Tom Weiskopf: An original

Q&A

When Tom Weiskopf quit the PGA Tour at 40, he was the fourth all-time money winner and sixth all-time tournament winner. In 1984 he joined Jay Morrish as a design team whose first creation, Troon Golf and Country Club in Arizona, was selected Best New Private Course in 1986 and whose Shadow Glen outside Kansas City and Forest Highlands in Arizona finished one-two in 1989. Morrish and Weiskopf went their separate ways in 1995, but Weiskopf has continued to design award-winning golf courses, most notably Loch Lomond in Scotland, already ranked among the world’s best. GCN Managing Editor Mark Leslie caught up with Weiskopf at his Scottsdale, Ariz., offices after the New Year.

Golf Course News: Compare the satisfaction of seeing a finished course of yours to winning a Tour event.

Tom Weiskopf: The comparison would be the recognition for a lot of hard work. There is a lot of preparation that goes into tournament golf. There are a lot of determinations during four rounds of golf. And it’s over a much shorter time frame than it is doing a golf course.

There is a tremendous difference. Playing tournament golf is a wisp-of-the-will existence. When you win a tournament, it is soon forgotten by the general public. Whereas if a golf course is finished and is being played, it is there for a long time, and long time is in living memory for a long time.

GCN: How do you respond to grousing by golf course architects about Tour pros “jumping into the business”? Is it sour

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Dyes designing 4th in Dominican

By Peter Blais

LA ROMANA, Dominican Republic — Architects Pete and Alice Dye are building their fourth course here at the Fanjul resort, home of Casa de Campo (Teeth of the Dog), one of the Dyes’ best-known layouts.

Alfons de Chevon, which means high above the (Chevon) river, began construction a year ago and is scheduled to open by fall 2000. It will be the third Dye-designed resort course here, joining Casa de Campo and The Links. Casa de Campo opened in 1971 and hosted the world amateur championship in 1974. La Romana Country Club, also a Dye project on the resort grounds, is a private layout.

Despite the devastating effects of last fall’s Hurricane Mitch, course work quickly resumed. The green pads were under construction in early January, according to Alice Dye.

“We didn’t have rain, like Puerto Rico,” Dye remembered of Mitch. “We had much higher winds. They were clocked at 225 miles per hour. It denuded all the trees.

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AMP: Examples from California

By Dr. Robert Abbott

The theoretical concepts behind Adaptive Management Planning (AMP) are not difficult since it is essentially the same experimental method taught at all good universities.

The difference is that AMP is a management strategy based on information derived through experiments designed within the context of social/economic policy constraints. Putting AMP into practice is much more challenging than an experiment back in the nursery area for a new fertilizer on your favorite strain of turfgrass.

AMP tends to involve people from a variety of disciplines, and a considerable expenditure of energy and money. The real virtue of the AMP approach is that it enables superintendents and developers to move beyond the gridlock, hard-nosed, red-in-the-face frustration stance with the regulatory community. AMP elevates the interactions and communications into a let’s-talk-it-over mode, so that they all can come up with answers.

But AMP is also very exciting because of the rewards of solving a tough problem, and achieving real understanding through a community effort that tends to create long-term professional relationships.

Here in Northern California there are many examples of AMP at golf courses. Two striking examples are observed at Pebble...

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Nebraskan neighbors build together

By Mark Leslie

GOTHENBURG, Neb. — In Nebraska, “community” takes on a whole new meaning. And “community-owned golf course” does not necessarily mean “municipal golf course.” Such is the case at Wild Horse Golf Club here, where more than 200 people not only hold shares in the course but probably also got down and dirty building it.

“I tell you what: These [Nebraska] people work together to help each other out,” said Dan Proctor, who co-designed Wild Horse with partner Dave Axland of Bunker Hill Golf Course Design and Construction. “If somebody needs something, they go and help them. Local people did most of the tilling. After their work, they’d bring a tractor over to the site. Some...
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grapes, or is some of it justi
fied?" TW: Some of it is ve
sified. They make a good point if
their comments are directed to
ward those who don’t spend any
time trying to be involved in the
business, trying to learn what it
takes to design, to administer
during site visits through con
struction and the final project.
In other words, if the pros are ba
ically putting their name on a
course. But there are some ex
ceptions to the rule. There are
some who make it a priority in
their life and put it ahead of play
ning tournament golf and do
spend as much time or even more
time than those who are critical of
the pros. Consequently, they
put their heart and soul and ef
fort into it.

I would argue the point
against pros/designers. In past
history, there hasn’t been any
one who has not played the game
at a pretty high level who has
designed many great courses.
I’m talking about a lot of great
players who originally designed
the old courses. Harry Vardon,
Jack Neville, George Crump,
Tom Fazio was a near-scratch
player. Pete Dye is a very good
player. I just don’t see how you
could not be a pretty good player
and design. I think they have a
tremendous advantage over
somebody who isn’t a good
player. If they have done the
homework and get involved in
every detail that it takes through
out construction and site visits
and into grassing — start to fin
ish — and still can hit a 4-iron 2
feet from the hole, they should
be a better designer because of
their experience of seeing those
who have played the game at its
highest level on the greatest
courses over the whole world.

GCN: Which Tour player/de
signers are committed, do you
think?

TW: [Ben] Crenshaw. Jack
[Nicklaus]. Jerry Pate. And John
Fought is very committed to it.
There may be some I haven’t
thought of. But for the most part
they are signing their name on
the dotted line.

GCN: Some complain that cer
tain Tour pros design courses to
fit their own game. Is that a ten
dency you struggle with?

TW: I think anybody would
tend to put some favoritism in
their course that came from the
stronger parts of their game.
Thats human nature. Thats’s som
ething that you have to be ex
tremely aware not to overdo.

The other thing — and I am not
defending [Jack] Nicklaus — is,
thats the way he sees it. Thats
his canvas. Thats was also what
he was hired to do. That owner
hired Jack and liked his golf
courses and liked the power of
marketing Jack can get.

GCN: What makes a golf
course a great golf course?

TW: Until Shadow Creek hosts
something significant like the
Nevada State Open, you can’t call
it “great.” I’ve played it twice and
it is a wonderful course. But
“great”? We’ve overused that term.

I have a hard time with these
rating panels and dealing with
the selection and the criteria of
the members of these panels. I
don’t totally agree with it.

 Granted, it’s a way to get pub
licity. I think they’d be better off
listing them alphabetically.

Tom Watson made a terrific
comment and I always keep it in
mind. He said conditioning is
important, but it is not the most
important factor. If a golf course
has to be in perfect condition for
you to execute a well-placed shot
and get excellent results, then
the course is designed wrong.

Tom named a course and said if
it isn’t in the finest condition how
could you play it effectively, be
cause you’re always hitting over
something to land it correctly.

GCN: You once said the best
courses since the late 1930s will
be built in the 1990s. It’s 1999.
Has that prediction come true?

TW: Yes. And I think it will con
inue because, starting about 1990,
the pendulum has definitely
swung back toward traditional
designs — golf courses that mir
ror the strategic qualities, be
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and maintainability of those courses that are so highly respected around the world.

GCN: Will you name a few?

TW: The first that comes to mind is Sand Hills [in Mullen, Neb.]. That's a very, very good example. Where I coming from is, if they're not maintainable, they're not playable.

GCN: Then what do you think of, say, the PGA West Stadium Course?

TW: It's spectacular. The imagination that Pete Dye put into that piece of ground and the results are as creative as you could imagine. It's memorable. It is truly a good player's golf course. But it's difficult to maintain and is not for the average player and his enjoyment.

GCN: What are the top three points in your design philosophy?

TW: Beauty, variety and, most importantly, the margin for error on and around the greens.

Beauty comes from bunker styles, bunker locations on the golf holes. Bunkers, to me, are threefold. They are used either strategically, directionally, or as "saving" bunkers.

Variety I mean in two ways: variety of shots that are required; and variety of the golf holes.

About margin of error: I don't put a lot of contour in my greens because of the green specs. I protect myself because of the subtle rolls I put in. Then they can get the greens as fast as they want and they are still playable.

I design for a lot of pitching and chipping and places to play safe around the greens. I'm a fan of bump and run.

GCN: You talk of water and the overuse of it. What do you think of it?

TW: I try to stay underneath six holes having water. The worst thing in the world is to lose a golf ball.

GCN: Differentiate your design philosophy for public versus private courses?

TW: On a private course, you're allowed more flexibility and versatility. And you can be much more illusionary and penal — simply because a shot is only blind once in a golfer's memory and they adjust their game to avoid the difficult situations. Whereas on a public or resort course they may be there only one time, and you want to be very straight-forward and not conceal things visually — no hidden bunkers. The greens are bigger, the challenges less severe and demanding.

I always remember a statistic: There are 26 million golfers in the U.S. That's anyone who plays six rounds of golf in their season. Ninety-two percent do not break 90. That's assuming they all know and abide by the rules. One half of one percent break 80. That's why I believe the design philosophy has to consider a margin of error most of the time.

GCN: What "problems" exist with modern courses that have not returned to traditional design?

TW: I think if the old architects were alive today they probably wouldn't design things much differently than we do. The problems are simple: The complement of residential communities internally within the golf course system. The hardest thing to deal with is the sewage and drainage systems, the traffic system. On the old courses, they all had peripheral housing, virtually void of any internal housing. But, we have to string these courses out to maximize frontage for residential lots. We have houses between every green and tee and eliminate one of the enjoyments of the game, comfortably walking. [Alister] Mackenzie and these other guys would use more mounding to conceal bad visual impacts — like cart paths, roads, or pump houses.

Another problem is the environmental impact today. Environmental constraints are unbelievable. All these great old courses are so gorgeous with wetlands. They violated so many of the things we can't do today. You can't even get approvals for properties that once were never a concern.

The third thing that's difficult is the availability of great land for golf. If you look at all the old courses, and a lot of them are plantations like Oakmont and Oak Hill, they were void of trees. They had good choices of land. Architects today are doing a doggone good job of trying to go back in time. They've tried all the things in the '60s, '70s and '80s and those things are not quite as...
accepted today. They get tired of hearing about all these old great courses, so they feel, "Let's try to copy those again."

If you look at guys who played in the '60s and '70s, they all tried to swing like Jack Nicklaus. They had that reverse C, that slide through the ball, because Jack was the greatest and we wanted to play like him. Then Curtis Strange and Nick Faldo came along, and dominated the game; and they went back to the old Sam Snead-Ben Hogan swing. The straight left side; you eliminate the slide because the equipment has changed, too. But the swing changed dramatically in the '80s and '90s.

Likewise, the three guys who had the greatest impact on architecture in modern times were Robert Trent Jones Sr., Pete Dye and Jack Nicklaus. Unbelievably contrasting styles. Everything is copy or recopy from Day One, and Dye and Nicklaus were getting all the work, getting all the recognition, and everybody in the business said, "Let's copy Pete, let's do the mounds, the deep bunkers, the pot bunkers, the links-type look. Then they realized in the '80s it was still not as popular still as what was done in the first 30 years. And we've all gone back to the old '30s style. Even Pete has modified his stuff. Jack has modified his stuff. It's just like the golf swing. They thought it was right because they were getting all the work, getting all the money, getting all the demands.

GCN: We were discussing the Tour players and how much time they spend on a design project. How much time do you spend on site?

TW: I quit playing. I gave up my career. I was 40 and fourth all-time leading money winner, behind Jack Nicklaus, Lee Trevino and Tom Watson. Architecture was what I wanted to do. It was a change of vocation. It was a change of lifestyle. Even though I was involved with the game, it was a totally different lifestyle. I started working for people. I always wanted to try it. And I always knew that if it didn’t work I could go back and play. That’s a nice option, isn’t it? Fortunately, my first course with Jay, Troon, won the best new course. So I got instant recognition and that wasn’t difficult. It takes anybody starting out in this business two to three years to get recognition because you have to get a variety of product for people to see. Then we won again, three years later, with Shadow Glen; and Forest Highlands was No. 2 by one vote. Within a four-year period — and probably we only had six or seven courses out there — we had two wins and a second. That’s the hard thing for young guys starting out: to get enough courses, with some variety, for people to see. I didn’t even think of the Senior Tour coming along.

As far as time on site is concerned, I have never been on a job where I have been less than twice a month, minimum. It usually takes eight to 10 months of construction time. I always walk the site with the ownership before accepting the job. I want to know the ownership and their philosophy. And the marketplace they are in has to balance the scale with the site. I'm not going to work on a terrible site knowing the ownership doesn’t have the money to make it a good site.

GCN: You mentioned the Senior Tour and you’re 56 now. Any plans?

TW: I’m going to play a little more. But I will never allow my golf to overtake my commitment and responsibility to my owners. I stil believe that I would not be the designer that I am without having the opportunity to have been a professional golfer and to play golf competitively on the great courses of the world. I look at that list of best courses and there are very few I haven’t played. As a result, they had time on their side. The interest clock is running so hard and fast now that we don’t have the time to look at things and dwell on them, for the most part. They had two to three years to design a course. The two best courses I’ve done took a lot of time: Loch Lomond and Double Eagle. So I had time to make decisions and challenge myself. The best courses I’ve ever been involved with were those I had more than enough time to make the right decision on. Most of the time today, you...
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never start on schedule. We give
the owners a schedule, and it's
always geared to grassing, and
we always start two to three
months later than we should
have. And then you're hastily
doing things.
So many things have changed.
Go back to the turn of the cen-
tury when they were playing with
the gutta percha ball and wooden
shafts. And look at the contrast
of the era of Mackenzie and
[A.W.] Tillinghast and [Donald]
Ross and [C.B.] Macdonald, and
what they had to use to construct
things with — mules and plows
and they played over and around
things. We play through things.
We just eliminate things today.
That's because lawyers were in-
vented, everybody wants to sue
everybody and you can't have a
blind shot anymore. And that
should be part of golf.
GCN: Tell us about your staff.
TW: Dave Porter has been my
senior designer the last five years.
He has engineering and agro-
nomic degrees and was a superin-
tendent at Pebble Beach for three
tears. Tony Heckenkemper of
Tulsa, Okla., does our working
drawings. Judy McCray is my sec-
retary. And we use three consult-
ants: Larry Rodgers, who does
most all the irrigation design;
Troon North superintendent Jeff
Spangler, who is our Western ag-
ronomic consultant; and Terry
Buchen, who is our Eastern con-
sultant.
GCN: How many courses do
you design per year?
TW: Four to six.
GCN: You were partners with
Jay Morrish for 12 years. Has it
been strange competing for jobs
with Jay?
TW: I don't know if it has hap-
pened. We never told who we're competing against.
But I can tell you this: I learned
a tremendous amount from Jay
Morrish. When I worked with
him, we got along great and ac-
complished some wonderful
things. If we were a team and
coordinated each other very
well. But there will never be
another one [partner] for me.
GCN: If you had to hire some-
body else to design a golf course
for you, who would it be?
TW: Pete Dye, no doubt. He has
the most imagination and creativ-
ity of anybody's work I've ever
seen. And we're only limited by
our imagination in most cases.
Pete takes a bad piece of prop-
erty that is void of character,
that has no strategic value to
work with — like big trees, rock
cracks, ravines, drainage
channels, streams and lakes —
and turns it into something won-
terful. When I play a Pete Dye
course, I look at it strategically
and have never questioned the lo-
cation of streams, lakes and bun-
kers relative to the shot he is ask-
ing the player to negotiate. He
always has them in the right place.
Pete's unbelievable. I wouldn't
even think of anybody else but
him. It will cost me in con-
struction costs. You know what I
mean. If I've got the extra $1
million or so, Pete's who I want.
GCN: Is your favorite
Weiskopf design?
TW: Loch Lomond [in Scot-
lane], by far. It is an unparal-
leled piece of property. You
wouldn't find a property like that
anywhere in the world. It's on
the most famous landlocked lake
in the British Isles. It's at the
base of the mountain range with
the Scottish Highlands, 180 de-
grees around it. It has 500-
700-year-old deciduous hard-
woods, 10 or 11 different species
that are from 3 to 6 feet in diam-
ete. It has a 30-foot elevation
change and it has a marsh, peat
boggish wetlands, and two trout
and salmon streams that run
through the property. And 800
acres to put the golf course where
it should be, with no houses.
GCN: Has this vocation lived
up to your expectations?
TW: What I have found out
about this business that is very
interesting, fulfilling and intrigu-
ing is the fact that you have to
really keep your eyes and ears
open because you're working for
someone else and using their
money and reputation — not that
yours isn't important, too. You
have to be on the job a lot. It's a lot
more difficult than people think.
It's exciting, ever-changing. There
are land mines that continually
need to be dodged. And solutions
have to be the right solutions. So
you have to depend on a lot of
people. That's what keeps me go-
ing. I think I'm as enthusiastic
now as when I did my first course.

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