Golf in consumer culture and the making of Augusta National syndrome

By the 1970s, then, chemicals had grown invaluable to the golf industry. The question of why this was the case is easily answerable on the surface. As recounted in Chapter 3, greenskeeper Joseph Valentine was not alone in thinking that the efficiency of pesticides was deeply appealing. Products such as DDT were the latest innovations in a lineage of time- and labour-saving devices – each contribution along these lines more remarkable than the last. Valentine’s sentiments were confirmed more recently by James T. Snow, long-time director of the USGA’s Green Section. Chlordane, a chemical banned in 1988 by the EPA, suitably exemplified the remarkable effectiveness of pesticides, as Snow averred: “All you had to do back in the 1960s was put chlordane on the greens and you wouldn’t have an insect problem for 25 years” (Barton, 2008). There was surely a normative force driving the golf industry in North America towards the widespread adoption of sweeping chemical applications as well. Superintendent training was still establishing its footing at this time (as discussed in Chapter 6), and so trade publications were perhaps among the most proven sources of information for those managing golf course landscapes. The (generally) pro-chemical view offered by publications such as Golf Course Management can credibly be regarded as a driver of golf’s ‘chemical warfare’ in the 1960s as well.

Yet our analysis of The Golf Course publication – that of the early 1900s – also points towards golfer expectations as a significant driving force in the quest to be modern. To be more precise, it points towards industry’s view of golfer expectations – perceptions of perceptions – as potentially important in this regard. As said in Chapter 3, an early issue of The Golf Course publication depicted “golfers everywhere” as “critical and fastidious” … “no longer are they content with the primitive courses of early days” (Anon., 1916a: 2). If such a viewpoint indeed prevailed, it is no surprise that golf course owners, developers, and superintendents sought to leave the ‘primitive’ courses of yesteryear behind.

With this background, we spend this chapter exploring golf’s pursuit of modernization – as well as the environmental ramifications arising from this
pursuit – with a particular focus on the game’s relationship to consumer culture. As will become evident, the 1960s are yet again an important period in our analysis. Although the decade of the 1960s was not the moment of golf’s *entrée* into consumer culture, it was the time when golf found a new and tremendously powerful tool for its widespread dissemination: colour television. Over time, TV became invaluable to golf’s commercial success. So too did it fortify an image of the golf course’s ‘proper’ green and pristine aesthetic. At the same time, the golf industry also experienced a major course construction ‘boom’ in the 1960s. This took place especially in Canada and the United States, though, as we shall see, golf was entering a new stage of globalization as well. Thus, as the 1980s approached, golf courses were demanding on the environment in their own right, and were also demanding in their growing occupation of land. This helped set the stage for the ‘light-greening’ of golf described in Chapter 5.

**Golf in consumer culture**

Given its current prominence on television, it might be surprising to fans of the sport that golf was once thought unfit for TV broadcasts. For most of the first half of the 1900s, consumers relied on radio broadcasts and print media to stay abreast of developments in the sporting world. The equation changed, of course, with television: “Sport television brought moving images of the players and crowds, the atmospheric noises of the unique moment, and explanatory commentary … directly into the domestic environment” (Rowe, 2013: 65). In the United States, the first televised sport broadcast took place in 1939 when a single camera panned back and forth in filming a Columbia–Princeton university baseball game (Bryant and Holt, 2006; see Hitchcock, 1989). This same decade also brought the televising of events such as Wimbledon in the UK (Whannel, 1992).

More than simply adding pictures to words, however, the introduction of television to the sporting landscape further cemented an already-existing relationship between sport, media, and capitalism. This is a point emphasized by Sut Jhally (1984) in his writing on the ‘sports/media complex’. For Jhally, the initial form of this complex manifested with television’s predecessors. With both print and radio, media owners ‘sold’ their audiences – and more precisely the *attention* of their audiences – to advertisers. As Rowe puts it, “the time that [audience members] devote to viewing the advertising material around media texts constitutes a form of labor that produces surplus value to be expropriated by the owners of capital” (Rowe, 2013: 65). With television, this relationship
was rendered all the more lucrative for both advertisers and media companies. This was signalled in perhaps a clearer way than ever before when the Gillette shaving company paid $100,000 to sponsor the 1939 baseball World Series in the United States, only to see a sales increase of 350 per cent during the event (cf. Johnson, 1971). More than a convenient relationship, from 1940 onwards, “advertising-dependent network television became so important that a fully-fledged, consolidated complex emerged of profound interdependency – or, more accurately perhaps, co-dependency” between sport and media (Rowe, 2013: 66).

And yet, as Barclay (1992) recounts, in the early post-war years, golf struggled to find its way into American households through the TV set. The problem was the game’s expansive landscapes – they were far too vast for the camera technology of the time, and certainly differed from an enclosed tennis stadium or baseball field. Owen (2003) makes a similar point in his detailed history of the Masters tournament. The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) was close to airing the 1947 men’s US Open golf tournament. When NBC opted not to, a local TV station stepped in, but chose to broadcast action on the final hole alone. “Golf was poorly suited to the TV technology of the day, since the game was played outdoors in unpredictable lighting, and the competitors roamed over an area that was hard to cover with stationary cameras” (Owen, 2003: 184). The first broadcast of the Masters tournament – perhaps the most famous of all golf competitions – would not come until 1956 on the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS).

There was no question that golf was popular, and the game was entering an era of telegenic star male athletes such as Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, and Gary Player. As Barclay (1992) writes, by the mid-1960s, broadcasting had advanced substantially. In turn, the picture changed in both literal and figurative ways:

From three fixed cameras and a handful of technicians, NBC and its competitors had gone to a dozen fixed cameras plus portables, mobile and stationary platforms, dozens of directors, and hundreds of technicians. More than six million homes were watching the Masters, the PGA, and the US Open, and about as many switched on to see Palmer, Nicklaus, and Player in an exhibition labelled the World Series of Golf. (Barclay, 1992: 451)

The popularizing of colour TV in the years that followed was a further benefit to golf’s commercial prospects. The immaculate conditions of Augusta National, home of the Master’s tournament, stood out in particular. As journalist Sharon Oosthoek commented, “starting in the late 1960s … colour broadcasts of the
Masters Tournament at the Augusta National Golf Club in Georgia showed the world a meticulously maintained course shimmering like an ethereal Emerald City. Golfers turned green with envy” (Oosthoek, 2012; see Millington and Wilson, 2014).

In retrospect, it is clear that televising the Masters in colour was hardly a fait accompli once colour broadcasting first became possible. Owen (2003) writes that the TV network CBS initially had a poor experience with colour television, and was thus reluctant to bring this technology to bear on its golf broadcasts. Yet key spokespeople from Augusta National differed in their opinion. In 1964, William Kerr, chairman of Augusta’s television committee, wrote to William MacPhail of CBS on this matter: “I am deeply concerned that if we continue to stand still on this score it will be detrimental to the best interests of the Tournament, the sponsors, and CBS” (cited in Owen, 2003: 196).

Note the third key stakeholder mentioned alongside CBS and the Masters tournament in Kerr’s expression of discontentment: sponsors. The first two Masters broadcasts failed to attract corporate sponsorship. In 1958, Augusta National itself found American Express as a sponsor – a role this company held until 1962. The insurance company Travelers became a sponsor at the end of the 1950s, as did Cadillac a decade later (Owen, 2003: 197). Sampson (1999) recounts that by the mid-1970s, one could encounter Oscar-winning actor Gregory Peck espousing the merits of Travelers in commercials shown during Masters telecasts.

Owen (2003) hastily points out that, under the direction of Augusta National Chairman Clifford Roberts, Masters organizers were careful not to be held to the whims of corporate advertising. Compared to other programming, few commercials were aired during the Masters, and Roberts stressed that those that did appear should comfortably overlap with the tournament’s themes. Even today, the broadcasting and advertising arrangements at the Masters are unique, and indeed to some extent out of step with the principles of free market capitalism. Bloomberg Businessweek reported in 2013 that CBS organizers meet with Masters spokespeople annually to discuss the revenue needed to cover broadcasting costs and perhaps generate a small profit. “Augusta then acts as a broker, arranging for the tournament’s three official sponsors – IBM, AT&T, and ExxonMobil – to cover those costs … CBS doesn’t get to sell ad time on the open market” (Boudway, 2013).

Nonetheless, from the 1960s onward, delivering television audience attention to sponsors became part of the Masters equation – and certainly became important to the televising of golf in general. Golf was woven into the post-war ‘sports/media complex.’ To be sure, the Masters remains something of an outlier.
in terms of generating revenue through broadcast licensing. Elsewhere, and acknowledging that TV contracts are often shrouded in mystery, it was reported that the Fox network more than doubled the $37 million annual rights fee paid by competitors in recent years in acquiring rights to the men's US Open golf tournament (Sandomir, 2013). This is what truly embracing the free market can yield. Indeed, in the contemporary media landscape, the Masters and other golf events require audience attention in the moment – lest viewers miss out on a compelling back nine charge from Rory McIlroy or Tiger Woods.

Sport (and golf) is thus to some extent exempt from the contemporary trend whereby audiences record broadcasts and watch them at a later time, fast-forwarding through commercials in the process (Van Riper, 2012; also Hutchins and Rowe, 2012). The important point in the scope of this analysis is that television broadcasting, from the 1950s onwards, played an important role not just in golf’s economic story, but in its environmental story as well.

Augusta National syndrome: the price of golf’s Emerald City

In Rowe’s (2013) retelling, Jhally’s concept of the ‘sports-media complex’ speaks to important facets of the political economy of both sport and media. Sport, with its fantastical appeal, which itself lies in part in its ‘live’ unpredictability, is perhaps the perfect ‘spectacle of (profit) accumulation’. Yet it should not be forgotten that television, among other media forms, is a communication technology in the last instance. Televised sport can accordingly serve as a ‘spectacle of legitimation’ as well – which is to say a platform for expressing and thus implicitly or explicitly legitimising particular ideologies (cf., MacNeill, 1996). For example, MacNeill (1996) draws on Jhally’s framework in explaining how Canadian hockey telecasts for the 1988 Olympics in Calgary not only delivered audiences to advertisers, but crystallized a vision of what it means to be Canadian: rugged, hard-working, and certainly different from Canada’s ‘softer’ competitors. This image was conveyed through both commentary and production techniques.

To ask which ideologies were (and are) reinscribed through golf telecasts is to ask a complicated question. Certainly, Augusta National, with its longstanding policies barring women and people of colour from membership, was presenting an image of exclusivity through Masters telecasts. From an environmental perspective, however, what was important was Augusta National’s powerful image of how a golf course should appear.
Above we quoted journalist Sharon Oosthoek in saying that in the 1960s colour broadcasts of the Masters tournament had golfers themselves turning green with envy. Augusta National was developed in the early 1930s thanks to a partnership between Robert Trent Jones Jr., the famous course architect, and Clifford Roberts, Augusta’s aforementioned owner and chairman. It became the site of the Masters in 1934, and it was not long before the course was celebrated for its perceived sublime beauty. In 1955, writing in the popular magazine *Sports Illustrated*, Herbert Warren Wind lavished praise on Augusta’s “great green meadowland slopes” – the perfect site for an ‘idyllic’ golfing test. He went on to recount the story of Jones taking in Augusta’s sweeping landscape from a raised vantage point ahead of the course’s construction. A similar feeling was sure to befall anyone adopting the same point of view upon Augusta’s completion:

> Each year the view from the hill, the view that instantly sold Jones, is breathed in by the thousands who journey to the Masters. There are few first-timers who, upon experiencing that view, do not exclaim either aloud or to themselves, “Yes, it’s all it’s cracked up to be and more.” There are few ‘repeaters’ who, after hurrying to the brow of the hill, do not affirm to themselves, “It’s just as lovely as I remember it. I hope it always stays the same because of what it personally means to me.” (Wind, 1955)

To this day, portraits of this kind are not hard to find. Ahead of the 2014 Masters tournament, sports journalist Rob Hodgetts (2014) wrote that just the name Augusta calls to mind an iconic green image, “punctuated by explosions of colour from banks of azaleas and framed by towering pines, with grass so sumptuous you could make a suit out of it”. The Golf Channel’s John Hawkins (2014) made a similar point: “You only get to see the place for one week each year, and because it’s so aesthetically stunning, it assumes a heaven-on-earth type of quality.” Even the Masters’ quaint customs – its cautious, controlling approach to commercialism, for example – arguably help convey an image of simple, bucolic splendour. Importantly, this manufactured image is not lost on television broadcasts. The music is serene, the Masters slogan – ‘a tradition unlike any other’ – hard to miss. CBS was even said to have added fake birdsongs to their broadcast one year, presumably to reinforce Augusta National’s perfect alliance with nature (Shmavonian, 2011). The television viewer might too say, as Wind imagined, “It’s just as lovely as I remember it. I hope it always stays the same because of what it personally means to me” upon watching the Masters on TV.

Yet for golfers to turn green with envy at the sight of Augusta was (and is) for superintendents, developers, and owners to face heightened expectations.
Maintaining the Masters standard requires tremendous care. For example, unlike many courses, Augusta National reportedly closes for much of the year, and needs only to appear ‘perfect’ for a short stretch in April (when the Masters is held) to fortify its image as a wondrous plot of land. Furthermore, its maintenance budget is believed to outstrip that of most courses (e.g. see Klein, 2012). Augusta National syndrome has therefore emerged as a term for describing the ‘affliction’ whereby consumers demand the ‘perfect’ golfing conditions that they see on TV. Golf writer Geoff Shackelford (2012) outlines this condition’s symptomology:

A pattern of symptoms that characterize or indicate a social condition in which golfers of all ages, races, religions and means demand a particular set of course conditions in the weeks, months and years following the annual Masters Tournament. Conditioning excesses requested include ultra-fast green speeds (regardless of long-term ramifications), lush green turf cut to absurdly low heights, snow-blindness-inducing bunker sand, artificially blue water hazards and on-course floral plantings no matter how expensive, unsustainable or excessive. (Shackelford, 2012)

Note the use of terms such as ‘excessive’, ‘unsustainable’, and even ‘absurd’, to describe Augusta National, in contrast to the flattering language noted above. Writing in Golf Digest, Whitten (2010) confirms that Augusta National syndrome arose with the televising of the Masters, and that it yielded ‘expensive’, ‘misguided’ attempts to emulate this famous course.

Thus, if the stunning effectiveness of ‘modern’ course maintenance practices can plausibly be deemed a first reason that the use of, say, DDT became popular in golf in the post-war years, and if advocacy of such practices in industry trade publications stands as a second exhortative force, the mimetic power lying in Augusta National syndrome can be considered important along these lines as well. In other words, ahead of the 1960s, there were already forces in place driving golf superintendents, among others, towards a highly manicured golf course aesthetic. Televised golf pushed the industry in the same direction, and spread the image of how a golf course might appear to an even wider audience.

Writing in 1993 in the USGA’s Green Section, golfer, commentator, and designer Jerry Pate lamented the homogenizing force of Augusta National syndrome. Features like water hazards and island greens were ‘everywhere’, he wrote. He also problematized the environmental implications of television’s idealizing force:

Today there is a very misused practice in golf course maintenance, and that’s the overwatering of our golf courses. I think television, no question, has played a part in reinforcing the misuse of irrigation systems. People want to see green
golf courses. When you go to major events, you have green tents, green cups, green observation stands, green hats, green jackets, green restroom facilities, green sandwich wrappers, and green pairing sheets. All we want to see is green. And as a player for many years on the tour, there’s no question I like to see green, too. But there’s no doubt, and you’ve heard this many times, that green is not always better. (Pate, 1993: 20–21)

Pate’s comments foreshadow the topic of the next chapter, as his vision neatly articulates with the emergence of what we term ‘responsible golf’ as an industry-friendly ‘alter-golf’ environmental response in the 1980s and beyond.

The existence of Augusta National syndrome, we argue, shines sympathetic light on the plight of those working in the golf industry in the post-war years. Practices such as DDT spraying may well have been taken up (and often defended) by individual superintendents, among others. But individual superintendents were not – and, to this day, are not – working independently of the wider context in which they are situated. Indeed, in addition to Pate’s contribution, in trade publications we occasionally encounter rueful meditations on the lofty standards that, by the 1960s, had come to reign in the golf industry. In a 1969 guest editorial in *Golf Course Management*, for example, golf superintendent Bill Brickell expressed concern that members of his profession were being asked to resign due to golfers’ unrealized expectations. “Club members compare courses, condition-wise only. They do not compare budgets or location” (Brickell, 1969: 103). To be sure, this is more an allusion to Augusta National syndrome than a direct reference. As we explore in Chapter 6, however, there was indeed a deep concern among industry representatives at this time that the public did not know what an important and arduous job the golf superintendent faced. More recently, former golf superintendent Joel Jackson, writing in the pages of the superintendent publication *Golfdom*, asked rhetorically, “How many gray hairs and ulcers have been experienced by superintendents who have endured the apples and oranges comparisons from their members about Augusta National conditions or television golf in general?” (Jackson, 2000: 22).

In the same publication, another superintendent wrote of the impossibility of meeting Augusta’s ‘perfect’ televised standard. “For major tournaments, courses prepare for weeks in advance with hundreds of volunteers. It would be impossible to maintain those conditions years around” (Sharp, 2000: 20).

At the same time, there is a question here as to whether the demand for perfect courses is imposed upon the golf industry or is a product of the golf industry’s will in itself. Robbins (2007) entertains a similar question in relation to the prototypical post-war suburban lawn. On the surface, the ideal lawn – lush,
green, and weedless, much like the ideal golf course – is clearly the lawn owners’ imperative. He or she demands it and follows the steps necessary to obtain it. But industry, Robbins argues, at the very least creates the conditions for demand – for example, by supplying and promoting pesticides in the first instance and by combatting legislation that would ban their use in the next. Here, the golf industry’s active promotion of turfgrass chemicals through trade publications is relevant once again. As Robbins would have it, demand is impossible without this step. As we shall see in later chapters, the golf industry also took an active role as time passed in defending chemicals against regulation that would impede their use. Indeed, and as we saw in the introduction to Chapter 1, Gene C. Nutter worried not only about the alleged speciousness of *Silent Spring*, but also that it would incite legislation curtailing the use of pesticides.

Furthermore, golf industry representatives *themselves* have on occasion pointed to the golf industry as responsible in shaping golfer expectations. This was true of Pate’s aforementioned account of Augusta National syndrome. A similar sentiment was voiced in 1997 by Denis Griffiths, President of the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA), in a letter published in the Canadian superintendent magazine *GreenMaster*. Golf’s original courses in Scotland and England, Griffiths stated, were effectively designed by Mother Nature; the (human) course designer merely “discovered the routing”. Golf’s ‘Americanization’ (Griffith’s term) instilled a perception that golf courses need be impeccable. “Television, golf magazines and the PGA Tour have all had a hand in furthering this perception, particularly in setting expectations that are often mistaken for standards” (Griffiths, 1997: 38). Superintendents, we would add, should not be fully immune from such a critique. In 1982, James A. Wyllie entitled his President’s Message in *Golf Course Management*, ‘The Masters, a visible standard’. Having lauded Augusta’s beauty in a way reminiscent of Herbert Warren Wind’s 1955 account in *Sports Illustrated*, Wyllie urged the magazine’s readership to pursue the Augusta standard. “Some will always say that large budgets make this possible at Augusta and nowhere else … We should not fall into this trap” (Wyllie, 1982: 5).

The growth imperative: golf’s booms and busts

The televising of golf in the 1960s was thus a major factor in golf’s entry into the culture of consumerism that flourished in the post-war years. Yet television was not the only influence in this regard. Just as Augusta National was setting a new standard for courses across Canada and the United States, and just as modern
‘weaponry’ was made available to golf superintendents and others interested in a pristine golf course aesthetic, golf was also undergoing a ‘boom’ in course construction. In other words, courses themselves were changing and the number of courses at which golfers could ply their skills was changing too. Once again, this was a phenomenon not free of environmental implications.

Rewinding further, the 1960s golf course boom in Canada and the United States was not the first of its kind. To some extent we saw evidence of this in Chapter 3. Contributors to the superintendent publication *The Golf Course* at times remarked on the rapid pace at which courses were emerging around the United States especially. An article from 1916 noted the ‘unbelievable’ number of courses that had recently been built or were in the midst of construction in the first decades of the 1900s (Anon., 1916b). These were not wayward observations. From the unveiling of the first Canadian and US golf courses at the end of the nineteenth century to the onset of the Great Depression, over 5,600 courses were built in the United States alone (Strawn *et al.*, 2011: 1165). The 1920s saw the apex of this trend. As Hueber and Worzala (2010) recount in their writing on golf course real estate development in the USA, between 1923 and 1929, 600 new courses opened each year – a rate of nearly two per day (see Adams and Rooney, 1985).

Certainly the affluence of the 1920s played a role in these changes. Hueber and Worzala (2010) call the 1920s the ‘Great Gatsby’ era of course development, with 80 per cent of courses at this time existing as private clubs. Moss (2001) reports similar figures. He also adds, however, that US audiences could better relate to golf’s post-First World War celebrities. The likes of Gene Sarazen and Walter Hagen came to replace the British-born stars that had previously dominated the game. Sarazen and Hagen in particular were from working-class backgrounds – something that, in Moss’s (2001) view, fuelled golf’s popularity among the public even with the relative shortage of public courses. Of course, golf remained deeply stratified in terms of who could participate at this time. Non-whites were generally barred from playing, including on the PGA Tour. In one of the more striking cases in point, in the early 1920s Joseph Bartholomew was denied access to Metairie Golf Club in New Orleans even after serving as course architect during construction (PGA.com, 2011).

In explaining the 1920s ‘boom’, there is overlap with Chapter 3 once again in the sense that new technologies were easing the process of manipulating the earth. Moreover, technological development was indirectly shaping course construction in the sense that advances in equipment were affecting how the game was played. In the late 1900s, a new, rubber core golf ball was patented.
in the United States; in the 1920s, steel-shafted clubs began to replace their hickory-shafted ancestors (Nauright, 2012a). Hueber and Worzala comment on the latter development: “This was significant because as golf equipment technology improved, golfers were able to hit the golf ball farther; so, it became necessary to lengthen the golf holes to preserve the score of par as being standard of golfing excellence” (Hueber and Worzala, 2010: 10). Golf was also colonizing land far and wide: “In 1916 there were four states with no courses and sixteen states with fewer than 10. In 1930 there was only one state with fewer than 10, and eighteen had between 10 and 400” (Moss, 2001: 114).

‘Busts’ are typically next off the tee after ‘booms’. Such was the fate for golf in the 1930s and 1940s, when courses closed as a result of the Great Depression and Second World War. As noted, however, the 1960s brought a second high point in golf’s expansion in the United States. The causes were much the same as they were for the previous peak. This was a time of affluence – at least compared to preceding decades – and one when golf’s luminaries had more exposure than ever before thanks to television. Beditz (1994) notes that government funding for public golf courses increased around this time as well. This helped reshape the public/private split that for years had been weighted on the side of the latter. Beditz writes that by 1970, 55 per cent of facilities were publicly accessible – at least for those who could afford their fees (also see Readman, 2003). True to sport’s modern spirit, equipment manufacturing only improved in the post-war years, yielding balls and clubs more resilient than ever and once again necessitating courses that could accommodate the technologically enhanced golf enthusiast.

One novel, and certainly important, development from the 1960s was that real estate developers came to see golf as an amenity for enhancing sales. Golf’s bourgeois reputation was presumably not irrelevant in this regard. “So”, write Hueber and Worzala, “the amount of acreage needed for the golf course development nearly doubled to an average of 150 acres in the 1960’s [sic] allowing real estate developers to maximize their premium priced golf course frontage lots” (Hueber and Worzala, 2010: 11). This point, added to the fact that the number of golf courses doubled to a total of 10,200 by the onset of the 1970s, bore a fundamental environmental reality. Not only had chemical-intensive golf arrived, and not only was there pressure to match Augusta National’s green aesthetic, golf courses were quite simply taking up more land in the United States than ever before.

The 1990s were a time for a third ‘boom’ in course development. Beditz (2000) suggests that the seeds for this growth actually began to sprout in the
mid-1980s, as the golf participation rate grew to 13.5 per cent by 1990, roughly 5 per cent higher than in 1980. Public courses became even more prevalent. Yet in keeping with the tenets of neoliberalism, it was deregulation, rather than government investment, that largely spurred this growth. Deregulation in banking engendered savings and loans institutions keen on funding development activities; golf courses and golf-related real estate were two of the primary beneficiaries (Beditz, 2000).

Golf’s growing public appeal might again inspire a sympathetic reading of these late century developments. Why not match consumer desire for new courses? But the question of whether demand in fact precedes supply is again relevant here. Indeed, in the late 1980s, with nearly two decades of stagnation in the rear-view mirror, the golf industry set out on an active campaign to promote its own growth. The Strategic Plan for the Growth of the Game, devised by the National Golf Foundation in conjunction with strategists at McKinsey and Company, specifically called for the development of a golf course a day across the 1990s. The slogan was literally ‘A Course a Day’, and was broadcast through public service announcements on TV. With the golf industry reaching 16,000 golf courses in the United States by the new millennium – 72 per cent of which were public – the campaign was certainly successful on its own terms (Hueber & Worzala, 2010). As Hueber and Worzala (2010) write, the golf industry had redefined itself as a growth industry through this late century campaign. As we show in the following chapter, an even more robust initiative was set in motion to spur the growth of golf as the 2000s arrived.

Augusta National goes global

A similar story to that described above unfolded in Canada in the post-war years, with substantial growth in the number of golf courses taking place during the 1960s (Barclay, 1992). And while we are interested mainly in this chapter in North America, and even more specifically the United States, the global growth of golf should not be overlooked.

Japan, for example, is commonly cited as a country in which golf witnessed tremendous growth in the post-war years. Exact figures vary, but it is believed that prior to the Second World War there were less than fifty courses in the entire country (Wheeler and Nauright, 2006). By the late 1950s, the industry had grown, but only modestly; Lockyer (2012) gives figures of 118 courses and 300,000 golfers for
1957. Yet the trend only intensified from there. Demand in subsequent years was spurred at least in part by the country’s staging of the Canada Cup International tournament in 1957 – a televised event in which Japanese golfer Nakamura Torakichi thrived. By the mid-1970s, the 1,000 course milestone had been surpassed; by 1983 the number 1,500 was in sight. Lockyer writes: “Then things got out of hand … In Japan”, he continues, “irrational investment became outright speculation” (Lockyer, 2012: 295). This was fuelled by factors such as low interest rates, land privatization, and weakened regulation – all underpinned by a desire among policy makers to spur on the economy. Estimates in the mid-2000s put the number of golf courses in Japan at north of 3,000 (Wheeler and Nauright, 2006).

These developments evidently did not go unnoticed in other parts of the golfing world. In 1985, Walter Woods, links supervisor at the famed St Andrews golf course in Scotland, wrote in the Canadian publication GreenMaster of the resiliency of Japanese developers: “Using huge bulldozers and earth moving equipment they will move any amount of earth to achieve their aim – and money will never be an object” (Woods, 1985: 19). Woods too noted the role of television in propelling interest in golf among the Japanese public.

The mounting popularity of golf in Japan, among other places, further propelled an outward movement of golf tourists. Indeed, much as domestic markets for golf were growing in conjunction with the arrival of post-war affluence, so too were new courses springing up at rapid pace with the specific aim of attracting customers from afar. Palmer (2004) ties the growth of golf tourism, at least in ‘developing’ countries, to policy decisions in the 1960s based on the notion of ‘comparative advantage’. This involves achieving economic growth by focusing on particular industries – namely, those for which a country is thought to be ‘best suited’. In many cases, tourism fits this latter criterion, and the promotion of golf becomes one way of attracting affluent tourists above others. Palmer notes that there are other presumed benefits to such a strategy, apart from attracting consumers with spending power:

A golf course can lengthen a destinations [sic] ‘tourist season’ by attracting golfers wishing to play when the weather is suitable in their own country. Degraded or derelict areas could be turned into golf courses thereby extending the utility of what would otherwise be difficult land to develop. A golf course can assist in diversifying the usual high season summer tourist product by offering additional recreational facilities and so enhance a country’s competitiveness in the global tourism marketplace. There is also the potential for both direct and indirect job creation although putting exact figures on such a benefit is notoriously difficult. (Palmer, 2004: 123; see Cleverdon, 2000)
Richard Haass, president of the US Council on Foreign Relations, has suggested that golf has more recently become a bellwether for domestic development and openness to international relations – especially with the United States. “Countries that have numerous golf courses tend to be friendlier towards the United States. Governments closing golf courses tend to be the most anti-American of all. Think of it as the fairway theory of history” (Haass, 2009).

The growth of golf in Japan had knock-on effects in East Asia in particular. Golf infrastructure has arisen, for example, in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, though as we shall see in Chapter 8, this part of the world has given life to some of the fiercest opposition to golf as well (Palmer, 2004; Readman, 2003). China is also a growing site for development, while in Vietnam a range of luxury courses were recently built and given the label the Ho Chi Minh Golf Trail (The Futures Company, 2012). Mark Readman, in an instructive book chapter on golf tourism, adds that courses have been built in Central and South America recently for the ‘sought-after reward’ of the American dollar (Readman, 2003: 175). The company HSBC said in their recent report on golf’s commercial prospects: “Even Cuba, which banned the game after the revolution in 1959, last year approved the construction of four large luxury golf resorts involving an investment of $1.5 billion” (The Futures Company, 2012: 38). The country’s tourism minister has said that sixteen more courses could be built on the island.

In subsequent chapters we explore the politics of golf’s global proliferation in detail, noting especially how resistance movements have crystallized around the cause of the environment, at least in part. For this chapter, what is noteworthy is not just that golf has been subject to the forces of globalization in a particularly intense fashion since roughly the 1960s; important too is the way in which golf has travelled the world.

First relevant here is the fact that golf has typically been tied to, and has often driven, larger development projects. In his writing on golf tourism, Readman (2003) describes four ‘products’ aimed at attracting the mobile golf enthusiast (see Priestly and Ashworth, 1995):

- ‘Trophy courses’, meaning those heightening their appeal by hosting a championship event. This type of development often comes in conjunction with the concerted efforts of, say, tourism authorities and local development agencies to promote golf in general. Spain, for example, followed this model in the 1990s, hosting the Ryder Cup in 1997 and quadrupling its stock of golf courses across the decade.
• ‘Single integrated resorts’ that act as self-contained, and often expansive, leisure complexes. In this case, other facilities – restaurants and places of accommodation, for example – are found on site, rendering moot the need for tourists to leave the facility. These are not uncommon, writes Readman (2003), in the United States, Australia, and the Caribbean. “In addition,” he adds, “the recent development of golf in Asia has often followed this model, and in some cases large-scale golf ‘leisurescapes’ have been created, such as in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand” (Readman, 2003: 178).

• ‘Property-development-linked courses’ attracting tourists who might buy a time-share property or second home. This type of development can have cascading benefits in the sense that tourists stay in the local community for longer, thus (ideally) spreading their spending dollars wider than they otherwise might. At the same time, and as suggested above, much more land is required in this style of development in that the golf course is one part of a larger real estate package.

• ‘Course networks’ that spread across entire regions, and are often accessed through package deals. Readman (2003) notes the Robert Trent Jones Trail in Alabama (USA) as an example along these lines. The aforementioned Ho Chi Minh Trail in Vietnam is likewise a case in point.

In the best case scenario, these forms of development stimulate local economies through the influx of new consumers. Perhaps the worst case – that which we explore in Chapter 8 – is that a form of ‘tourism as imperialism’ manifests (Palmer, 2004: 124; see Nash, 1989) whereby investors, operating perhaps from afar, promote a form of development unsympathetic to the needs of local residents and the environment.

On the matter of the environment, a second key point pertaining to golf’s global expansion involves the nature of golf courses themselves within these development projects. Were golf’s recent global expansion to have come at another time – say that of Old Tom Morris and the mid-1800s – one might imagine that the less impactful ‘links’ style of course that was hegemonic in the past might have been disseminated around the globe as well. We think it fair to say, however, that the image of the ‘ideal’ course made salient in post-war America is that which has in fact shaped golf’s movement around the globe. Said otherwise, Augusta National syndrome is not confined to America’s borders; it holds ideological resonance on a wider scale.

Nauright (2012b) makes this point in suggesting that Augusta National syndrome has become a global problem, and not just a North American one.
Criticisms of golf emanating from Mexico, Scotland, Thailand, and beyond have rested largely on the environmental implications of ‘American-style’ courses – their use of pesticides and occupation of land, for instance. Notably, the international resonance of the ‘ideal’ aesthetic has been stressed within the golf industry as well. Writing in *Golf Course Management* in 1991, J. Michael Poellot of JMP Golf Design Group observed that “golf is now a worldwide game”. He continued:

> With golfers from all countries now traveling all over the world to play, golf courses are no longer judged against those in the nearby local area. They are measured on the basis of the highest standards in the world. Every golf course is now in the worldwide market whether it wants to be or not. (Poellot, 1991: 7)

To be sure, this is at best an implicit reference to Augusta National syndrome. Nonetheless, the general point remains: golf, and the image of ‘ideal’ golf, knows no spatial boundaries. Poellot averred in 1991 that Japan was ten years behind the United States in its ability to understand and solve golf-related environmental problems. As we argue in the next section and upcoming chapters, however, golf was not without problematic environmental consequences even in America at this time.

‘The beaver dams had been blown to bits’:

a ‘pro-golf’ response

Returning to the superintendent publication *Golf Course Management*, an article from the mid-1980s tells a story of the potential impacts of golf course development (Witteveen, 1986). Readers may have been surprised in encountering the image of an explosion set within a wooded area – a blast powerful enough to tower over the surrounding treeline – on the article’s opening page. An accompanying caption explained that dynamite was used in reconfiguring the ‘rocky, wooded, wet area’ in Ottawa, Canada where Loch March Golf Club would eventually lie. As the article’s author, golf superintendent (and consultant at Loch March) Gordon Witteveen, recounted, there were few open spaces among the trees before the course’s development began. Other ‘negative factors’ potentially impeding Loch March’s arrival were the rocks and swamp-land found on site. According to his own account, Witteveen presumed the realty team “would come to their senses and leave the swamps to the beavers” (Witteveen, 1986: 34).
Such was not the case. Returning to the course site at a later date, Witteveen found that construction was already under way: “The beaver dam had been blown to bits and a network of drainage channels had been dug through the swamp. As if by magic, the entire swampy area had become reasonably dry land” (Witteveen, 1986: 36). From there, a veritable ‘armada’ (Witteveen’s term) of machinery – trucks and bulldozers, for example – were brought in for hauling earth “from morning ‘til night” (Witteveen, 1986: 36). Returning to the image that first greeted the article’s readers, he explained that 18,000 pounds of dynamite were used in levelling green and tee sites (p. 38). In the end, Ottawa-area golfers had a new course at which to pursue their hobby of choice.

Then again, perhaps the ‘explosive’ image at the start of Witteveen’s article was not so striking. What we know from Chapter 3 is that, as the twentieth century unfolded, the golf industry in North America took advantage of modern ‘weaponry’ in the longstanding ‘war’ against turfgrass pests. This was a Promethean inclination to the extent that golf’s representatives saw it as humankind’s inherent right to manipulate the Earth. What we know from this chapter is that the culture of consumerism that reigned in the post-war years, and particularly the arrival of television into the ‘sports/media complex’, invigorated these existing trends. Augusta National syndrome made it normal to finely manipulate one’s course in the pursuit of aesthetic perfection. And while the golf industry certainly bears some responsibility in ‘infecting’ consumers with this ‘disease’, individuals working within the industry can be forgiven for fearing their job security might be jeopardized should they disregard the presumption that golf courses can be perfectly manicured ‘emerald cities’.

We of course do not presume that the environmentally destructive practices employed at Loch March in the mid-1980s are in fact characteristic of all development endeavours in the post-war years. In fact, as we shall see in the following chapter, practices such as ‘blowing beaver dams to bits’ – or, at least, the practice of reporting on such activity with Witteveen’s candour – are misaligned with the tenets of ‘responsible golf’ that emerged near the onset of the 1980s. The point is that as time passed, the golf industry found it increasingly possible to manipulate the natural environment. A similar point is made by Strawn et al. (2011), who note that in the post-war years golf courses could be built anywhere from flat terrain to desert climates to rocky and steep alpine sites. These authors further emphasize how this constituted an important change from golf’s early days:

Horses and mules pulling scraper pans across aborning fairways were thus replaced by the steel and smoke of diesel engines driving heavy equipment, with
blasting as common a procedure in building a golf course as it had become in a typical public works project. In fact, the expertise acquired in dam building, road building and other mass excavation projects was easily transferred to golf construction. (Strawn et al., 2011: 1169)

Again, by the 1970s, the image of golf superintendents extracting weeds with mechanical tools was in the far distance of golf’s rear-view mirror. Golfers sharing pastures with grazing sheep was even further behind.

In the broad scope of this book, what Chapters 3 and 4 point to is an age of ‘pro-golf’ in the early post-war years. Recalling our discussion of the pro-alter-anti-response (‘PAAR’) continuum from Chapter 2, the term pro-golf bespeaks a time of very limited concern for environmental issues (see Figure 1). It is ‘pro’, or ‘for’, golf first in that golf industry spokespeople support golf’s expansion to new regions in North America and beyond. But it is also ‘pro’ in the sense of the ‘Promethean’ environmental discourse: recognizing that counter-hegemonic perspectives existed in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, practices such as DDT spraying were underpinned, we argue, by a dominant logic of human superiority. To be sure, and judging mainly from industry trade publications, the desire among key officials to expand the game and deploy chemicals, among other materials, in the name of modernizing the sport of golf was not entirely new at this time. The point is that in the early post-war years it was increasingly possible to act on this inclination. As we shall see in the following chapters, an emergent logic – a ‘responsible’, ‘alter-golf’ response – was lurking at this time as well.

Note

1 The currency symbol $ denotes US dollars, unless otherwise stated.