

By JAY MORRISH

Equitable design should lead to family-accessible courses

As our lives become more complicated, and as time pressures build, more families are turning to leisure activities to spend time together. This leisure time takes many forms, not the least of which is golf. It's not uncommon these days to see grandparent, mom, dad and youngster all hitting the links together. But the question for the members of the American Society of Golf Course Architects is, how does one embrace this trend in their designs?

Golf course design is complicated at best, and to design a family-oriented course — fair and fun for all members — is difficult because we never know if the users will be the Nicklaus family or the Adams family. More than likely, there will be a mixture of skills, sometimes ranging from low handicaps to high handicaps.

One of the great players in the world once told me "golf is not fair, and it isn't meant to be; but if you play enough golf, the good breaks and the bad breaks balance out. You just hope you don't get the bad breaks during the U.S. Open."

Until we allow a designated hitter

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



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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.

Probably the single most equitable design principle concerns greens. It is an easy and fair solution to design greens which allow players to bounce the ball to half of each putting surface without crossing a hazard. Hazards in front of greens (especially water) do not affect expert players so much, because they rarely hit a "fat" shot, and generally determine the proper club to carry the hazard. They may miss the shot to the right or left, but not often short. Poor players, however, miss shots left, right and short. By allowing high-handicap players to bounce the ball onto the putting surface, we can at least help eliminate one of their problems.

[This is not a new concept. Anyone who has played golf in Scotland knows that most greens receive shots bounced along the ground and are marvelous fun. It is a great part of golf in the United Kingdom, but often neglected in the United States.]

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. If

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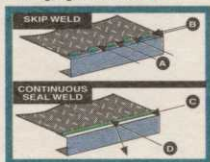


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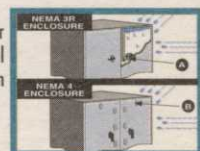


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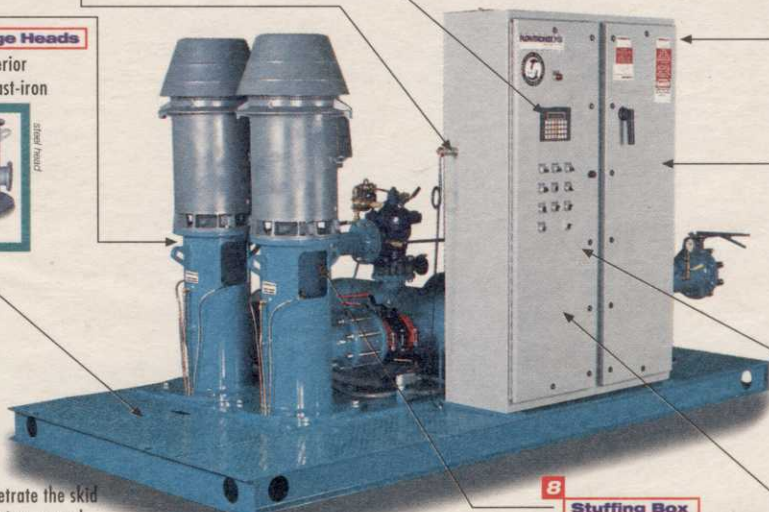
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Leslie comment: Chasing wisdom

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and *Times of Bobby Jones*. Here is a true American hero, not one of these 1990s-style persona-non-integrity types.

- Want to know the down-to-earth particulars of design and construction? *Golf Course Architecture* by Dr. Michael Hurdzan and *Guide to Golf Course Irrigation System Design and Drainage* by Edward Pira will leave few questions unanswered.

- The latest in maintenance techniques and research? Dr.

J.M. Vargas has released his long-awaited *Management of Turfgrass Diseases* and Dr. James B. Beard and Toshikazu Tani have co-authored *Color Atlas of Turfgrass Diseases*. Any further questions, class? Then you might find them in a book about the secrets of greenkeeping by former GCSAA President Mike Bavier and former Canadian GSA President Gordon Witteveen, or Beard's upcoming *Fundamentals of Golf Course Maintenance*. Both are due out in

early 1997.

- Want to read the greats? Books are coming from even beyond the grave. *The Spirit of St. Andrews* by Alister Mackenzie is a full diet of design, with a morsel of playing tips tossed in. And due out this spring is *Golf Has Never Failed Me*, the lost commentaries of Donald Ross compiled by (guess who?) Whitten.

All this adds up to one thing: wisdom. So, pursue it, eh?

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Right now, like an older professor, Robert Trent Jones

Sr. wants to add more "use" into the game of golf. Thus he is enthusiastic about his collaboration with son Bob on a course in the Disney Co.'s town of Celebration outside Orlando, Fla. (see story page 37). This short, par-3 course is geared to children as well as adults. Jones Sr. wants children to play the game. How does he intend to draw them in? Far-forward tees, even to the extent of building tees up on the doglegs of par-4s.

"This way, youngsters can play the course without being embarrassed," said Bob.

...

Asked if superintendents who don't belong to chapters are a threat to the profession, our Super Focus subject of the month, Jean L. Esposito, said: "What I fear are the ones who have little or no connection with anyone at all. There is so much going on in regulations that they could accidentally get themselves caught up in. Government reactions [to mistakes] come back through the ranks, even those who are doing things the right and legal way."

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Morrish comment: Designing it for the whole family

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the architect determines that six water features fit his strategy, he probably will design those holes so that the water is on the left in four instances and on the right on the other two. The reason for this is simple. When good players miss a shot, it is usually hooked to the left, whereas poor players will slice to the right seven out of eight times when missing a shot.

The last, but very important item concerning family-friendly design is maintenance. Architects and superintendents should work hand in hand to make the courses play fair. One problem constantly encountered is the length of roughs. For everyday play, roughs should be mowed at a height that will help players. This means that it is short enough so you can easily find your ball, but long enough to keep balls from rolling into a worse lie. In other words, the rough should "help," not "hurt."

Golf courses afford one of the best chances for families to spend time together and experience the great outdoors. No, strolling a beautiful fairway is not the same as hiking a wilderness area. But then again you can't chase a little white ball in the wilderness — that is, unless you're really wild off the tee.