

# 18 HOLES WITH HAWTREE

## No. 17 — What is a Bunker?

By F. W. HAWTREE

An eighteenth-century golfer, recalled from the Elysian Fields for a mixed foursome, would not understand many features of the contemporary game. Tee, green, hole, style, garb, his partner, all are different. But he would recognise the bunkers even if he did refer to them as "hazards".

The word "bunker" was not written into the golfing vocabulary until 1824. The earliest codes of rules (St. Andrews 1754, Leith 1775, Aberdeen 1783) did not use it. But Rule IV, Lifting of Break-clubs, etc., of the 1858 Royal & Ancient Rules reads: "All loose impediments within a club length of the ball may be removed on or off the Course, when the ball lies on grass . . . . When a ball lies in a bunker or sand, there shall be no impression made, nor sand or other obstacle removed by the club, or otherwise, before striking at the ball. When a ball lies within a club-length of a washing-tub, the tub may be removed, and when on clothes the ball may be lifted and dropped behind them". The distinction "bunker or sand" does not necessarily mean that bunkers were not sanded but, in dialect at least, the original bunker was an earthen seat or bank in the fields.

The bunker, indeed, is about the last remnant of golf as it was originally played—the game, as Gordon G. Smith said, "of the slow, canny yet strong, resourceful Scottish character . . . the game of the patient, self-reliant man prepared to meet whatever fortune may befall him". Notions of equity have changed all that but the bunker has managed to survive—a rich source of debate on what is fair and unfair. If the bunker goes, we shall have to rely on the rough. But most of that, like the wash-tubs, has gone already.

We touched on the penal versus strategic question early in the round so the proper location of bunkers can be shortly dismissed. Those which give options are more exciting than those

which give none: those which affect the player before he plays are more stimulating than those which only affect him after his shot. But having devised a scheme on these lines, there must still be some manoeuvring to get the bunker into the right place for the general appearance of the hole and for its relationship to the ground around it. And on most courses, there will always be holes which can only be bunkered in a way which punishes a bad shot because the layout is a compromise with the land as a whole. Therefore the idea that a golf course can be transformed by a general overhaul of its bunkering system is often misconceived. There may be room for improvement but much broader factors determine merit. A general overhaul also runs the risk of too much change being dictated by fashion. Soon after the war there was a big drive to reduce the number and size of bunkers. Somebody made the statement that each bunker cost £30 a year to maintain. In those days that sum, duly multiplied, was at least equivalent to the wages of two men doing nothing else. Many superfluous bunkers were filled up but they were seldom replaced by others more effective and appearance sometimes suffered. Others were simply grassed over without correcting the shape so that balls tended to collect in one area and concentrate divot marks.

Next it was noticed that sand became confused with the soil underlying it. There were trials with beds of ashes, gravel, concrete and perforated plastic sheeting as insulation.

The question of the overhanging lip had been more or less exhausted long before but it came back in disguise with demands for fairway bunkers which permitted playing a long iron or even a wood to the green. It is not clear how this idea was to be reconciled with another practice which required raking the sand to leave deep grooves which would ensure the opposite.

Now a well-known championship course has turfed the faces of most of its bunkers in case a ball should bury itself and be lost. In championships, with expert players, caddies, markers and spectators, this chance seems remote and no recent results seem to have been affected by it. On seaside links, the problem of maintaining sand faces against wind erosion is often acute and Scottish greenkeepers first developed the turf wall system to provide a solid backing. Covered with sand, a natural formation is retained but grassing the slope produces a new maintenance problem and an artificial appearance while the total effect on the landscape is mournful. The paucity of design elements available to the golf architect has been mentioned before, the concealment of sand limits them still further, destroys visual scale and tends to reduce a links to a meadow.

But to judge fashion, we must have basic principles. Here is a round dozen:—

(1) The forms of a bunker are infinite. Exploit them to the full to produce good landscape and demand a wide variety of shots.

(2) If the hole allows, site them to give options inspiring a complete plan for playing the hole from tee to green. This means that all bunkers in a hole are related.

(3) Continue this relationship visually to form an agreeable pattern with asymmetrical rather than precise balance.

(4) Vary this pattern at holes of similar length to produce different situations and make different demands.

(5) Show sand strongly for landscape effect and scale.

(6) Relate bunker location to the standard of scratch. This is the only standard which, by definition, is predictable. Higher handicaps normally adapt to options because of shorter tees and random length shots.

(7) Vary predetermined distances to site bunkers in desirable contours (e.g. cut into rising rather than descending ground).

(8) The variation of form includes

orientation, size, contouring but there will often be one form correct for a particular situation. Avoid similarity in neighbouring bunkers, an outline generally at right-angles to the line of play and situations which disperse interest rather than concentrate it.

(9) Be discreet with bunkers which limit tee shot distance.

(10) Give full thought to drainage on clay or low-level sites.

(11) Build boldly with curves and banks adaptable to machine mowing.

(12) On inland sites, use a coarse washed sand free of fines at one end of the scale and of small stones at the other. An even particle size gives least binding.

You can doubtless produce a dozen more of your own. That is the delight of bunkering. We have not, for example, touched on the delicate question of the bunker at the back of the green. But if grassing the faces is the first step to grassing the rest, we shall not have to bother.

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