Player-Designers: Partners in Crime

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD

Weiskopf and his former partner, Jay Morrish, were a different but equally appealing example of how a design pairing can bring together each person's unique talents with sound results.

Fought has built a thriving business and seems embarrassed when you mention he played his way into the final group of the 1983 PGA Championship. And Norman has disappeared from the Tour since the Masters because he loves spending time in the dirt building courses.

These days, almost half of the Tour's top 125 are involved in course designs, basically lending their names for generous fees. Those fees usually include photos with the clients and nice opening-day appearances.

As one architect recently told me, however, he could count the number of weeks he was on site, while he could compute the number of minutes his player-designer partner appeared to offer his wisdom. Needless to say, the architect wasn't complaining: he was just pointing out that not only do player-designers provide little in the way of wisdom, they do it in short time.

Whatever happened to the build-it-and-they-will-come mentality, instead of this brand-recognition obsession? Do people really believe that golf course designs are enhanced by Joe Tourpro's status? Are average American golfers so shallow that they believe that they're getting more for their money by playing courses designed with player-designers involved?

Sadly, the answer is probably "yes." The unfortunate reality is that player-designers have become the necessary evils of the golf-architecture business. Like it or not, more and more Joe Tourpros will sign up to lend their names to projects, collect big checks and do those things they do. Whatever they are.

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