



"The Wiffle ball, soccer and football games are bygone as well—it's hard to slide to second base with a tree in the way."

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# Can't see the forest for the trees

**I** was heading to work and noticed the neighborhood kids waiting on the street corner for the school bus, as I had a thousand times before. Except this morning I was struck by the number of kids waiting. Where did they all come from?

When we moved into our newly constructed home some 25 years ago, the location was a recently developed subdivision. Like any subdivision developed from farmland, it was flat and barren. The obligatory six bushes and one tree required by FHA home loans were the extent of the ornamental landscaping. The majority of the landscape consisted of sod, which meant two of the first home improvement purchases were a lawn mower and a sprinkler.

As with many community zoning regulations, we were not allowed to enclose our properties with fences. Thus, we had expanses of turf running from property to property.

Neighborhood kids would create Wiffle ball, soccer or football "fields" across neighboring lawns. I forced my kids to also create chipping areas for golf. And with the expanse of turf came sidewalks. How can I forget wak-

ing up on Saturday morning to the sound of kids riding their Big Wheels up and down the sidewalk?

As time progressed, the city planted trees in the easement between the sidewalk and street, and we needed to place a tree in such a position to shade our newly constructed patio. Neighbors began planting a tree or two for aesthetic and shading purposes. And as the neighborhood kids got older, so did our trees.

The trees planted by the city were Bradford Pears. They were popular in the late 1980s and early '90s, but now they just cover the neighborhood cars with a sloppy mess of splattered berries from late fall through winter. The more sparrows that feed on the trees' berries, the worse the onslaught is.

Also, the sidewalks are no longer as smooth as airport runways; the shallow tree roots have caused their upheaval. No longer can the neighbor-

hood kids ride their Big Wheels; hitting sections of the side walk will cause a crash. It's so bad that the city has now beveled the edges of the uprooted sidewalk squares to make them "safer."

The Wiffle ball, soccer and football games are bygone as well. After all, it's hard to slide to second base or run a stop-and-go pass pattern with a tree in the way. These days, outdoor games have been replaced by 12- to 15-foot enclosed trampolines that look more like an Ultimate Fighting Championship ring. They fit easily among the trees, but neighborhood kids who want to play sports now have to carpool to the nearest city sports complex.

It's ironic that when we first looked at places to live we decided not to go with the older, stately areas of town because we didn't see any kids. Now that I live in a stately and older area, it's not that the kids have grown and left, it's just that I can't see them for the trees.

I tell this story not so much to reminisce, which I have recently done in some of my columns, but to focus on benefits of removing trees from golf courses besides agronomics. Removing trees exposes the subtleness of course design that has been hidden, and opens the course up to more vista views. It brings a freshness and newness to a course that is old and claustrophobic. Now we can instill the excitement back into courses that have been hidden by trees for way too long.

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