Now's time to reeducate golfers, and ourselves

By DAMIAN PASCUZZO

American Society of Golf Course Architects has suggested a transition (turn to a less structured arrangement of holes which will allow many sites to be developed that are presently considered unsuitable. There may not be two re-turning nines (George Thomas wrote in the 1920s that this concept almost always compromises design). There will be no mandated number of par 3s, 4s and 5s, or their lengths. There may even be an odd number of holes instead of the predictable nine or 18.

Architects, developers, golf pros may not always have a standardized par-72 score like the Tour pros on television. So, they might be forced to go to match play, to pick the ball up, to move around the course at a much faster pace — and probably enjoy the game more.

So, if we all believe this is the right direction, why do we seem to be edging into this brave tomorrow at a snail's pace? The general fear seems to be the golfer simply won't buy it. If that is the case, why do so many American players make pilgrimage to St. Andrews, the very model of traditional courses, to think that zippy little golf cars are a big part of the fun?

If there is a transition away from the golf car, pros should lead the way, convincing a new generation of golfers that the course can be played more successfully and enjoyably on foot.

Superintendents can do much to lead the march away from the "green is beautiful" obsession. For instance, many courses that get heavy play would profit from planting Bermudagrass, but there is a concern players will resist the plant's brown winter phase.

Superintendents can help educate players on how the obsession with green and the idea the ball must be playable anywhere on the course is not what golf is about.

The golf media's support of this movement (sometimes called naturalism) is essential. Despite the ink invested in the phenomenon of naturalism, the new and old course rankings still line up with the "green is beautiful" crowd. Why shouldn't there by style points in rankings for natural beauty, a "good walking course," minimal maintenance and chemical usage, and low green fees?

Bringing naturalism criteria into the rankings would change things overnight. And why not regular features in the golf press on the new drill in golf course design? Certainly, we golf course architects must assume some responsibility. It is true we serve the client. But that doesn't excuse us from the responsibility of wise counsel on environmental matters, low maintenance, and selling the game as an adventure for the golfer, not just another numbers exercise.

We also can, through our national association, pressure the media to start evaluating and ranking courses on some criteria other than biggest, costliest and greenest.

The important thing is that we're all in this together. No single group within the golf industry can, alone, change the public's attitude. It serves all of our interests to develop as many courses as possible within the environmental constraints we face and the scarcity of quality land.

But the job requires a massive attitude adjustment to get everybody under the tent — an education process that will require all of our best efforts.

So, what are we waiting for?

Golf course news

Phillips commentary

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Joining RISE.

Our new lobbyist should concentrate on convincing our various organizations, a veritable forum of acronyms in pro-active cooperation: GCSAA, USGA, NGF, PGA, PGA Tour, LPGA, ASGCA. Sharing the cost of a golf lobbyist would be shared by: GCSAA, USGA, NGF, PGA, PGA Tour, LPGA, ASGCA. Sharing the cost of a golf lobbyist would be shared by: GCSAA, USGA, NGF, PGA, PGA Tour, LPGA, ASGCA. Sharing the cost of a golf lobbyist would be shared by: GCSAA, USGA, NGF, PGA, PGA Tour, LPGA, ASGCA. Sharing the cost of a golf lobbyist would be shared by: GCSAA, USGA, NGF, PGA, PGA Tour, LPGA, ASGCA. Sharing the cost of a golf lobbyist would be shared by: GCSAA, USGA, NGF, PGA, PGA Tour, LPGA, ASGCA.