

# I Want It Perfect — NOW!

High-quality golf course conditions take time.

BY PATRICK J. GROSS

**G**olfers have always appreciated perfect golf course conditions. The problem is they want it **NOW!** Superintendents are feeling the pressure to produce perfect conditions at all times, regardless of the season and without regard to the capriciousness of Mother Nature. The following are three perfect examples of the frustrations that golfers and superintendents experience in the quest for the eternally perfect golf course:

## A NEW IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Countless times I have heard golfers complain, “Why do I still see wet spots and dry spots and a bunch of guys hand watering after \$1.6 million was just spent on a new irrigation system?” The assumption is that if enough money is spent, then any problem can be resolved immediately. It is important to note that a new irrigation system is simply a tool (albeit an expensive tool) to keep your turf alive when there is not enough rainfall to get the job done. It is not a magic wand to make your course perfect. It takes at least one to two years for the superintendent and his staff to adjust and fine tune the system. Nozzles are changed, a few sprinklers may need to be moved, and water schedules are manipulated throughout the season to account for wind or changing shade patterns. Often sprinklers are placed in new locations, and it takes the surrounding turf several months to adapt to the new irrigation patterns.

## OVERSEEDING AND TRANSITION

For decades, golfers have flocked to southern resort areas during the winter

to enjoy the beautiful golfing conditions created by winter overseeding. Golfers would typically arrive in early November and head back home at the end of May. Winter conditions would be perfect, with no concern about what the course looked like during the summer because they weren't there.

Now, a steady trend of people are living year 'round in the desert resort areas of Palm Springs, Phoenix, and Las Vegas, and there is shock and dismay when they discover that golfing conditions are not always perfect in the summer. There is no appreciation that the superintendents in these areas are attempting to grow a winter crop (perennial ryegrass) and a summer crop (bermudagrass) with a seamless transition between the two despite the huge differences in plant growth requirements. If it were agriculture, they would plow the field and start over, but golf courses don't have that luxury. It takes several weeks in the fall to establish the perennial ryegrass and several more weeks in the summer to reestablish the bermudagrass. Obviously, there are some awkward moments during these transition periods when conditions are not ideal. As one friend aptly put it, “I can give you nine months of perfect. Which nine months do you want?”

## BUNKER CONDITIONING

An annoying trend has developed with the expectations for bunker conditioning. Although they were once considered hazards, bunkers are now looked upon as playing surfaces similar to tees, fairways, and greens. Meticulous groom-

ing is expected, if not demanded, because if a golfer fails to make a good shot from a bunker, it must be the conditions — it couldn't possibly be their lack of skill, type of sand wedge, or failure to occasionally practice the shot.

## HOW MUCH MONEY IS IT GOING TO TAKE ... ?

Expectations are often directly tied to the amount of money spent to play a particular course or fees paid to join a golf club. How would your expectations change if you played a golf course where the green fees were \$15, or \$50, or \$150, or even \$350? Right or wrong, there is a value demanded for the amount of money spent. Unfortunately, there is a limit to what superintendents and nature can provide at any given time of the year, regardless of green fees or maintenance budget. While many courses can achieve perfect conditions for a few months, I have yet to see the course that doesn't take its lumps at some point during the year. While some things can be manipulated, turf growth generally follows its own time schedule based on the season and a number of factors that are out of the control of the superintendent.

So, please be patient and appreciate quality golf course conditions, because as a wise agronomist once said, “The only thing that happens fast in agriculture is crop failure — everything else takes time.”

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