

Q&A with Lopez

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joyment to people. Even when I'm gone, they will know I loved golf that much and I cared about my fellow golfers, amateurs. I wanted to build something that they would love and enjoy playing as much as I did.

A lot of times courses are built for the professionals, and when did they ever pay a green fee? You have to build it for the people who support golf, and that's my goal: to build a course that will give them competitive feelings, they will be tested but will love and enjoy.

Another aspect is the visual. When I play courses I hate, I never play well — not because they are tough, but because they are boring or not pretty. Visually, golf can intimidate you. I want a course that intimidates people; it may not be tough, but when they look at it, it looks tough. I've played courses like that. You are intimidated by what you see. Maybe there are trees on the right or out-of-bounds on the left, and yet it is only a 100-yard carry.

GCN: What would be a good length for your two sets of women's tees?

Lopez: On the Tour we play about 6,200 yards. I'm not sure what total distance I'm looking for. I want it long, but not so long that women don't enjoy it. I want them to be able to reach par-4s in two shots. Even good amateurs struggle to reach some par-4s in two. I want the better women to have the chance to hit a driver and 5- or 6-iron into the green. That's how the pros do it. They're not hitting 3 and 4 irons into par-4s.

This is all a learning process for me. I haven't done a full-blown course yet. I've

Lopez: Youths, family, golf help one another

Pointing to the golf industry's push to open programs to get youths involved in the game, Nancy Lopez feels children and families are issues to be considered.

Youth programs, she said "are something we really need to think about. It's so important. I look at women's golf, or even collegiate golf, and you barely see any American players coming up. You see a lot of foreigners scooping up scholarships and playing for college teams. We need to develop junior golf as much as we can in the United States. You look at the women's Tour and a lot of foreigners win each week."

Meanwhile, she said, golf can be an important cog in keeping the family unit together.

"Every day everyone in my family is going 100 miles per hour. They don't have that two to three hours to go out and play on the golf course. But if I can get them all on a golf course it would be a lot of fun," Lopez said.

While her two oldest daughters — Ashley, 16, and Erinn, 13 — are softball and basketball players and not interested in golf, her youngest, 8-year-old Torri, is an avid golfer, Lopez said.

"It's not just the training of the young," she added. "We have to get the parents to support their kids. My Mom and Dad supported me 100 percent. That's why I know I got to where I am today. They spent that time, money and effort to encourage me playing golf. Nowadays, because moms do work, it's difficult."

always been the consultant. I've walked the course and suggested ladies' tees and changes. You know, "Move that tee or bunker over because it's not fair." I'll talk with Brit about that.

It's deceptive to tell you yardage because, unless you go out on the site, you don't know from where the person is hitting the 5- or 6-iron.

Golf course design is a feeling, also. It's not just looking at the course. It's what you feel when you step on the tee, what you see and what intimidates you and doesn't intimidate you. Golf is an emotional up and down all the time. I know how I felt over the years when I stepped on those tees and my emotions were up and down. I don't want it to be, simply, "Let's tee it up and go." I want them to look at everything and say, "Boy, this is a beautiful hole. I can go for this or go to the right, or reach the green in two." Give them the opportunities that the pros have.

GCN: Do you think you can relate to the amateur-caliber player?

Lopez: I think so. Growing up, playing with my Dad, I remember courses I played and what I felt and how tough a hole was. I remember those feelings of hitting over water. I want bailing-out areas to the right or left and give golfers that choice. Let them get the thrill of golf by hitting that great shot, if they choose.

GCN: There are a number of male Tour players involved in design. Why haven't you been involved before this?

Lopez: I was not interested and did not have the time. IMG knew that and did not pursue it. What got it started was a visit to Florida — to The Villages — where they build two courses a year. The developer asked if I ever thought about designing a golf course and would I design one for him. It is a beautiful area and I expect we will sign a contract. When he asked, I had not really had the time.

But I love golf and being able to build a golf course and being proud of it is something I look forward to doing. When it is

Women & golf a mutual attraction

Judy Bell became the first woman president of the U.S. Golf Association two years ago, the same time that Alice Dye was elected the first female president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. Now that Nancy Lopez is receiving the Old Tom Morris Award from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, what does she feel this says about the involvement of women in golf?

"I think women's involvement has grown tremendously over the last five or six years," Lopez said. "We've come a long way. A lot of people say, 'Why aren't you getting paid as much as the men?' or why, why why. You can only do what you can do."

"I think there are many more women playing it and enjoying it. I think even in the corporate world, they realize a lot of things get done on a golf course. It's a quiet place. It's away from phones. It's peaceful. Yet, you do realize who you want to do business with, because you learn more about their character on a golf course than anywhere. And I think women, especially corporate top executives, are finally catching on to that."

Lopez said that women are also getting involved "so they won't be golf widows. They enjoy being with their husbands more, and want to play golf with them and hopefully be the kind of golfer their husbands enjoy playing with."

"It's fun for me," she added. "I like to go to pro-ams and see groups of women playing, and the men really accepting that. Many years ago, when I was coming up I was not allowed to play on some golf courses because I was a woman."

As for Alice Dye and Judy Bell, "they are quality women in golf," Lopez said. "They respect the game. They respect the male game and yet they respect the women's game, also. When you have women who can do that, they have a lot of sense about golf. It's not an attitude [declaring] 'Women should be doing this or that.' It's more a statement: 'We can all do it together — for both men and women.'"

"I've always respected Judy Bell very much, and I used to play with Alice Dye when I was an amateur. I'm flabbergasted that I can even put my name beside theirs. It's an honor. When I started playing golf I just wanted to be the best I could be."

finally finished and I get a chance to play it and be a part of it, that will be neat.

GCN: Now that you have created Nancy Lopez Course Design, where do you want to work?

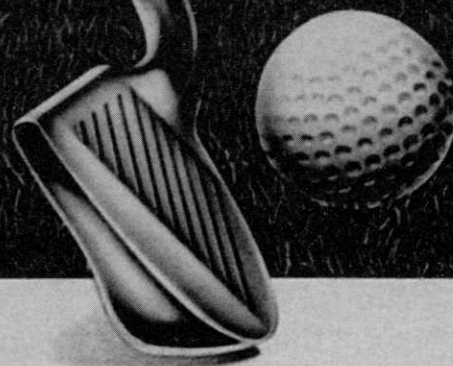
Lopez: Right now I'm looking at the United States. I'm hoping we develop one in New Mexico because that's where I grew up. They're in the talking stages now. That would be a lot of fun for me. I love New Mexico and to have my name on a golf course there would be really neat to me.

GCN: Have you had any involvement with the LPGA's new golf courses?

Lopez: I was a little disappointed they didn't get us involved — perhaps let each player design a hole there, since it was our golf course. I think it would have brought a little more — something — to it. It would have been fun to have 18 holes with 18 different players' names on them — to see the character of each player on each hole.

It is flattering for me that IMG would ask me. Playing all the golf I have, I feel I have insight on what a hole should look like. I don't want to put my name on something and not be involved in it. ▶

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