Equitable design should lead to family-accessible courses

By JAY MORRISH

A member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, Jay Morrish in one of design's great collaborators, having worked with or for Robert Trent Jones Sr., Desmond Muirhead, George Fazio, Jack Nicklaus, Bob Cupp and Tom Weiskopf. Now in business with son Carter, Morrish works from his office in Flower Mound, Texas.

Rule similar to baseball, there will always be difficult and "unfair" shots for high-handicappers on any well-designed course. Still, there are some design disciplines that architects can use to ease the pain a bit if the golf course is designed specifically for family fun.

Fairness and equality should begin with the tee locations. Most courses built in the past two decades have numerous sets of tees, so this is nothing new. Unfortunately, these tees have acquired names: championship, regular, seniors', and ladies'. Many players who are not capable of hitting the ball a great distance refuse to play from the tee that suits their games, because their egos will not allow it. Therefore, we see mid-handicappers playing from the championship tees, senior players shooting from the regular tees, etc.

Remember, ego has ruined more handicaps than golf course architects! We have even designed some courses with five sets of tees, and have recommended that the back tees be used only for special events or for the lowest-handicap players. It is very important that family members select the tees that best fit their games, if the goal is to enjoy the game.

Fairways should be generous in width so high-handicap players have a large target area, and should feature "preferred" areas which create easier second shots for the good players. These "preferred" areas frequently are next to hazards. If lesser players happen to drive into these preferred areas, so much the better, but they should not be punished for playing away from the problems.

Another method members of the society are employing to make golf courses more friendly for the entire family is to design more grass bunkers (grassy hollows). This may be the most important "perceived" equalization of players' abilities. Most really good golfers would rather play from sand than from long grass.

Conversely, poor players dread sand shots and normally would opt for a poor lie in long grass rather than a good lie in sand. The beauty of grass bunkers is that they can be maintained at any desired height, and can be changed in just a few days for optimal play or the most penal conditions, whereas sand is sand, and plays the same way day in and day out.

The use of water hazards in golf is something rarely seen in Scotland but has become a main design feature in the United States, and rightfully so. The strategic use of beautiful lakes, rivers and streams adds a dimension to golf that is an American tradition we cannot do without. (A lot of water also sells real estate.)

We must be careful with the use of water, however. It probably should not affect golf shots on more than six holes out of 18. Too much water takes the fun out of golf for high-handicap players.

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Morrish comment: Designing it for the whole family

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the architect determines that six water features fit the course in the wrong way... This has happened with the poor landscape industry because of one individual who uses a product in the wrong way... This has happened with the poor landscape industry because of one person who just hangs out a shingle. All landscapers all of a sudden get painted with the same broad brush.