

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Firm and Fast? Let's All Embrace It and Promote "Brown is Good!"

"Early to bed early to rise, water like hell and fertilize." - Dr. Ralph White, Agronomist

Dr. White was one of golf's leading agronomists for nearly five decades from the mid 1950s, and he was a mentor to me. "Dr. Ralph," as I would affectionately call him, often used the above saying in a jocular manner when consulting with golf course superintendents during the grow-in of a new course. Dr. Ralph would then privately complain to me that many superintendents in the industry were being forced by their employers (mainly real-estate developers) to continue that practice post-opening.

In 1991, with Dr. White in attendance, I spoke at the Florida Golf Course Superintendents' Association meeting about the concept of "firm and fast," citing my project at Southern Dunes (which was then in planning) as an example of how this approach can not only drive interesting designs, but will encourage exciting and thought-provoking play. During the late 80s and early 90s I made several visits to Great Britain and Ireland, as well as to the sandbelt region near Melbourne in Australia, to play and study a selection of firm and fast-running golf courses. In 1995 *LINKS Magazine* ran an interview with me titled, "Put the Bounce Back into the Game" in which I espoused much of what I had learned. So it is a topic I have a history with and feel very passionately about. I applaud the USGA as they stage the US Open, "golf's toughest test," at Pinehurst, Chambers Bay and Erin Hills — all venues that showcase this type of golf to the golfing public.



Royal Liverpool Golf Club (photo credit: Matthew Harris)

Of course, I recognize the challenges faced by golf developers who are seeking to attract home and condominium buyers, many of whom have a perception that "green is best" — that soft emerald fairways and an abundance of water on a golf course is what the game is all about. But in so many parts of the country, where minimal rainfall paints the countryside with a more muted palate, brown can be, and is, both attractive and appropriate — and especially when the golf course is located within a strong natural landscape setting (and by the way those aforementioned British and Australian courses are some of the brownest and most beautiful courses I have seen). One could also argue that if it's not appropriate, then it's not attractive ... Would a moss-draped Spanish Oak look so impressive within a mountain or desert setting? Does a lake really look good on a traditional links style course?



Chambers Bay Golf Course (photo credit: Matthew Harris)

But aesthetics aside, I think the vast majority of golfers, when they understand the richly diverse *playing benefits* of firm and fast, will embrace the concept. I look at the issue of water and turf reduction, along with the changes in equipment, grasses and maintenance practices, and see real opportunity for ASGCA members. I firmly believe that there is nothing that has evolved within the game that we cannot address in and by design. Through understanding and anticipating the future, our profession will thrive and help make the game become more interesting and stimulating. Moreover, by promoting browner, firmer and faster courses, we will preserve the rich traditional values of the sport and be the leaders in its growth and popularity.

I've been taking advantage of this evolution towards firmer and faster playing conditions to talk to clients about how it allows us to visualise and create more dynamically interesting golf courses nestled in powerful natural landscape settings. And I'm always looking for ways to use new tools—turf reduction, im-

provements in grasses, changing attitudes in bunker style and sand selection, improved golf equipment and modern maintenance practices—to alter and enhance the appeal of golf courses.

So I call upon my fellow members not only to embrace the concept of courses that play firm and fast-running — as I believe many of us already do — but to make "brown is good" our mantra. Spreading the word to our colleagues in the Allied Associations of Golf throughout the world will increase awareness of the ASGCA's own stance, and lead to the game maintaining its health. Now is the time.

As always, I want to hear what you think. I hope you'll be in touch: steve@stevesmyers.com or (863) 683-5888.

- Steve Smyers, 2015 - 16 President