

The Seven Dirty Words of Golf Course Maintenance

Watch your language!

by PATRICK GROSS

THERE ARE certain words that should never be mentioned in public, especially at a golf course. To do so would constitute a serious breach of decorum and good manners. Golf, being a game of etiquette and gentility, requires that certain social graces be observed. The following seven words are listed as a public service to golfers and superintendents to help you avoid social embarrassment.

Aerification: Does this sound familiar? “Just when the greens start getting good, they plug ‘em and mess ‘em up.” You would think superintendents aerify on purpose just to upset golfers. The truth is, if you want healthy grass, you need to aerify. This process removes thatch, relieves compaction, stimulates root growth, and improves air and water movement within the soil. Aerification also helps prevent the discussion of some of the following dirty words.

Brown: Unfortunately, there is no room in the American golfer’s vocabulary for the word *brown*. Grass must be green — perfectly, uniformly lush green, even if it means over-watering and plugged lies in fairways. There’s nothing wrong with green grass, but there’s nothing wrong with a little tinge of brown, either. It’s a good sign that the course is not over-watered.

Ast: No matter how fast greens are, they are never fast enough. More time, energy, and money have been spent over the years to produce fast greens, but golfers want still more. Gradually, the pace of play grinds to a halt as golfers plum-bob their fourth putt. In the end, the quest for fast greens leaves in its wake dead grass and unemployed superintendents. Whatever happened to the goal of smooth greens with reasonable pace?

Bunkers: Golfers will tell you bunkers are always “too” something — too hard, too soft, too wet, too dry, too shallow, too deep, etc. All I can say is, “Too bad.” Bunkers are *hazards*. Something is seriously wrong when courses are spending more time and money maintaining bunkers than greens.

Trees: People love to see trees on golf courses. Trees are beautiful, they are challenging obstacles, and they provide some degree of safety. But trees and turf just can’t seem to get along. Excessive shade, root encroachment, interference with irrigation, and blocked air movement are just some of the problems caused by trees. When superintendents suggest removing trees to grow healthier turf, they are met with strong opposition. I have heard golfers say, “Do you know how long it took for that tree to reach that size and now you want to cut it down?” I think it is unfortunate that courses have suffered with terrible turf at the expense of trees. After all, the game of golf is played on grass.

Carts: The negative impact of golf carts on the playing quality of courses cannot be denied. Soil compaction, thin turf, abrasion, and wear injury directly affect turf quality. But if you suggest cart use rules or restricting carts to the paths, screams of protest can be heard throughout the course. Many golfers don’t pay attention to the rules anyway and then wonder why there are *brown spots* (see dirty word #2). A significant amount of money is spent at courses each year for ropes, stakes, directional signs, and marking paint to restrain carts, not to mention the maintenance programs to correct the damage. Unfortunately, many courses are addicted to the revenue

produced by the rental of carts, but I wonder if the revenue is enough to offset the damage caused to the golf course?

Rebuild: When all the agronomic alternatives have been exhausted and you still cannot grow healthy turf on the greens, many superintendents and green committees entertain the thought of rebuilding the greens. But be very careful about saying the “R” word. Golfers just don’t want to hear it. To them it means change, it means disruption, and it means money. The thought of rebuilding greens becomes even more offensive if previous construction efforts failed to solve the problem. Before you consider rebuilding greens, make sure you are doing it for the right reasons. You may want to discuss some of the previous dirty words that led to the problem in the first place (*aerification, fast, and trees*). Then do your homework to ensure that the project is done properly and efficiently so that golfers can get back to playing the game they so dearly love in as short a time as possible.

In closing, I beg of you to please watch your language the next time you are at the golf course. Especially avoid these seven dirty words, because we don’t want to have to bring you home and have mother wash your mouth out with soap.

PAT GROSS is the Director of the Southwest Region. He politely discusses these seven dirty words and more with courses in California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado.