my interest in the outdoors, it was a natural that I eventually became part of our club's green committee.

I had the luxury of serving as chairman of the committee and also as its only member. I decided that it was clearly going to be more than I could handle to have a committee of four or five members. After all, it was all I could do to learn about the job, working in conjunction with our golf course superintendent, without worrying about four or five other people. So I convinced the board that I would serve only under the condition that I would be the committee and I would resign every fall; if they didn't like the way it was going, then they could start another program. I finally got fired after 18 years, but it was a lot of fun while I was doing it.

We're all very well aware of the steady growth in golf that's expected to continue through the decade, and I think it really speaks well for your profession. My hat is off to you for the continuing sophistication in golf course maintenance that is clearly growing by leaps and bounds.

The environment in which the game of golf is played is really becoming more and more pleasing to the senses. The USGA is taking the lead, along with the Audubon Society of New York, to help you establish wildlife sanctuaries and conservation programs which will surely, over the next few years, draw support from environmentalists concerning the beautiful green space you're maintaining. I began a bluebird program at our club this past year. I kept emptying those boxes of the competitive species throughout the summer and finally, during the last nesting season, we got one set of bluebirds. I was thrilled by that and look forward to finding more there next year. It takes patience, but Nancy Sadlon, the USGA environmental specialist, will be glad to answer any questions you have about starting a bluebird nestbox program



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yourself. I can assure you that it's worthwhile.

We are all concerned about the shotgun criticism toward golf courses damaging and changing the environment. It is one of the major threats to golf of the 1990s, not only for courses that are already in place but for the extensive period of time that's being added to receive permits to build new golf courses. You are all well aware of the National Golf Foundation's estimate of the number of courses that are needed to satisfy the demand for golf in the future. Four hundred golf courses a year from now until the year 2000 is obviously an impossible number to achieve, but I'm confident with the work that our environmental programs are doing now, it will help speed up the process. Over \$3 million has been committed by the USGA to fund environmental research for the period 1991-1993, and this presents a good start. The 900-page book *Golf Course Management and Construction: Environmental Issues* will provide a benchmark for the work that has been done to date. Maybe you weren't aware that until this project was completed, nobody really knew just how much scientific work has been done relating to golf and the environment. People were waving their arms and claiming all kinds of things, and I hope

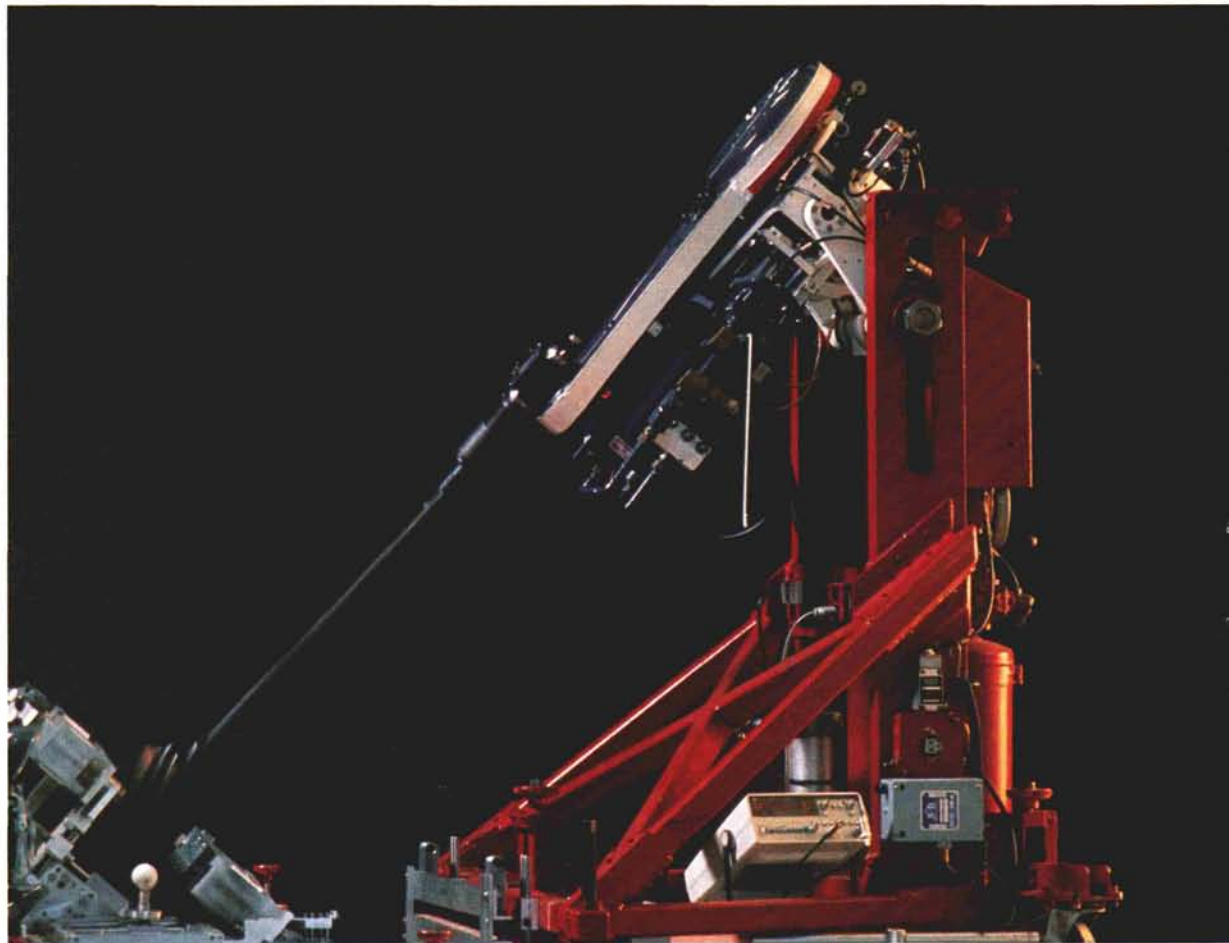
this book will provide information not only for our industry, but also for those who question the golf industry. I also want to thank the GCSAA for the \$50,000 you have contributed annually to the USGA Research Program.

An important part of the environmental side, of course, is the wonderful success with drought-resistant buffalograss, seeded Sahara bermudagrass, three improved bentgrasses which will be available for testing this year, and the prospects for improved zoysiagrass. It is amazing how much progress has been made in the past ten years. Research is a slow process. Every time you cross two plants, you get 1,800 new little children that come out of that work. Then you have to figure out which of them are the best and then use them to create the next generation. I see us in this field for a long time. Not every project we are funding now will continue, but as we go forward, we are going to have more success which will result in better grasses for use on the golf course.

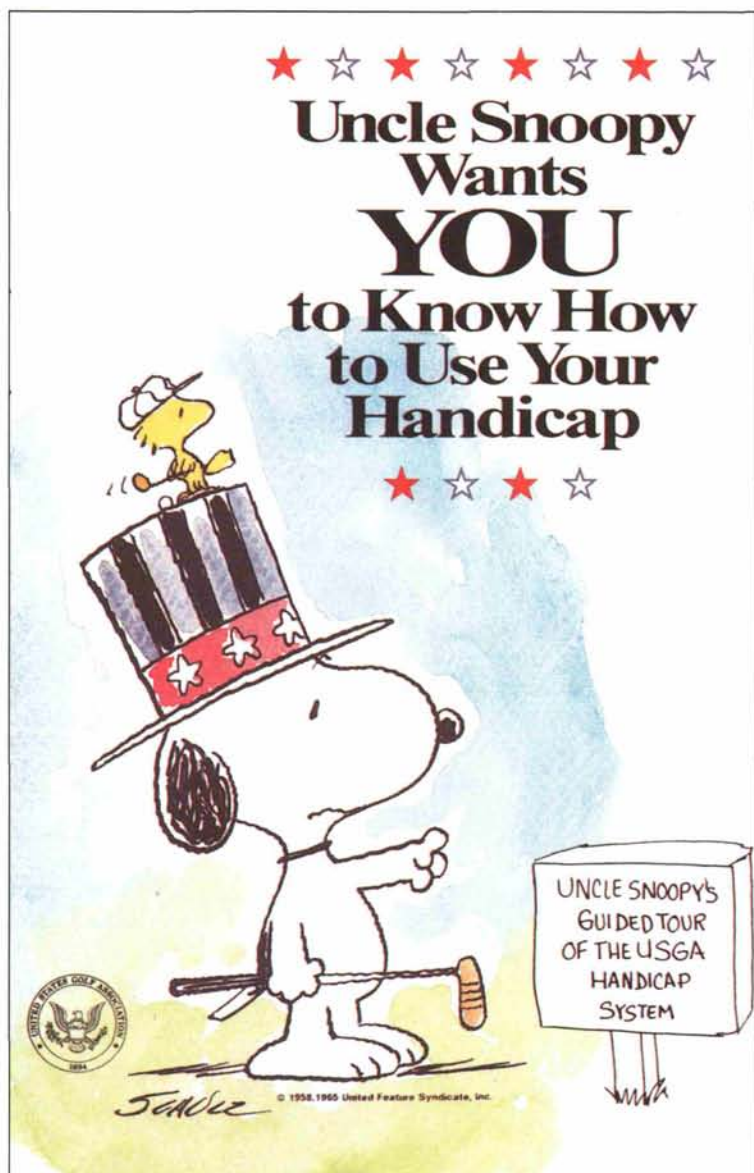
On another subject, golf equipment technology continues to produce more challenges. The USGA is working hard to learn everything we can about the clubs and the ball. Our objective is a simple one: to identify the elements of the player, club, and ball equation that really matter and to apply that knowledge to improving our oversight of the game. We want to do a better job of ensuring that a player's skills, and not his equipment, determine his success as a competitor and preserve the challenge of the game for all of us.

We are already realizing some benefits from our efforts. A recent Rules change stated that inserts are now allowed in iron clubs, metal clubs, and metal woods. We would not have been able to make that decision without the increased sophistication that has been developed at the USGA Test Center. We have expanded the building, added a new Iron Byron, added more staff, and have put together a group of specialists and technicians from industry who are serving as an advisory technical committee. It is a large goal to stay ahead of the manufacturers. I think the









(Opposite page, top) The USGA is constantly trying to make the Rules of Golf more user-friendly.

(Opposite page, left) The USGA works hard to ensure that a player's skills, and not his equipment, determine his success as a competitor.

(Above) The USGA Handicap System is the best method to allow all golfers to compete fairly on any course.

improvements and commitment of resources will allow us to be more active, rather than reactive, to equipment changes. At the same time, however, we want to allow innovations that only serve to make the game more pleasurable and broaden participation. For most of us this game is already hard enough. We have no intention of mak-

ing it more so for the average player and, therefore, we're doing everything we can to understand every aspect of the equipment in order to preserve the game as you and I know it.

Finally, with all of the new players attracted to all the beautiful golf courses maintained by the golf course superintendents, the USGA is undertaking a

major outreach program to educate golfers about some of the special pleasures that the game provides. The Associates' Membership Program has experienced a name change as of 1992 to the USGA Members Program. We anticipate its continued growth.

For the future the handicap system will continue to be a major focus of attention. How to obtain one and how to understand and use your handicap index when you play from different tees or different golf courses will be part of the education process. A new booklet featuring the Peanuts character Snoopy has already exhausted the first million printing, and the second million is on order. *Golf Digest* and *Golf Magazine* have established a 900 telephone number so that you can call, use your index, and find out what your handicap strokes will be when you go to another golf course.

The Rules of Golf are constantly being made more user-friendly. The current issue of *Golf Digest* features a marvelous special about how to play by the Rules, and they enclose a complete Rules book and challenge the reader to enter a Rules quiz. The Rules are more interesting to golfers around the country when controversy arises during major championships. The USGA holds Rules seminars during January, February, and March with the PGA of America, and they are quickly filled to capacity. There's not only a great interest, but the Rules are becoming more understandable both to old-time players and to new golfers who are enjoying the game.

The USGA wants to defend and improve the environment where we play the game. We want to develop turf-grasses which use less of our precious resources. We want to stand firm in the legal area when necessary. We want to stay on top of equipment and ball changes so that the game we love will still be a challenge for our grandchildren, and we want to reach out and communicate to our constituents about the many special elements our fascinating game has waiting for them.

We at the USGA are geared up for the 1990s, I believe, and we look forward to participating with the GCSAA in working for the good of the game.