Von Hagge calls for facelift of Blue Monster

MIAMI, Fla. — It’s high time for changes in Doral Country Club’s Blue Monster golf course, says architect Robert von Hagge, who oversaw course construction 30 years ago.

Owner Howard Kaskel counters, “The estimated $1.5-million cost exceeds the benefit.”

According to von Hagge, bunkers, once vast and steep, have grown smaller and shallower because mechanical rakes sweep sand toward the center, and grass grows around the edges.

Tour pro Raymond Floyd cited the 11th hole. “The bunker in front of the green is a quarter the size of the bunker that used to be there. Every hole, there’s a tremendous difference.”

Formerly distinctive fairway lines have grown blurry and ragged, said von Hagge, and greens that once abutted bunkers and lakes have shrunk.

Collars and fringes between greens and hazards have grown wider to accommodate tractors instead of the 28-inch hand-pushed mowers that once groomed the fringe.

As-is Doral has its defenders. Jack Nicklaus said Doral “still has plenty of challenge” while conceding that it has gotten easier over time. “The bunkering is not as deep, and the greens have gotten flatter, but if you’re going to design a facility to move a lot of people, a resort course, it’s a darn good one.”

Architects Tom Fazio and Pete Dye consider the course a classic. Declared Fazio: “If you made a substantial change to Doral, the first reaction from tour players would be that you ruined the golf course. They’d say, ‘This used to be a great course.’”

Von Hagge estimates that the Blue Monster would have to be closed for almost 10 months to return it to the shape that made it one of the country’s top 30 courses. Its current ranking is 96th.

Kaskel, who inherited ownership from father Alfred, does not take such a dim view. “We have a few suggestions — nothing major. I wouldn’t call it a ‘rehabilitation.’ It’s a beautiful course,” Kaskel said.

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