

Dear Golf Genie . . .

My three wishes for better golf.

BY DERF SOLLER

In recent years many have written that the game of golf is too difficult, and that this is a primary obstacle against increasing golfer participation. I have the opposite opinion. In fact, I believe learning to play golf is easier than ever due in large part to the many advances in equipment technology and accessibility to so many golf courses today. What I believe is hurting the game the most is that it seems many of us have lost sight of the goal of having fun when we play. Fun is, and should continue to be, the main reason the majority of us visit golf courses in the first place. Looking back to when we first learned to play the game, we were not concerned about perfect ball lies, consistent green speeds, or manicured bunkers. The intrigue and enjoyment of the game stemmed from being on the course and trying our best to get the ball from tee to green and eventually into the hole. Even more fun was to be had when there was friendly competition with other players.

What if a “golf” genie were to grant us three wishes to improve the game? What would your wishes be? This is my chance to share mine.

1. My first wish is that all golfers and course managers learn to understand and appreciate the architect’s original design and intent of the golf course. This begins with realistic expectations for putting green speeds. Maintaining excessively fast greens reduces the number of usable hole locations, and oftentimes it is the best and most intriguing hole locations that are lost. When this happens, the architect’s original intent and design for each putting green are also lost.

Fortunately, I believe my first wish is starting to come true. In fact, the idea recently received some help from professional golfer Peter Jacobsen. In an interview for *Golf Course*

Management magazine, he stated, “The worst invention we have ever seen is the Stimpmeter.”¹ Now, I politely disagree with Mr. Jacobsen, because there are many benefits of the Stimpmeter and it has helped raise the bar for golf course conditioning throughout the industry. When utilized correctly, it is a valuable tool for superintendents to achieve greater consistency in playing surfaces throughout a given golf course. In fact, there is no better tool to help ensure that putting green speeds are appropriate for their architecture. Mr. Jacobsen went on to say, “I really appreciate it when I see a membership let the superintendents maintain the dignity of the golf course and the original intent of the architect and let the golf course play as intended.” Thanks, Peter, for helping get the word out on my first wish.

2. My second wish is for all golfers to enhance their enjoyment of playing the game. This can be accomplished simply by playing from the correct tees based on their skill level and average driving distance. Golf is more fun when the player hits more fairways, reaches the occasional par-5 in two, and hits more greens in regulation. Golf is more fun when the player makes birdies more often than double bogeys. And golf is more fun for everyone when less time is spent searching for lost balls. In a recent *Golf Digest* Lesson Tee article,² Jack Nicklaus stated, “I played in a pro-am the other day. I teed off on the par-4 first hole from the back (tee) markers, hit driver, 4-wood, and said, ‘that’s enough for me.’ On the second hole I teed off from the middle tees with my amateur partners, and that’s the way I played the rest of the round. We had great fun. The new [Tee It Forward](#) campaign makes a lot of sense.”

3. My third and final wish is for golfers and course officials to understand

and better tolerate a maintenance practice that is critical to the health of turfgrass — aeration. Whether core aeration is conducted for removal of organic matter or compaction relief, or solid tine venting is done for aiding in water infiltration and to provide oxygen to plant roots, aeration must be an annual part of all turf maintenance programs. No superintendent looks forward to aeration. Not only does the practice temporarily disrupt golfers’ enjoyment of the game, it is a labor-intensive and time-consuming task. It would be very easy for a superintendent to forsake the long-term health of the facility and skip aeration to avoid the complaints and criticism that often accompany aeration procedures. True professionals recognize it is their responsibility to care for the course to the best of their ability. My wish is that they get a little more support from those who benefit the most from such dedication.

After reading this article it is hoped that you will share in my three wishes for better golf. Now get out to a golf course and have some fun!

REFERENCES

¹Peter Jacobsen’s complete interview with *Golf Course Management* magazine can be found by clicking the following link: <http://archive.lib.msu.edu/tic/gcman/article/2012jan66.pdf>

²Flick, J., J. Nicklaus. 2012. Stay active as you age. *Golf Digest* 63(1):28.

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