

## MASTER PLAN:

# Changing a Course's Complexion

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As gutta percha gave way to high compression golf balls, and hickory gave way to metal, fiberglass and graphite shafts . . . once challenging golf courses began to succumb to the advance of power golf.

Many courses built in the early 1900s were not designed for the modern game. Long distance clubs and balls gave the golfer the ability to carry lateral water, cut doglegs and perform other feats once deemed impossible.

But fears that technological advances in equipment are ruining the game are unfounded. The golf course superintendents and golf course architects have ways of maintaining the balance of power between the golfer and the course.

Experienced superintendents can make their layouts play 3 to 5 strokes tougher by simple adjustments in the set-up and the grooming of the course. The architect, working in tandem with the superintendent, can achieve even more dramatic results with such common techniques as rerouting of holes, reconstruction of tees and greens, and repositioning of traps and hazards.

Dramatic changes and improvements can be achieved with a well-planned remodeling and reconstruction program. Every course needs it sooner or later. And in fact, any good golf course architect will admit there's not a course in the world — including those of his own design — which could not be improved with a few simple alterations.

Palmer Maples, the new president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and superintendent at The Standard Club in Atlanta, points out that some of the more obvious problems to watch for are outmoded greens and tees, misplaced bunkers and water hazards, bad routing of holes, unfair shot values, blind greens and either a shortage or overabundance of doglegs, water holes and sand traps. Superintendents may be plagued by maintenance problems such as standing water,

hard to mow areas and poor soil condition.

Experienced golf course architects also will notice more subtle flaws, such as green sizes which have no relationship to the length of approach shots, bunkers and traps which are unrelated to the play of the holes, and a monotonous layout that offers little shot variety.

These and other problems justify the expense of golf course remodeling. The investment in a well-planned remodeling program will be returned many times over in better playing conditions, increased traffic and course revenues, and perhaps more importantly, reduced maintenance.

The key to any remodeling and modernization program is to develop a workable master plan that will remain intact whether the work is to be carried out in a single season, or phases out over a period of several years.

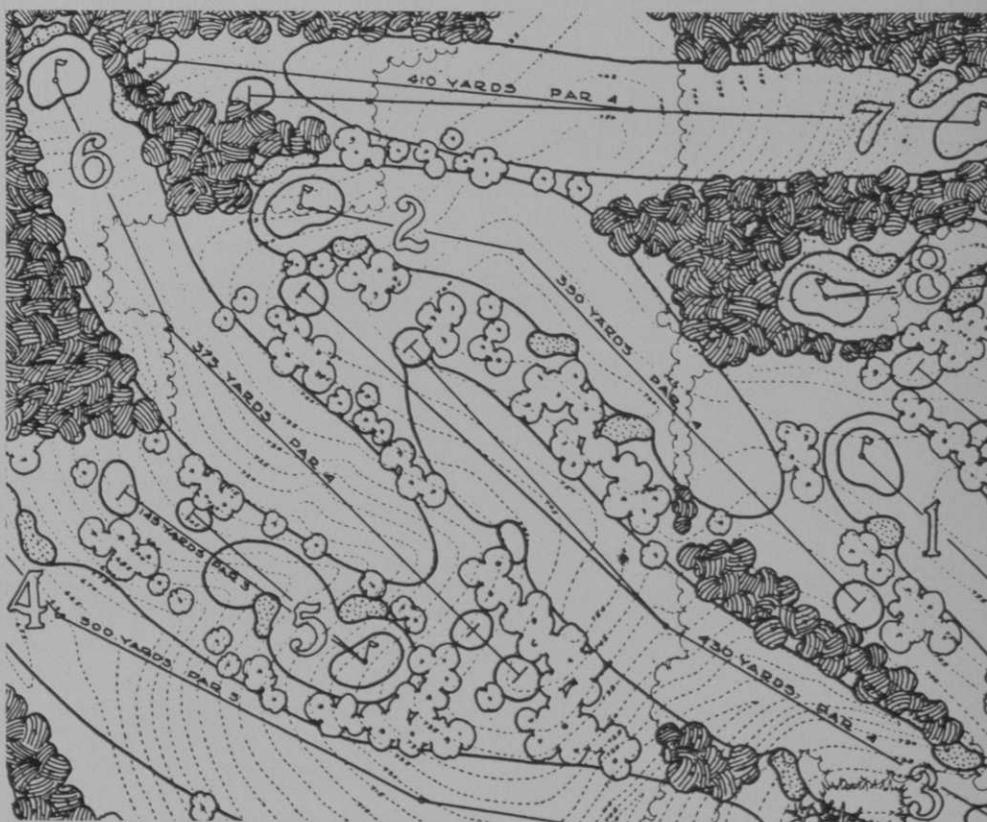
Once the master plan has been developed and approved, it is highly advisable to have the plan entered into the club's by-laws. This elimi-

nates the problem of one greens committee obliterating the plans and work of its predecessors.

Preparation of the master plan involves several key individuals . . . the greens committee members, the club professional, the superintendent, and the architect. The advice and counsel of the superintendent is especially vital, since he ordinarily has a more intimate knowledge of the course than anyone else.

And if the superintendent is also a golfer, so much the better. Palmer Maples, for example, has a seven handicap, and feels "the play of the game is helpful to the superintendent because it helps him appreciate the needs and problems of his fellow golfers."

Maples is also a firm believer in the need for a master plan. In fact, every task at The Standard Club, from routine daily chores to major course alterations, is accomplished as part of an overall plan. Under Maples' supervision, The Standard Club has carried out several major projects, including the installation



Trees are synonymous with a course's beauty as seen in this plan. One of the easiest improvements, trees are often overlooked as a useful addition to the grounds. (Courtesy National Golf Foundation)

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of an automatic irrigation system and a major course redesign.

Without the benefit of the experience of the greens committee, the club professional and the superintendent, gained through years of playing and maintaining the course, a master plan would be superficial and lack the depth required to produce a truly great layout. Furthermore, without their advice, many good features of the old layout could be compromised or lost.

The role of the golf course architect is to sift ideas brought out by these men, bring in fresh approaches to the problems, and finally to produce a finished plan. Finished plans, working drawings and specifications should be very complete in detail. Sketches of new features and colored renderings of the proposed new course by the architect are important to keep the general membership informed. These are the people who will foot the bill and endure the discomforts of reconstruction. Courtesy also dictates that they be kept informed, while experience shows that the success of the renovation is dependent on their goodwill.

Several preliminary plans and many meetings are required. It takes hard work and diligent effort to produce an inspired master plan. But it's well worth the effort, because this is the blueprint for the future greatness of the course.

The big question in any remodeling project is always: "How much will the project disrupt play and club life?"

The work timetable is an important consideration, since it is often possible to begin work on a limited number of holes after Labor Day and have the course back in play the following spring.

Robert Grant, superintendent at Brae Burn Country Club in West Newton, Mass., points out that a limited remodeling program was carried out at his club four years ago, with very minimal disruption of club life and little or no loss of revenue. Again, sound planning and scheduling was the key.

"We waited until October before starting the work, and closed down only that portion of the course under construction," Grant says.

"Since we have 27 holes, members could still play a full 18, even though some holes were temporarily closed. The following spring, the entire course was back in play."

The recommended approach on more extensive projects is to do the work in stages over a period of several years. This was the approach by the Woodland Country Club at Waban, Mass., in completely remodeling and modernizing its 75-year-old course. Working from a master plan, the club carried out a complete renovation of the course over a period of about six years.

Club superintendent Norman Mucciaroni explains that two or three holes were remodeled each year, with the work beginning late in the season, usually in October.

"Each spring the members would find two entirely new golf holes," Mucciaroni says. "Most members were so excited about the dramatic changes in the course that they didn't mind the temporary disruption on the course in the fall." Mucciaroni emphasized that the entire remodeling project followed a master plan that was created at the onset of the project, and was followed precisely.

Another alternative is to close the course for the better part of a year, have all the work completed, and be back in business the following year on a newly-remodeled course. This approach is not frequently used, nor is it recommended, since it means lost use of the course, and severe loss of revenue.

**Greens.** Although many greens built during the 1920s were flat, the great golf course architects of that era developed the modern green, which is characteristically raised above fairway levels to provide a more interesting approach shot.

Greens with bumps and back slopes are maintenance headaches since they require expansive hand mowing. Since it is difficult to revise part of a green, the best plan is to reconstruct the whole area.

The surface of all greens should allow drainage in more than one direction, but contours and shoulders should be mild enough to avoid scalping by mowers. Drainage problems are not as difficult to correct as they once were. In fact, most greens can be retiled, backfilled, retamped

and settled, and the sod replaced in a single day.

**Tees.** New tees are often immense in size, gently sloping from back to front. Where possible, tees should range between 5,000 and 7,000 square feet. This enables the superintendent to move his markers and minimize wear and tear, even under extremely heavy playing conditions. Terrace and side slopes should be designed for ease in moving.

**Bunkers and traps.** The trend in architecture is to design traps with milder convolutions around the edges and a gentle rise from bottom to top to accommodate gang mowers. Modern traps are raised above the fairway level and are clearly visible to approaching players. They drain readily and add to the overall beauty of the course.

**Mounds.** Modern mounds or hillcocks as contrasted to chocolate-drops of the past have long drawn-out slopes, again to permit maintenance with gang mowers. And in hot weather the turf is less likely to burn out. Mounds have several functions. They provide depth and perception around greens, and help define playing routes along fairways.

**Ponds.** Adding immeasurably to the interest and beauty of the course, the creation of ponds and often water hazards is very high on the club's list of remodeling priorities. To look their best, ponds must be designed to accommodate mowers that can clip close to the water's edge. Therefore, slopes must be drawn out and extended.

**Trees.** Planted almost anywhere on a golf course, trees add to a club's beauty. Generally, trees are used for: 1) backdrops at greens, 2) shade at teeing areas, and 3) boundary and roadside markers. Both beauty and safety can be enhanced with judicious tree planting. This is one of the easier areas of improvement, but is frequently forgotten. Courses with trees that have already reached maturity should supplement by adding long-lived trees, small flowering trees and conifers.

The golf course architect will usually be one of the first to recognize the need for course remodeling, and the architect will look to his regular input and advice in the development of the overall plan. □