

# Smoothing Out The Roughs

Let's change the name of roughs. After all, most are not rough anymore.

by STANLEY J. ZONTEK

THE RULES OF GOLF do not contain a definition of a rough. Roughs are included in the definition of *Through The Green*. *Through The Green* is defined as the whole area of the course except the teeing grounds, putting greens, and all the hazards on the course.

The dictionary defines roughs as "having an uneven surface; full of bumps, ridges, and other irregularities; not smooth; coarse, shaggy, or uneven in texture. The part of a golf course left unmowed and uncultivated as distinguished from the fairways and greens." Not bad. Looks like the authors of the dictionary were golfers!

While this description may have been appropriate at one time, having roughs that are uneven, full of bumps, ridges, and other irregularities is becoming less and less common on most golf courses. As a matter of fact, most roughs today are maintained much like fairways of only a few decades ago.

One of the most common requests I hear while visiting golf courses as an agronomist for the USGA Green Section is for recommendations on how to improve the stand of grass in the roughs. Increasingly, golfers seem to want, and frequently demand, a good lie in the rough. Why is this?

- Is it TV golf where every lie is a good one?
- Is it the ever-expanding desire for perfection in the stand of grass on a golf

course? Said another way, is it the lack of tolerance for anything other than green grass in all areas of the golf course, regardless of the weather, costs, or the necessity to expand irrigation, etc.?

- Is it simply not understanding or appreciating the fact that roughs are supposed to be, as the name implies, rough? Is it a reluctance by the average American golfer to accept a bad lie as part of the game of golf? Should golfers be reminded that the essence of the game of golf is to reward a good shot while penalizing (to some degree) a poorly played shot? Could it be possible that the ball just might come to rest in the rough behind a clump of grass or, perish the thought, the ball may find its way to a patch of bare ground without the golfers being critical of how the golf course is being maintained?

- Is the desire for a perfect rough reflective of the fact that the average male or female golfer plays more shots from the rough than a better golfer? Is there a desire for equity?

- Is the desire to have perfect grass everywhere on the golf course a lack of appreciation that a few brown edges on a golf hole is a sign of a good water and turfgrass management along with the intelligent and economical allocation of resources and not some lapse in how the golf course superintendent is managing the golf course?

- How about most people's concern about the environment and conserving resources? Is a more natural golf course a concept for some other golf course down the road?

- Is it a reflection of the times? We have a healthy economy, more people playing the game, full or nearly full memberships, and many people looking for a pretty golf course without any bad lies.

What to do? In reality, not much. Nothing stays the same on golf courses. As one area of the golf course gets a better stand of grass, it may seem a natural step that the next area be tamed. It is hard to argue when people perceive an improvement in uniformity and fairness. Increasingly, roughs are being changed, and what was once a rough should be lamented. It's a passing of an era.

So, should the roughs be renamed? How about: the area outside the fairways formerly called the rough, the smooth, the secondary fairway, the longer grass through the green, the intermediate cut of grass between the fairways and the trees?

There seems to be little doubt that the average rough on today's golf courses is not properly named. Golf courses are spending an ever-increasing amount of money on seed, fertilizers, weed and pest control, and supplemental irrigation to improve the quality of grass in the roughs. It makes no sense. However, the desire for a more reliable and consistent stand of grass in the roughs may be part of the evolution of the game of golf and turfgrass management as it is practiced in the United States.

I am reminded of a cartoon. A young beginning golfer is asking the teaching professional, "Why do they call these clubs woods?"

Is this all that far removed from another young golfer asking the question, "Why do they call them roughs?"



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