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PHIL'S FODDER

Column deadline day and what to write? Wait, thank you Phil Mickelson for part two of your “Rees’s Rants”; this time for changes at Chicago public golf icon, Cog Hill, made in hopes of landing the Second City their People’s U.S. Open. The comments are also a proxy for complaints on modern architecture in general, which have some merit as we discussed last month.

A course designed to hold major tournaments is likely a wee bit tough on Joe Six Pack the other 519 weeks a decade. A few common design elements cause unnecessary difficulty for everyday players. While well known, some course designs use them, and problems ensue.

TEE SHOTS. A decade-old USGA study showed more than 20 percent of tee shots are dribbled, skunked, shanked or squibbed fewer than 100 yards. Keeping turf from the middle tees to fairway is essential to fast and fun golf. USGA studies also show fairways must be at least 40 yards wide for 66 percent of tee shots to find them. My research shows it takes a play corridor of at least 75 yards wide to provide “safe landings” for about 80 percent of tee shots. On a typical narrow tree-lined course, with native grasses in front of the tee, almost half of tee shots may be lost, or at least looked for.

Let’s go back to mowing turf and cutting trees, and environmentalists be damned.

Phil mentioned, “Slashing out of the rough” being hard on average players. It should be kept just long enough to create visual difference between fairway and rough, but some tournament venues do keep rough high to give their players that PGA Tour or US Open experience.

APPROACH SHOTS. USGA research shows average golfers spray their approach shots in a width pattern of about 15 percent of the approach shot length. That’s 24 yards wide for a 160-yard approach shot. If you let your greens shrink, widening them back out just three feet all the way around a 5,000-square-foot round green, you will pick up almost 800 square feet of green – a 15 percent gain and greater chance your golfers will “reach the dance floor.”

THE FRONTAL APPROACH. Phil complained about this the most, even though his idea of a roll-up approach

is using the drive through at Krispy Kreme. While strategic design for good players would suggest an approach slightly narrower than green width, average golfers still bounce the ball well in front of the green, and need an open fairway approach in front that is nearly as wide as the green. The benefits to average players outweigh the strategic needs of good players by tenfold in this case.

AROUND THE GREEN. The USGA is mum on how wide an area is required for all golf shots, but I suspect it’s embarrassingly comparable to the width of Kansas, especially in typical Kansas winds. But, my research shows that about 80 percent of golfers stay within 25 percent of the approach shot length (40 yards wide on that 160 yard approach) and 99 percent will stay within 40 percent (or 64 yards wide).

Removing trees, deep rough or native areas close to your greens in favor of expanding turf

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areas as far as practical makes sense. Even adding by five more yards to your greens surrounds typically adds 50 percent to the turf area around the green and makes golf easier.

GREEN HAZARDS. Phil said greens are over-bunkered, and I agree. Sand is still a multiple stroke hazard for average players, while good players sometimes aim for bunkers because they are easy. Reducing sand in favor of any number of grass hazards – grass bunkers, chocolate drop mounds, fairway chipping areas – also makes sense. Sand hazards that extend well in front of the green create unnecessary difficulty by being in high miss zones and creating difficult, long bunker shots.

The artistic endeavor that is golf design often boils down to simple math problems of dimensions and percentages. Providing more turf in key high-use areas makes golf fun. More designers should play the percentages and design for average golfers, and not the best players who might show up. **GCI**