Drawing a line in the sand

By DAMIAN PASCUZZO

As golf course architects we are trained to be problem solvers. Given a piece of land, along with a list of development constraints and the client's goals and budget, we set out to design the best course possible. That's our job and we'll continue to do it the best we can. But how about a little help from our friends making all of these new high-tech clubs and balls?

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How has the golf ball harmed golf?

By WALTER UHLEIN

For the past 70 years the United States Golf Association and the Royal & Ancient have had performance controls in place concerning the golf ball. These performance controls have included limitations on size and weight (adopted 1955), velocity (adopted 1942) and overall distance (adopted 1976). At the same time the performance controls on golf clubs did not occur until 1998.

To discuss and debate a "limited flight ball" is to conclude that the golf ball is the cause of some current problem. If there is a problem, the golf ball is not the cause.

PLAYERS ARE BIGGER, STRONGER AND LONGER

The cause is a combination of stronger competitors and better clubs. In 1992, the average height and weight of the 125 exempt players on the U.S. PGA Tour was six feet and 180 pounds. Today the average height and weight of 125 exempt players on the U.S. PGA Tour is six feet two inches and 195 pounds.

At the same time, club technology has improved. In 1992, the average size driver clubhead and driver length on the PGA Tour in 1992 was 180 cc and 44 inches. The average size driver clubhead and driver length in 2002 is 325cc and 45.25 inches. In 1992 average clubhead speed on the U.S. PGA Tour was 108 mph. Average clubhead speed today is 112 mph. This increase in clubhead speed (and the ability to generate distance) involves the player and the club. The golf ball has not been hit yet.

The 1992 Masters Champion was Fred Couples, who stood 5 feet 11 inches tall, weighed 180 pounds and could barely bench press 55 pounds, while the 2002 Masters Champion Tiger Woods is 6 feet 1 inch tall, weighs 210 pounds and bench presses 350 pounds.