

# Cast a Long

**Newfangled balls and clubs will help golfers on the tee, but industry veterans say such equipment is hurting the integrity of the game**

**P**erhaps the only benefit of the ongoing equipment dispute between Callaway Golf Co. and the United States Golf Association is the increased dialogue concerning the game's evolution. Callaway's new ERC II forged titanium driver, which the company is marketing as a club with extra clout, has been deemed illegal by USGA, which also was not happy about Arnold Palmer endorsing the driver for recreational play.

Needless to say, everyone from architects to superintendents is talking about the impact that equipment is having on the game. Since 1994, when an American Society of Golf Course Architect's study on the effect of the ball and clubs was released, the golf community has watched average driving distances increase at an alarming rate. Advances in the golf ball, and to a lesser extent in clubs, have

changed the way golf courses are designed.

The rubber-band effect on golf courses has led to existing layouts being redesigned to adjust to this new game, while restoration projects are often evolving into renovations to address the way modern golf is played.

If Carlsbad, Calif.-based Callaway succeeds in weakening the USGA as golf's rules authority, it figures that golf design, course maintenance and the overall character of the game is sure to see a major transformation. But does this potential revolution benefit the industry or is it a pending disaster?

Other questions pertain to equipment's impact on the game: Should all courses be forced to change to deal with new equipment? Are many classic venues in danger of being outdated? Will course operators be at risk if a player is hit by a shot that flew off the face of an "illegal" driver?

*Golfdom* asked several industry leaders to

**BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD**





# Shadow

assess the impact these equipment changes are having on the game.

## **Dye: Callaway hurting the game**

Pete and Alice Dye are long-time scratch golfers who have devoted the last 40 years to creating courses that make golf more interesting for all players. Pete Dye's reputation as the ultimate menace to golfers is more a product of American Express commercials than actual fact. His eccentric style has brought a sense of humor and fun back to design, while Alice has educated the industry on how to better design forward tees. Since the Dyes love golf and architecture, the news of Callaway's new driver is hard for them to swallow.

"We understand [CEO Ely] Callaway's position as a businessmen, but he is on the verge of destroying the game," Alice says. "All sports have their rules, and in golf we play by these rules. Why one person should be allowed to break the rules is beyond anything I can understand. Manufacturers have no love for the game."

The Dyes have already shifted their design style in recent years to deal with increasing distances.

"We are already designing courses that

are too long," Alice says. "They are so long that we have to build family tees, forward tees and senior tees — sometimes as many as six sets — to make a course manageable to play. Callaway keeps talking about fun for the recreational golfers, and here [the company] is pushing the game in another direction."

Strategic design has always been a key component of Dye courses, but in recent years Pete and Alice feel the average player is being unfairly punished for being shorter than low-handicap golfers. So the Dyes altered the way they place bunkers.

"Architecturally, we've had to reverse the age-old standard of rewarding length," Alice says. "We now make it so that the longest hitter has a hard shot over a bunker and the short hitter has an opening to the green. What's the point of making things easier for the person hitting a 9-iron into a green when his playing partner is a short hitter with a 3-iron to carry a bunker?"

## **Increased irrigation, more target golf**

Architect Jeff Brauer has seen dogleg turning points increase on average more than 100 feet in the last few years, while carry bunkers au-

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tomatically have shifted 10 yards. But he says, "When we move doglegs out, we must remember that only 2 percent of players probably gain distance on tee shots because of their swing speeds, so forward tees must stay where they are. This potentially creates a visual problem, as the hole may appear as all tee and little fairway."

Brauer also shares the USGA's concern that more length means longer missed shots, as well as creating safety problems and adding even more need for acreage.

"As average Joes hit balls further, they will also hit them further astray — 1 degree off line at 350 yards will require twice as much fairway width as 1 degree at 175 yards to contain the average tee shot," Brauer says. "This is at a time when there is pressure to irrigate less acreage for environmental reasons. The clear implication is that golf will become more target oriented and get further from its Scottish bump-and-run origins."

### Wayward tee shots

Westhampton CC superintendent Mike Rewinski makes the argument that courses could be held liable by players who are struck by shots coming from illegal drivers.

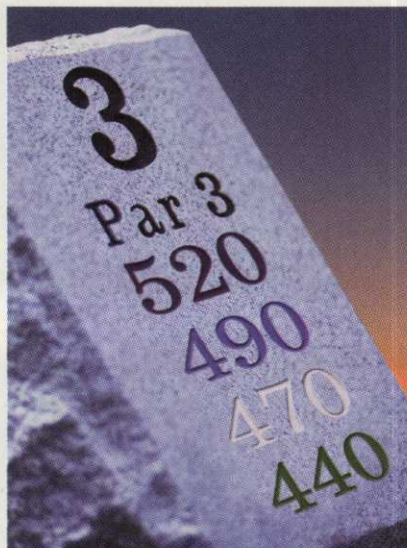
"On my course, I am worried about parallel fairways that will come under fire from wayward tee shots," says Rewinski, whose course is located in West Hampton Beach, N.Y. "If a course with known safety problems allows the use of nonconforming equipment, and a player is injured by a crossover shot, will the course be liable for damages? Can banning nonconforming equipment be considered a reasonable precaution, the standard typically applied in negligence lawsuits?"

As a long-time superintendent and classic course fan, Rewinski also shares the view of many architects that Callaway's ERC II driver is the least of golf's concerns. Like the ASGCA stated in Tom Marzolf's 1994 study, the advances in the golf ball pose a greater threat to the game than any other equipment changes.

"Nonconforming golf balls represent a greater threat," Rewinski says. "Once golfers decide to abandon limits on technology, who knows where the game will go? As a substantial increase in distance ripples through the ranks of golfers, from high handicappers to low handicappers, you will see short par 4s become long par 3s with a delay on tees as golfers wait for the greens to clear."

### Is staggering bunkers enough?

Architect Brian Silva has seen his share of classic courses and dealt with golfers of all



levels. With his interest in strategic design and restoration, he has been watching the distance controversy closely.

"Just making courses longer would be a lousy alternative because it would make people overlook what the real solution should be — slowing down the ball," Silva says. "We design most of our courses for 99 percent of players, as everyone else does. But that response is too simple."

So Silva has gone back to the style of strategy-oriented architects from the past. His designs break up the center lines and introduce decision-making elements that may even cause some players to keep their drivers in their bags.

"The random bunkering patterns that have been the staple of our work for the past four or five years are a more sensible way to go than merely pushing flanking

slice or hook bunkers 15 yards further down the fairway," Silva says. "We have done this so our courses take on more natural and traditional appearances. A nice by-product is that there are bunkers that come into play for [long hitters.]"

Are more interesting bunker placement schemes enough to offset increases in distance? More importantly, is it possible that the current rules of golf will disappear because of new equipment?

"There are two alternatives," Silva says. "Either roll back distance and slow down the ball or see the game as we know it be ruined."

Rewinski struggles with the conflicting views of golfers. Many want equipment that makes their lives easier, yet they flock to courses with high slope ratings, championship-like yardage and tough layouts.

"The equipment manufacturers, like Callaway, say that the game is too difficult and that better equipment will make the game easier and therefore more fun," Rewinski says. "On the other hand, you have architects and developers who are designing and building more challenging golf courses that are 7,000 yards with lots of water hazards and knee-deep fescue rough."

### What does the future hold?

Who will step in to find a middle ground in this chaos that threatens the industry's future? Previously, this would be a role for a certain organization in Far Hills, N.J. But since it is wedged in the middle of a fight against Callaway and perhaps other companies down the road, golf has no governing body to take charge.

"It looks like we're making the game easier and the courses harder so that equipment manufacturers and the golf course construction industry can both make handsome profits," Rewinski says. "But is the struggle between these opposites really good for the game?" ■

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