

# Tee Shots

THE GOLF FOUNDATION has produced the golfers. The Golf Development Council is producing the golf courses.

Let's take a look at the shortages and the problems that this upsurge in golf interest has produced. What can we learn from the past 10 years?

## Providing facilities

It can take four years or more to produce a golf course ready for play. Therefore, by the time it is realised that new golf courses are needed, the situation is already four years behind the times.

Simple facilities like driving ranges, (e.g. on existing sports fields when not used for other games) or rudimentary greens and tees provided on sports grounds, common land, parks, farmers' fields, may satisfy schools and beginners for a time. Artisan type clubs which use courses at off peak times should also be encouraged at existing courses to assist maximum use of existing facilities. But full scale new golf courses are demanded in the end. They must be located and planned well ahead of demand.

Cost of construction is rising. £100,000 is not exceptional on an unfavourable site. Standards are rising all the time and intense use demands a higher specification than formerly.

Private ventures may falter for lack of funds. Municipal bodies have to be encouraged. Municipal courses now break even and show a profit. A privately operated public course can do even better.

The integration of housing development with new golf courses provides the best way of spreading the cost and giving something extra in return. But planning restrictions stultify this type of development in many countries, though in the USA (especially Florida) it still flourishes. Otherwise, a private venture needs, say, 200-300 enthusiasts with at least £500 to £1,000 each.

Because costs are high, the tendency for each new venture to seek a bigger club house and longer 'Championship' course should be discouraged. Simple layouts and buildings can be developed fully in the future, if the original plans are right.

Government help may be available where derelict industrial land can be reclaimed and landscaped by making a golf course. It is cheaper, for instance, to remodel slag heaps for golf than for many other purposes because more internal contours can be left. But any reclamation scheme should ensure adequate top soil cover and drainage of playing areas at least.

The British Government recognises the need to encourage sport and makes grants towards the provision of new courses and training teachers. The old idea of golf as a game for the favoured few dies hard but it should be relentlessly contradicted wherever it survives. Lack of government help may indeed prolong this old myth. Grants will naturally carry the obligation to use them for general benefit.

Recently many more commercial interests have become interested in 'investing in leisure'. The publicity of televised sponsored tournaments has been attractive for some years. Now the sponsorship of amateur events may follow. This new money would be better channelled into the sub-structure of the game instead of its facade. It is folly to foster more surface activities until background technology and personnel can take the strain.

Nine hole courses nearly halve the costs and in remoter areas may well satisfy demand. They should always be planned with an eye to future extension to 18 holes.



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Par 3 courses and Pitch and Putt Courses are popular and the latter, especially, can be lucrative. But they are a sign of the popularity of the game rather than a solution to providing facilities for it.

### **Pressures**

The rush of new golfers and hence the urgent need for new courses, now shows us where plans were needed years earlier. Today, many of our resources are woefully out-dated.

*Greenkeepers* An apprenticeship scheme was started about six years ago but only at the instigation of *greenkeepers themselves*. Golf in Great Britain is curiously organised. Responsibility for fundamental thinking is dispersed. There are four amateur, ethnic groups, one traditional supra-national body dealing with limited areas, female organisations, professional bodies concerned more with finance than the game itself, the Golf Development Council which tries to link the above bodies and the Golf Foundation supported by manufacturers and official representatives from most sections of golf. Each organisation is, indeed, represented in some form on most of the others. This provides a superficially democratic system of government but produces effective stalemate in any urgent matters outside each organisation's immediate area of concern. Thus, there is still no effective encouragement or training for greenkeepers. Older courses cannot find them. New courses have to take pot luck. The average age of groundstaff in Britain has, at a guess, gone down from 40 to 20 in ten years. Traditional greenkeeping practices are in danger of being lost because we were all slow in realising the side effects of developing golf alone and not its associated trades.

**Research** An expanded programme of research was equally lacking. The investment in research in relation to expenditure could be as low as .0042%. No industry can long survive on this proportion – nor does it deserve to.

The scientific investigation of soil problems, especially permeability and physical behaviour of soil under stress becomes ever more essential when expenditure on new courses exceeds millions of pounds annually. There must be some certainty that this money is being spent wisely.

*Design* At the same time, the boom in new courses attracts a number of professional amateur golfers and others into the design field. They probably lack practical experience. Again, if money is not to be wasted there should be a full supporting service of agronomy. Design itself is changing the whole time in its details in order to keep up with new greenkeeping techniques. The triplex green mower, as one example, needs adequate space to manoeuvre on surrounds as well as a green structure able to resist compaction.

*Construction* The number of golf course contractors increases at the same time. Stress must be laid on the need for precise detailed specifications and drawings. Good constructional foremen who could interpret general indications do not exist anymore. The construction of a golf course can only be resolved by an engineering approach, however experienced the designer may be.

With qualified architects fully engaged, urgent schemes may use advisers or contractors alone of little experience, often with unhappy results both in design and practice. Standard contract documents should be available so that clients can obtain value for money and be given protection.

### **Future**

Unless these problems are met squarely by the responsible authorities in each country, control of the situation will pass out of experienced hands into those of entrepreneurs and persons with no interest in aspects of the game of golf which have been proved by time.

Basic etiquette and rules could even be at hazard.

Encouragement of development must come from the top – from the authorities who have inherited and understood the changing traditions of the game. They must remould these to current needs. The flood of new golfers must be actively encouraged (our basic philosophy rests on the universal benefits of the game) but its direction must be guided. The money and time now involved in golf are very serious business indeed. Those who care for the game's interests must respond on the same level.