What does it take to design a golf course?

I wish I could string together four great rounds, say on a Thursday to Sunday as I march to the Washington Post’s PGA Tour’s event. I’d win a nice chunk of cash and certainly pick up the momentum necessary to place second or fifth, or even first on another week during the rest of the PGA season.

That would appear to be all I need to do to launch my supplemental golf course architecture career — you know, in case my game starts to slip.

As I wade deeper into the knowledgebase of the golf business, I’ve repeatedly asked the top players in the design field what it takes to be a well-sought-out course architect. The answers are as varied as the designers themselves; yet the common piece of any response is that one must be able to look at a site, no matter how perfect or how raw and awful, and picture a layout, figure out how each hole should be framed in the context of a given piece of land.

That skill alone takes an “eye,” the same eye that separates Irving Penn or Helmut Newton from the rest of us simple camera owners. Yes, I own a camera, but what I choose to frame is what separates me from one of the masters. That master frames the shot before the eye gazes into the viewfinder.

Good design is not necessarily a great golfer (I’ve seen this fact proven on two occasions), but a person who has an eye for the layout, a person who has stepped on countless acres of undeveloped earth and has seen thousands of holes materialize in the minds eye.

Now this is where I remain somewhat mystified. PGA pros have walked thousands of fabulous holes, but how many raw spaces has each one surveyed prior to the layout of 18 new holes? Is being a great golfer any help in being a great course designer? Are the two skills related in any way?

Just prior to The Masters, Tiger Woods was catching saying that he has, in fact, entertained the thought of hovering over some blueprints.

“I think it’s going to happen a little later,” Woods said in an Associated Press wire story prior to the big event. “I’ve got some things in my head of styles I like and things I want to incorporate into my own course designing.” Woods went on to say he needed to play more courses around the world and learn more about drainage and slopes and development around the tract of land. “I’m very creative,” he went on to say, “I’d like to create that.”

International Management Group (IMG) is reading a few new “design products” in the forms of Jesper Parnevik and Annika Sorenstam, two excellent players who will have “design teams” put in place to support their new endeavors.

According to IMG, there are more new stars are on the horizon, all with slick marketing packages and niche-oriented business plans. How Jesper and Annika will do is yet to be seen. However, as more and more marquee names enter the field, it will be the market that will eventually decide what it takes to be a golf course designer.

Letter

WGA looks to work with industry

Editor note: The following is a letter from Graham Whatley, executive director of the Walking Golf Association (WGA).

Thank you for writing the article on the establishment of the Walking Golf Association (WGA) and including it in your recent issue of Golf Course News (GCN, March).

Everything in the article was a fair and accurate representation of what we have made and our views so far. There is, however, an aspect of our goals for the association which was not strongly stated and which could allow golf courses to favor walkers that we are a threat to.

Fundamentally, we do not intend for the Walking Golf Association to be adversarial with golf courses that have a restrict walking. We, in fact, plan for golf courses to join the WGA and for us to be a partner which helps solve problems for the good of all — both walking golfers and golf courses. We know that some portion of players will always want to use a cart. We respect that decision and don’t want to impede these golfers in enjoying their rounds the way they choose.

Being trained as a lawyer, I was taught that lawyers who tell you that you can’t do are a dime a dozen. But the lawyer who can tell you how you can legally and appropriately accomplish your goals are worth a million bucks.

The WGA wants to be the organization that works with million bucks to golf courses.

How do we accomplish this? First, we truly understand the revenue and economic pressures that golf courses face today and the reason many in the upscale golf course arena must rely upon cart revenues. Michael Hurdzan, my fellow Board member, works and deals with these issues every day. We are certainly not naive to the forces at work. And we certainly don’t have all the answers.

But we are in a unique position to work with golf courses to create answers which will allow them to maintain revenues while allowing walking. We want to be an organization which creates solutions and then tests their veracity in partnership with interested golf courses. If they succeed, we will be the first to forward to other golf courses utilizing the knowledge we have gained.

Rounds of golf at far too many courses are taking well over 5 hours, especially on weekends when the popularity of the course is played. If something could be done in a systematic way to increase the speed of a round to 4 hours, this would make a significant impact on the number of rounds possible on peak days and revenues.

Admittedly, far too many times golfers are their own worst enemies. Honestly, too many golfers who have played for years don’t know the rules like they should and aren’t well educated on the speed-of-play issues. For example many of us have no clue even what the speed rating for a golf course is, let alone do something to moderate our speed of play!

Therefore, one of our first priorities is to help educate golfers on these issues and what they can do about them. We want to make golfers aware of their responsibilities to others on the course. Make them aware so that they know how to make adjustments to their speed without...
harmful to others in the group. This is a golfer issue not a walking v. cart issue. And we are not doing anything about it.

We are currently negotiating with the City of Rockville and the professional staff at their municipal layout, Redgate Golf Course, to partner in the creation of an educational video for golfers which will be filmed this spring.

This 15 minute video would be displayed in pro shops or concession areas and explain to players in a simple clear way a dozen speed of play or rule of play tips to speed their rounds.

We want these tips to be something players immediately take to the course and use.

Once we are successfully educating golfers, then we want to help golf courses to train their marshals to know how they can enforce these rules effectively. Marshal training is currently time consuming and potentially expensive for a golf course.

Marshal turnover is high, forcing continuous reeducation on part of the golf course creating inconsistency at a particular golf course and one course to the next.

To this end we intend to create a Marshal Training Program. This program, which will include a 30 to 60 minute video, work book and test will save golf courses hundreds if not thousands of dollars.

You know as a golfer, there is nothing more frustrating than a marshal flying up to your group and yelling at you for slow play when you have been the person waiting for others during the entire round and doing everything you can to get the group to pick it up.

You leave the golf course with a bad taste in your mouth feeling like that marshal has no idea what your group was doing or how to manage play on the course — let alone how to talk to people.

Through our training program, a marshal will be taught how to quickly observe a group and then strategically engage with them in a positive way to speed up play. The program will, even more importantly, teach marshals how to manage and maintain play in the first place!

Many times marshals are the ambassador of a golf course. Other than the guy that took your money and the kid at the concession stand, you might not meet any other staff at the course. Therefore, it’s in the interest of the golf course that marshals are well trained, personable and good shepherds.

This is actually where the opportunity comes in for Golf Course News and ourselves to work in some way with Redgate and the City of Rockville. How could we partner to distribute these marshal training videos and publicize this program? Our issue is not the production but building a solid distribution network.

Furthermore, we are going to be conducting a lot of research in partnership with golf courses and the National Golf Foundation.

Redgate, for instance, is very interested in working with us on some of the problems they face.

Bottom line, our goal is not to be adversarial. Your article, I’m afraid appeared to portray us that way. We will not be able to work with and attract golf courses if they perceive we plan to order them to simply allow walking. It’s unrealistic.

We believe this can definitely be a win-win situation for everyone.

Furthermore, I hope there is a way we can work together in the best interests of the spirit of the golf.

Thank you,

Graham Whatley

Hurdzan/flat pipe

Continued from page 15

pretty harsh thought I would admit, but not without a fair amount of truth.

We are living in a period of rapid technological innovation and application that has no foreseeable end and the pace will only quicken as we learn more about the technological innovation and application that has no foreseeable end and the pace will only quicken as we learn more about the

In the spirit of the interest of the golf course, the National Golf Foundation has set up a Marshal Training Program. This program, which will include a 30 to 60 minute video, work book and test will save golf courses hundreds if not thousands of dollars.

You know as a golfer, there is nothing more frustrating than a marshal flying up to your group and yelling at you for slow play when you have been the person waiting for others during the entire round and doing everything you can to get the group to pick it up.

You leave the golf course with a bad taste in your mouth feeling like that marshal has no idea what your group was doing or how to manage play on the course — let alone how to talk to people.

Through our training program, a marshal will be taught how to quickly observe a group and then strategically engage with them in a positive way to speed up play. The program will, even more importantly, teach marshals how to manage and maintain play in the first place!

Many times marshals are the ambassador of a golf course. Other than the guy that took your money and the kid at the concession stand, you might not meet any other staff at the course. Therefore, it’s in the interest of the golf course that marshals are well trained, personable and good shepherds.

This is actually where the opportunity comes in for Golf Course News and ourselves to work in some way with Redgate and the City of Rockville. How could we partner to distribute these marshal training videos and publicize this program? Our issue is not the production but building a solid distribution network.

Furthermore, we are going to be conducting a lot of research in partnership with golf courses and the National Golf Foundation.

Redgate, for instance, is very interested in working with us on some of the problems they face.

Bottom line, our goal is not to be adversarial. Your article, I’m afraid appeared to portray us that way. We will not be able to work with and attract golf courses if they perceive we plan to order them to simply allow walking. It’s unrealistic.

We believe this can definitely be a win-win situation for everyone.

Furthermore, I hope there is a way we can work together in the best interests of the spirit of the golf.

Thank you,

Graham Whatley

Jake’s SandScorpion ready to strike

Jake’s SandScorpion ready to strike}

Jacobson has introduced its new SandScorpion bunker and infill rake to provide a convenient walk-through deck with generous leg room. Jacobson also designed the operator position for 360 degree visibility while keeping the operator away from sand and debris. A tilt steering wheel allows customizing the wheel position for individual comfort and peak productivity. Steering requires minimal effort. Customers can purchase an additional battery tray, which holds six 8 volt batteries, to extend operating time. The SandScorpion Electric operates an average of up to six hours per charge in most conditions.

For more information, contact 414-637-6711.

CIRCLE #205