

# Golf Course Superintendents Association

## PRO OR AM?

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It would not be inaccurate to say that golf architects (I know three, though not closely) in general view golfers, in particular committees, as morons. Golfers, in their turn, incline to regard the architect as an invention of the devil, and the committee morons for calling upon him. They dislike paying out money for a task they consider could be carried out by themselves.

I have in mind alterations to existing holes. It should be obvious that the planning of a new course out of virgin woodland, or using to their best advantage the sweeps and folds of commonland can be left only to the professional designer. He has three primary qualities: knowledge, experience and imagination. He can see the wood for trees.

Though, to adapt the words of P. G. Wodehouse (I think in reference to bishops), the incidence of insanity among architects is not high, two of these gentlemen, of different firms and editors of different journals, have accepted my effusions. I put that forward as the reason for my presumption in discussing the make-up of golf holes. I have been on both sides of the fence. During 25 years in the colonies (an archaic word), in the absence of anyone else I was invited on three occasions to 'improve' holes, thus becoming, may I be forgiven, an amateur architect. The bush had already been cleared, inevitably in dead straight tram-lines . . . no imagination.

A good golf hole is one that makes the useful player scratch his head a bit when on the tee. His drive must be placed so that the green, if not the flag, should be 'open house' for the second. But, *and this is important*, the ordinary club member who is not looking for and unlikely to achieve a four, must have an alternate route so that he may enjoy his game; which when all is said and done, is the reason why he pays a subscription. And that surely is the practical idea of a hole. It is possible for a single, intelligently sited bunker to govern the tactical play of a hole.

In this discourse I should mention, with the purpose of my editor retaining his reason, that there is a clause in most journals to the effect that the editor does not necessarily agree with his contributors' opinions.

It is interesting to take a look at some old courses that have not altered over the years. It can be that even the old die-hards would agree with certain changes. I believe that the first act of an architect would be to abolish a large number of bunkers. These in the old days were placed to punish the poor players. A stupid policy, for in that category he has quite enough on his hands in reaching the hole at all. Those point-less bunkers, those ancient barrows planted with primness on either side of the fairway . . . catch the sliced or pulled drive, and repeated some way from the green to trap the inferior second. They are, so far as the good striker is concerned, redundant. Today he can carry them. Fill them in. They cost money in upkeep. Let the long-handicap player when he errs,

which is often, finish in the rough; that will give him plenty of food for thought. The erasing of bunkers should be left to an architect, otherwise you have conflict in the club between the habitual slicers and the habitual hookers.

It is the good player who should be challenged, both in his thinking and his strokemaking. He must be forced to calculate risks: by how much dare he cut off a corner, will it or will it not pay him to go for the pin with his next? He should be made to think on every stroke in the round.

There is a school, small, may Allah be praised, who wish to replace rough grass, heather or bracken — with trees. In earlier days a ball in the rough could be counted as costing half a stroke. With trees it depends which side of the tree the ball strikes.

The only bad hole is one that is featureless and dull. Luck? We hear too much of so-called unfairness. Bernard Darwin when writing on this asked: "Do we wish to raise the game to the bloomless heights of chess?" I confess to a weakness for blind holes — fun and luck. I can, however, picture what would happen to the professional designer who introduced one into his plan. And yet life consists of wondering what lies on the other side of the hill.

There is a delusion that a good player can lay out a good hole. There was a famous amateur international, a good friend of mine now dead, who for no apparent reason layed down a green close to the existing one. I paced its area one day. Seven paces wide, 12 from front to back. He did me the honour of asking what I thought of it. My reply was that given a medium or long iron to this unwatered green, I would bet against Henry Cotton at his best leaving the ball on that green more than three times in 20 attempts. It was never used.

I recall a course which was altered by a famous professional. The members, who contributed to the cost, now find it takes half an hour longer to complete the round. There is a new short hole, a feature of which I cannot fathom. The teeing-ground is at the top green defended immediately in front by a stream. An out-of-bounds fence on the left. Just over the water hazard and a sentinel over the left entrances to the green stands a tree. The right-hand side is open, calling for a downhill chip. So far, so good. But just beyond that tree is a bunker. What for? One or the other is dispensable. That is an isolated case. If alterations are to be made, I come down heavily on the side of the Pro architect against the Am.

There remains one question. Provided the course is not one of those that caters for professional tournaments, or upkeep is a burden, why not leave things as they are? In short, committees are not elected to change a course.

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