Golf growth prospects far from 'bust'

By Bill Amick

Golf seems to be on television almost constantly these days, with professional events for men, women and senior men. Superstars of golf are even better-known to millions of non-golfers.

The why aren't greater numbers of people heading towards a first course? It's a challenge to shoot a good score. You can compete with a single opponent or a whole field, have a friendly match, or try to lower your handicap. Golf is an eternal quest, never completely learned. But remember, the NGF never projected that 350 new courses would be built. The projection is that 350 new courses will be needed to meet the demand.

The methods used to count golfers may not be valid. However, you should understand that there is a demand for new golf courses.

The problems involving golf courses are not necessarily the courses, but rather the real estate development surrounding the courses. The demand for stand-alone courses, primarily in the public and municipal categories, is real. Just try to get a tee time at a Chicago or Pittsburgh municipal on Saturday morning in July.

I have presented Golf Course News' projections for new facilities on a number of occasions. Even more conservative (see the NGF's estimate (we're projecting 300 new courses per year) is preposterous.

But the NGF never thought that 350 new courses would be built. The projection is that 350 new courses will be needed to meet the demand.

Dear Sir:

The NGF's numbers may be wishful thinking—and I personally think that 350 new golf courses per year is preposterous.

I responded to Forbes with the following letter. I'll look forward to your comments.

Bill Amick

Family affair leaves no widows, orphans

Everywhere you turn, the courts, the government, the schools, the voters — someone somewhere in the country is putting a child in the armor of the American family.

And now, just as the golf industry has resolved to be part of the solution, not part of the problem with the environment, it should resolve to be part of the solution to the destruction of the family, not a part of the problem.

I don't know exactly when the demise of American society began. I'll let the sociologists and psychologists argue about that. But you don't have to be a "dystopian" to figure out some of the causes. We have been devastating to family life.

If you're a jobologist or schoolologist. Children and parents alike are faced with more pressures outside the family — either from jobs or school. More extracurricular activities keep more kids away from their families. (When you're a high school team nearly every day after Christmas vacation, including New Year's Day, this suddenly becomes very real to you.)

Jobs also are often more demanding and many send parents traveling much more today. Mobility itself, from airplanes to automobiles, has hurt family life.

If you're a motherologist: Each year, more and more mothers are joining the workforce, either by choice or by necessity as inflation eats into family earnings. The one person who has traditionally been home to hold the family together is often not there for the children.

If you're a fatherologist: More and more men are taking second jobs. More time away from home means less time with wife and children.

If you're a TV-cologist: Television and movies alike have downsized childhood to the taste of violence, death, bad manners and degrading sex. A complete list could fill anyone's scalp. Family values are next to nonexistent, and Christians, Christian values and morality are constant attack.

How often in the last month did you see a family presented as a real, honest family — or the case of the "yeah" voters ever consider the possibility of new courses if the demand exists? Are there any solutions for this new golf course dilemma, a shortage that could grow near most large cities?

A way to reduce the size and cost of building courses would make it easier to provide the joys of the game to the more people. We certainly don't expect long hitters to start swinging easier or hitting 5-irons off every tee so that golf holes can be made shorter. Nor do golf rule makers—the United States Golf Association and the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews — seem ready to throttle back on how far today's "hot" golf balls can be hit.

Bill Amick

A SOLUTION

Fortunately, a solution is already here and being used to accomplish these goals — playing a reduced distance ball on modified golf courses.

MacGregor Golf Co.'s "Mactec" ball goes about 60 percent of the distance a golf ball when driven by a long hitter. It weighs approximately 1 1/2 ounces (45.93 gram) golf ball. A modified golf course can be set up several ways. What many golfers and developers think about is what housing developer Andy Combs opened in 1987, at Eagle Landing near Charleston, S.C. This is essentially a miniaturization of a conventional golf course, at a scale to fit the modified ball.

A second option is a part-three course that can be played as a modified course with a modified ball. This is the route taken by Charles Pasternak in building his Missing Links course near Milwaukee, and Joe Clark in remodeling the Highlands Links Colony par-3 course in Plymouth, N.H.

Another advantage of what is the development of the Britannia course in the Cayman Islands decided upon. There are alternative ways the course can be played, depending on where tee markers and cups are placed. It can be arranged as an 18-hole Cayman course for the modified ball, an 18-hole executive course when played with a golf ball.

Sincerely,

Charles E. von Brecht
The critical hire — superintendent — was omitted

To the Editor:

In the December 1990 issue of Golf Course News, the article "Golf Course Europe" contained comments by AGCA (American Society of Golf Course Architects) President Dan Maples stating that "the key to a successful golf course development is assembling a professional team. The key should be an experienced land planner, civil engineer, golf course architect, housing architect, attorney and financial consultant." How sad that golf course superintendent was omitted from his statement. Who is better qualified to assist in grass selection, turfgrass health, and turfgrass quality? Who is better qualified to assist in grass selection, turfgrass health, and turfgrass quality? Who is

Would new developments have an increased rate compared to what a qualified golf course superintendent were included as part of this professional team?

Could maintenance costs and construction problems be reduced while maintainability is increased?

Would developments be better prepared for the tremendous start-up costs of golf course construction and maintenance primarily the first year, but certainly second and third years as well?

Food for thought, certainly.

Sincerely,
Mark J. Hoban, CGCS
President
Georgia GCSA

Not mixing irrigation with great architects

To the Editor:

In November's issue were listed golf course architects headquartered in the United States. I was honored to be on the roster with such great people as Jay Morrish, Tom Fazio, Bob Cupp, Art Hills, Roger Packard and Scott Miller. The truth of the matter is, Larry Rodgers is an irrigation consultant to golf course architects, not a golf course architect, as you listed.

My only attempt at design was a three-hole course on a friend's ranch. It was this humble experience that taught me just how important selecting a quality golf course architect is. I am quite happy in my role as the irrigation designer on the many fine projects I have been involved with.

Thank you for putting my name in print in association with such great architects. My role in the golf course design field is an important one, but the art and strategy must come before the mechanics of golf course architecture.

Sincerely,
Larry Rodgers
Lakewood, Colo.

Comment

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tens of thousands of people who would no more have Sundays with their families?

Let's be golf-ologists and be a part of the solution.

Jerry Gelinus, vice president of marketing with Club Corporation of America, stated potential club members "want benefits that fit their needs and their families' needs. We've found a strong trend toward the entire family becoming part of the club environment."

Gelinus said families offer a major opportunity and a more stable membership for a club.

So, businesswise — as well as good neighborwise and Plain good citizenshipwise — getting entire families involved in golf is a positive for golf courses everywhere.

What can you do? Ski areas are finding success with one tactic: Giving "first-time" the opportunity to ski free of charge (including skis, poles and boots in some instances) on a particular day. Other ski areas offering teaching programs for very little money.

This is all geared to teaching young and old alike the sport so that they can enjoy it to its fullest — and return and keep returning.

Would this be difficult for golf courses to do? Courses could offer special "family" green fee discounts; father-son discounts; husband-wife discounts... the list goes on. Giving the midday could mean eating a meal of success tomorrow.

Let's give the many "golf widows" new life by bringing them out, showing them respect, and honestly illustrating that they are welcome.

With varying degrees of success, ski areas have gotten entire families involved in the sport so that they can enjoy it to its fullest — and return and keep returning.

Junior programs, women's programs, teaching programs — all have been successful in getting entire families involved in the sport so that they can enjoy it to its fullest — and return and keep returning.

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