Golf is pushing toward a greater good

Golf and our society over the last decade have evolved in opposite directions, it seems. The golf industry is an engine driving toward more equality, morality, and unity, while society has been steered by politicians and activists toward dissension and intolerance.

Ten years ago, Ronald Reagan was president of the United States. The general public felt good about America, its future and its president. The Berlin Wall had fallen and Russia was about to collapse. The U.S. was held in high esteem in most other countries of the world.

In the little world of golf, the industry was peddling along at 200-old new golf courses each year. Player figures were relatively stagnant. The fiasco over Butler National's white-only policy had not yet surfaced. Generally, golf was treading water.

Ten years ago this month, Golf Course News published its first issue and I attended my first International Golf Course Conference and Show. I recall my first two interviews:

- with Alice Dye concerning her efforts to get golf course developer and architects to build "forward" tee boxes to make the game more playable for women, youths and older players; and
- with golf architect Jeffrey Brauer regarding the pros and cons of sodding an entire course, since Tom Fazio was doing just that for the first time at Shadow Creek Golf Club outside Las Vegas. They seemed innocent-enough interviews, but look at them more closely. It appears now that Alice's push (or was she using a hammer?) heralded a trend of a mammoth, game-changing trend that has turned into an adventure of innovative, energetic programs and learning facilities to pull youths, women and other beginners into the game of golf.

Though sodding golf courses was unheard-of at the time, Brauer's insights proved true — perhaps even prophetic. The long-term savings related to sodding a course often more than negate the short-term savings related to seeding. But with sodding, a golf course can open quickly and speed up return on investment. Having greatly picked up steam, this method appears to have coincided with the acceptance that, yes, golf can be as much a profitable business as it is a game — a business that can stand without housing, and therefore one that can open to the general public rather than just the wealthy.

Golf as a game, meanwhile, has even gained in stature, perhaps because it stands in stark contrast to the world in which it must exist. Players abide by the rules, everyone being equal. There are no shades of gray. Here's a novel idea for some of the folks in the White House.

Gamingmanship has to do with a contest of skills, not who can best "spin" the facts to make themselves look good and their enemy evil. Golf's history is so strongly laced with tales of ethics that they rule — that is, RULE — the game and influence modern players. Compare them to the "ethics" of the world in 1999.

Ten years ago, there existed no Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System for Golf Courses. Today, thousands of golf courses belong to the system, more are being added every month, and builders and architects have labored with environmentalists to forge a set of rules by which they will work with and for ecology. This is a great

Continued on page 66

NOTES FROM THE UK

Time to consider a better women's course

By Brian Griffiths

The Marylebone Cricket Club's (MCC) change of heart in admitting women members recently might well lead us to a consideration of media interest in the status of women golfers.

In the United Kingdom the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) busineses have already been sticking their noses into the Royal & Anc-

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Norman’s Tiburon opens in Naples

NAPLES, Fla. — The Greg Norman-designed golf course at Tiburon, a resort destination community developed by WCI Communities, has opened.

“The course at Tiburon will be unique to the Naples area because Greg Norman’s design provides for a variety of contrasting elements,” said David Fry, senior vice president of amenities at WCI, “such as stacked sod wall bunkers and the use of a tangerine-colored coquina sand in the waste bunkers. The course will contain no roughs, with the highest turf being maintained at a fairway height of one-half inch. The golf course landscape plan has incorporated the use of indigenous plants in an effort to create expansive areas of native habitat bordering the fairways.”

Construction on an additional nine holes is scheduled this year. Tiburon, Spanish for “shark,” is a master-planned resort community. In addition to the golf course and club, there will also be the Tiburon Golf Academy.

Golf pushing toward greater good

Continued from page 18

contrast to our ill-educated vice president and his weird concept of nature.

Ten years ago, technologies like Global Positioning Systems and laser earthmoving were far from the game of golf. Today they are here — and even instrumental in the operations of some facilities and some course builders. Out in the world, top-secret technology is being “sold” to foreign governments for campaign contributions.

The golf course is the great equalizer. There is no rich and poor on the golf course — just the best striking of the ball. Compare this to the political harrangues and government policies that only tear apart Americans based on their income and social status.

Not to be lost in this reflection is the immense and amazing effect that Tiger Woods has had. Many have rightly compared his impact with that that a young Arnold Palmer had on many of us as we watched that new contraption called a television set. Kids of all kinds — black, white and yellow — have flocked to courses from Arkansas to Australia after being stirred by the play and charisma of this young man.

The good part of the decade that we have published is that golf has embarked on an upward spiral in which the game has thrived; more than one golf course per day has opened for four straight years; it has become the popular game of choice; daily-fee courses make up around 85 percent of new facilities; more and more kids are being taken off the street by new First Tee-type programs; and, yes, all seems well with the world.

The bad part of all this is that, as we approach the Year 2000, we in the golf industry must approach it while living in a world that operates under a far different value system. My hope is that we all attempt to walk daily above the muck and not get dragged into it.

Remember that old kids’ song, “This little light of mine...”? Yah, that’s me singing, man.