TPC designs face 'sweeping changes'

By Bob Seigman

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See related feature on pages 36-37.

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TPC courses to undergo transfiguration, Tour says

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Vedra, Fla., that Pete Dye designed in 1980. “We need to pull back and soften some of the sharpness and try to naturalize the features a little more,” said Weed. “Pete Dye had a tremendous effect on golf in the 1980s. To a large degree, many architects took that model and tried to increase the concept. It got to the degree where we got a lot of artificial courses and a contrived look.

“In the 1990s you’ll see a little less contrived look working in harmony with the environment and natural features.”

Weed said the natural-look TPC courses will have more indigenous plants in the rough and out-of-bounds areas. More drought-tolerant grasses will be used in the out-of-bounds areas to reduce maintenance costs.

In cases like the TPC at Summerlin, in Las Vegas, Nev., which is a future host of the Las Vegas Invitational, the plant material will serve as a buffer zone between the course and housing development.

Designers will also try to incorporate more natural features into stadium seating, one of the trademarks of TPC courses.

“We’ll try not to move as much material and dirt,” Weed said. “We’ll try to reduce scars in the ground from earthwork.”

PUBLIC PLAY

But beauty is only skin deep. While TPC courses gain plenty of attention the one week of the year they host PGA Tour events, many factors will be introduced into the designs of the newer TPC courses, according to Weed. An increased focus on multiple tees will accommodate all levels of golfers.

Bunkers will be placed more strategically, presenting both an opportunity for heroic and penal shots.

Water will still be present, but Weed said it may not come into play as much as in the past.

Additional design changes will be made nearer the holes. Lower-cut turf around the greens will be intended to bring back the bump-and-run shot. Weed said shorter grass has already been incorporated by the TPC at Eagle Trace in Coral Springs, Fla., and at Sawgrass.

Fuzzy Zoeller, the former U.S. Open and Masters champion who is a consultant on the TPC at Summerlin, favors that tactic.

“You shouldn’t cut the green off from the amateurs,” Zoeller said. “Rolling the ball up is part of the game.”

Smaller, flatter greens with more subtle contours will also become part of the newer TPC courses, according to Weed. They will still be faster for tournaments than for regular play.

“With as much technology as we have today, the speed of the greens can get out of control,” Weed said. “Any time you have a Stimpmeter reading of 12 or more, it’s virtually impossible to putt on multi-tiered greens.”

Some TPC courses have already begun taking on the look of the future. In addition to the changes at Sawgrass and Eagle Trace, the TPC of Connecticut, in Cromwell, now has small-to-medium-sized greens, and strategic and cluster bunkering.

The course, which has been extensively remodeled, is scheduled to reopen in mid-July, just prior to hosting the Canon Greater Hartford Open.

The TPC of Tampa Bay at Cheval in Tampa, Fla., has softer spectator mounding, and has lots of plant material.

Weed is architect for both the Connecticut and Tampa Bay courses.

FUTURE MODEL

He said the TPC course of the 1990s hasn’t been created yet. He said the prototype of the future will be the TPC at Black Mountain, which Weed co-designed with Johnny Miller, in San Diego. It is in the permit process.

“We feel that has a great opportunity to blend in and work with the environment,” Weed said.

Even though the new TPC courses aren’t likely to become realities for awhile, PGA Tour professionals approve of their direction.

“They have to change,” Zoeller said. “We’re only there one week a year. You have to think about the people who play there the rest of the year.”

Former Masters champion Ben Crenshaw, a consultant at the TPC at Las Colinas in Irving, Texas, said: “People will grow tired of losing a box of balls in a round. People will play it once or twice, but why go back to torture yourself?”

“The trend in architecture the last five years has been on the moniker courses. Most of the people will enjoy an area where it’s a more traditional layout and it must be fair to more levels of golfers.”

Larry Nelson, a two-time PGA champion and former U.S. Open winner, said it’s the new approach wasn’t made in the first place.

“It’s amazing there wasn’t more learned with the Jacksonvile course (TPC at Sawgrass) with the mistakes that were made there,” Nelson said. “It was supposed to be a target golf environment. Target golf is OK, but when you have an area five to 10 feet, from 160 yards out, nobody is that good. It goes past skill to the element of luck. I’ve felt that some of the TPC courses produced the guy who was playing well at that time, instead of the best golfer.”

Bob Seigman is a freelance writer based in Pomona, N.Y.