Technology threatening course obsolescence, architects warn

CHICAGO — Golf course architects believe there should be "a line drawn in the sand" for at least for tournament golf or technology could render courses obsolete.

"The challenge will grow even more difficult with each passing year," said the board of governors of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, in a position paper issued recently. "It is not just an issue for new courses, but for every club that finds its best golf holes rendered defenseless by technology."

The board added: "It is difficult and some-times impossible because of land restrictions for architects to design courses that will challenge top players using high-tech golf clubs and balls."

As modern golf becomes more of a power game, designers are finding it difficult to create holes that require good players to hit long irons onto the green. In this summer's U.S. Open, for instance, players were driving with two irons on a 490-yard hole — not the driver and long iron the designer intended.

In 1994, the ASGCA issued a "white paper" on the problem, its original warning, pointing out that advancements in golf course maintenance, club design and ball technology have altered the way the game is played and how courses are designed.

Since then, equipment advances have enabled golfers — including hacks — to hit longer shots, with no end in sight.

TOURNAMENT BALL

Some of the group's most prominent designers, such as Jack Nicklaus and Pete Dye, have long called for a "tournament ball" that would control distance. And a number of ASGCA past presidents, including Bobby and Rees Jones, Ed Seay, Art Hills and Geoffrey Cornish, support the call to review technology's impact on the game.

"Technological parameters would enable some of the great traditional courses to continue to host major tournaments," said current ASGCA president Damian Pascuzzo.

"They would enable us to design new courses that won't be obsolete in a few years."

Longer drives by high-handicap players also are forcing designers to widen fairway corridors to accommodate more pronounced slice and hook shots. "Safety is a real concern," said Pascuzzo.

DISCOURAGING NEW GOLFERs

Pascuzzo added that if technology dictates longer and wider golf courses, it will further escalate land acquisition and maintenance costs, ultimately driving up green fees and membership dues.

"We're already designing 7,000-yard courses," he said. "What's next — 8,000 or 9,000 yards? Or does technology force designers to 'trick up' a course to defend par?"

Frankly, we think that solution is not good for golf. But if technology continues to give us a course that is perfectly in place and entrenched and operating for a couple of years before you take on anything else. We learned that the hard way. This course is our prototype. We will get it to where we want it, and go from there."

HIGHEST IN FLORIDA

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"We have a par-3 of 250 yards from the back tees, and it drops 90 feet from tee to green," Gagliardi said. "It is very much not a Florida golf course. It's more like an Irish course, with the course.

The semi-private layout — a par-71, 6,911-yard track — offers affordable golf, ranging from $30 in the summer to $90 in the winter.
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The judge in the Mauser v. Mauser case put it this way: “All golf courses have a duty to post a sign that details what, if any, safety procedures are being utilized by the golf course to protect its patrons from

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Similar complexities are involved in the decision to make defibrillators available to assist in cardiac incidents on the golf course. On the other hand, such well-intended, humanitarian efforts, if implemented incorrectly or inadequately, could increase liability exposure rather than reduce it.

Gary M. Crist practices sports and entertainment law in Jupiter, Fla. Prior to establishing his own practice in 1994, he was general counsel to the PGA of America and associate general counsel to the PGA Tour.