

Some not-so tongue in cheek observations from JIM ARTHUR, Britain's most astute golfing observer and outspoken critic of the absurd and ridiculous

Failing is, in fact, one of the easiest of all tasks, but you will need to acquire a few specialist qualifications and obey a few rules to achieve total success, ie. failure! However, there are so many ways of achieving the desired end that if you do not initially succeed, do not despair. Just when things start going well you will find you have overlooked something.

The first prerequisite of any successful failure is that those who have to deal with the human race should actually either dislike or, better still, despise them. The management of two legged livestock is quite different in some basic respects to that of four legged ones, as many farmers, seeking without success a less exhausting and frustrating way of life than agriculture, have discovered. This in essence is that such livestock answers back, is very difficult to satisfy and can vote with its feet.

The next stage is planning, but do not waste valuable time and money on that. All the answers are in the R & A's handbook – The Demand for Golf – a publication which made it clear that 700 new courses were needed in the last decade of this century, irrespective of such trivial factors as location (and location and location), suitability of soil and terrain, and above all the proximity of the potential market. Consequently, in order to fail really dramatically there must be *no* unsatisfied need in your area.

You will need some advice on the layout of course, though for a real humdinger there is nothing to beat being your own architect. In passing, I had experience of one DIY man who produced three doglegs in a par 3 – though on reflection I have seen only very little less daunting designs of courses where vast sums have been expended on the advice of 'experts'.

Of course, to make a real success of failure you should be an enthusiastic golfer. The prospect of designing a course to suit you and you alone is something that few golfers can resist, even if they are aware – and few are – that this may prove to be a very expensive present.

Never mind all those professionally experienced architects, agronomists, drainage and irrigation consultants! Why not go to the real professional – your local Club pro – who will knock up a design for you for a modest fee. If, however, you want real success then opt for that internationally known Top Tournament Professional (always identified by capital letters) who, if he can be tempted with enough money, will design you a course fit for his peers – and only his peers. He may just possibly produce you a good design, though what is certain is that he will not only charge you ten times too much – as he has an army of *real* experts to pay behind their desk tops – but the costs of construction will be in proportion.

Having got over these trivia – and assuming you have access to untold wealth – now is the time to start the work. You are unlikely to be presented with ideal golfing country. More likely it is some flat, heavy, featureless agricultural land – a legacy of prairie farming. Never mind – we can soon alter that. Carefully watching your television set, you will see televised tournaments played over water-scapes. Nothing pleases the average

HOW TO FAIL GOLF COURSE DEVELOPMENT

golfer more than watching someone at the top of the leader board plop one straight into the pond in front of a steeply sloping green, surrounded by tiger country. (Nothing of course pleases him less if he suffers the same fate personally).

Therefore your design must incorporate lots of water – never mind if managing water is expensive in order to keep it clean and sparkling, instead of blooming with algal growth and evaporating (or extracted) to leave their surrounds like watering holes in the Serengeti! After all, what is money for?

Clearly the course must be challenging. (It seems no coincidence to me that this term is increasingly being used by do-gooders to describe those with serious handicaps and disabilities). Therefore, we need at least five carries of 200 metres over water. Think how much the greenkeepers could make in the sale of lost balls – you might even cut their wages accordingly.

The course must be long – length before strength is a good gambit which applies to another game, so must be right for this.

So we have a flat heavy featureless expanse? No problem! Let's bring in an army of earth moving equipment and push it about a bit. You want a hill here – certainly. A lake there – fine, no sweat. What about the existing field drainage. Oh, we ignore that because in the States we rely on surface run-off to fill our irrigation lakes – field drainage is old fashioned.

The first things to build are, of course, the greens. If they are not in the right place, no matter – we can move them later. Now you have a real decision to make. Do you build them of sand only on a well drained base, set as they are in saucers of impermeable clay? Or do you use the local soil wherever possible (which means always) and mix a bit of sand with it. Someone murmurs that sand plus clay makes bricks. Nonsense, if it works in Texas, its got to work here. What about a blinding layer over the stone carpet between it and the rootzone layer? Old fashioned USGA Green Section rubbish! With pure sand you don't need it. With soil and sand use a geotextile membrane! Nice and easy and no problems about compatible particle sizes. 'It may get silted up?'. So what, we can always put the Vertidrain over it and punch it full of holes.

When making the greens, do not waste money on hand work. What are machines for anyway? Get them in – the bigger the better – churn it up and spread it all around. It doesn't matter about working over the future approaches and surrounds – we can top the lot with sand to make a

seed bed, having rotavated up the soil.

The great day dawns – ready for seeding. What seed? Why, naturally, Penncross or the equivalent – 'because it does so well in the States'. Do not believe those, including many US Agronomists, who say it does not suit most of the States. They probably have an axe to grind with someone else's seed!

Your 'architect' will have planned your irrigation system – costing mega-bucks and so computerised that the control panel looks like the pilot's view of Concorde. What's all this nonsense about not being able to use the water? Who do the NRA think they are anyway. You have a wall-to-wall watering system and the God given right to use it. Throw some money at the problem – that should resolve it.

At last the course is green instead of brown and your thoughts turn to the grand opening ceremony. But first there is a small hurdle to face. How many staff? One per *hole*! And the machinery list costs as much as a luxury house? So now you look for members or unsuspecting punters. You are assured that there will be an insatiable demand from well-heeled golfers, all of whom will be happy to put up £30,000 a piece plus a hefty annual subscription to keep the place select. Or alternatively you can have thousands vying for membership, happy to pay through the nose to take five hours for a round, (seven if you include waiting time to get onto the first tee) and then having to use brute force to get to the bar against a throng of like-minded characters.

You now have the makings of a really spectacular failure and you ask yourself, who is this insolvency firm Cork, Gullie? How you wish you had settled for golf in a field – a no-nonsense cheapie. But then again, you would have been successful, having to pay staff for twelve months of the year but with the course closed for three, because of lack of drainage.

Of course, you could minimise your losses by pulling out halfway, leaving yet another blot on the landscape – and with your advisory team high-tailing it back to the States – or wherever they came from. There must be more exhausting ways of losing money, but I do not know of one off-hand.

♦ **Editor's note:** If this seems too far-fetched to be true, no less than five multi-million pound golf courses were advertised in an estate agency window in York last month, the developers of which had all run out of cash before the trees had shed their first autumnal leaves. Most were being offered at prices well below the cost of land and construction. All were described as 'championship' courses.