

Forward Tees; The Key to Playability

by Mike Schulz — Mike Schulz Golf Designs

I've always felt that a major flaw in the design of most existing golf courses is the lack of properly located forward tees. This flaw results in golf courses that are just not as playable as they should be for a large number of golfers. How did this happen? I think it happened because, in many cases, golf course owners and golf course architects have lost sight of the purpose of golf. To me, the purpose of golf can be summarized in two statements:

Golf is a game, it is supposed to be fun.

Golf is a game of accuracy, not a game of distance.

We shouldn't ever forget that golf is a game. As a game, people will only continue to play it if it is fun and enjoyable. That is why playability is so important to the success of golf.

Secondly, we should never forget that golf is a game of accuracy. I've always thought that distance is overrated as a factor in golf. We play to a 4 1/2 inch diameter hole. We don't count the number of strokes to cross a line, we count the number of strokes to put the ball in that little hole. We win or lose holes or matches independent of how far we hit each stroke. The scorecard never indicates how far we hit the ball. A 2 inch putt counts the same as a 265 yard drive. Except in a long drive contest we never even measure and record the lengths of our shots. Golf truly is a game of accuracy, not distance.

With those two ideas in mind, it is easy to see that we have shortchanged a large part of the golfing population. For the

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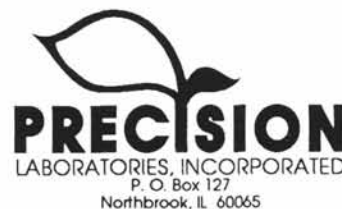
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most part, we've shortchanged women golfers, but we've also shortchanged our beginners, our juniors, and many seniors. We've cheated them of the joy of playing the game of golf as it is meant to be played, by not giving them forward tees to match their capabilities.

Since golf is a game of accuracy, all golfers should have a legitimate chance to reach each green in regulation with their best strokes. All golf courses should be designed with a full range of multiple tees, so that if the golfer can not consistently reach the greens in regulation, then he or she should be able to most up to a shorter tee.

One of the things that I noticed from my very first day as a caddy, many years ago, in my hometown, was that women do not play the same game of golf as men play. Women play a game that often finds them hitting a driver and an iron to a par 3 green and a driver, two woods and an iron to a par 4 green. Par 5s are almost too painful to talk about. Many women have never reached a green in regulation on a par 4 or par 5 hole. It is really a credit to women, that they continue to play golf on golf courses on which there is no possibility that even if they hit their very best shots, that they can hit a green in regulation, and par a hole by two putting the green. Men, in their competitiveness, would never play golf if there was no chance that they could reach a green in regulation. To get an understanding of the issue, men should imagine playing golf on a 8400 yard par 72 golf course, where the par 3s average 250 yards, the par 4s average 480 yards and the par 5s average 650 yards, and you could never reach a green. It would soon be seen as a exercise in futility. Most men would never play a round of golf after their first attempt.

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(Forward Tees continued)

Historically, most golf courses were designed for male golfers, and had no forward or women's tees. When women began to play golf, women's tees became an afterthought in the design. There was no architectural theory behind the location of the forward tees. They were located just a little forward of the men's tees, ... "because women don't hit the ball as far" ... They didn't consider that women only hit the ball 65-75% as far as men.

Now is a good time for golf course owners, managers and superintendents to look at their courses and see how they are set up for all their golfers. If necessary, they should institute a program to create a full range of teeing areas, with special emphasis on the forward tees.

How do you locate the forward tees properly? I think that first of all, par should be the same for every tee on the hole. I have never understood why a hole should be a par 5 for women when it is a par 4 for men, or why a course would be a par 72 for men and a par 76 for women. It only proves that the women's tees were not located correctly in the first place. Secondly, the rule of thumb that I use is that the club selection for all golfers playing the hole should be similar. For example, if the average male golfer usually uses a well played driver and a 7 iron to reach a green on a par 4, then the forward tee should be located so that most women would use a well played driver and a 7 iron to reach the green. Using average distances that men and women hit each club, in this way, can be very helpful in locating forward tees. Each hole can be analyzed for the typical average male club selection and then converted to a distance based upon the average women's yardage for the same clubs. The proper tee location can be determined based upon that distance, as well as the hole par, hazard locations, hole shape and topography. This should result in a golf course, where the total yardage from the forward tees ranges between 4800-5200 yards, with 5000 yards being a good target length. Don't be afraid that 4800 yards is too short. Experience has shown me that it will give women golfers a challenging, enjoyable and fun course, that allows them to play the game of golf the way men have always played it, with the premium where it should be; on accuracy.

There are several benefits to having properly located forward tees on a course. Women, juniors, beginners and some seniors will be able to play golf as it is meant to be played. They will find a game more within their capabilities and will be encouraged to continue to play. Seniors, who have lost only distance and not accuracy, feel or touch, will be able to once again enjoy the game as they did in their younger years. Play will speed up. Wear can be reduced from other tees. And the leading edge of the fairway cut can be moved further down the fairway, reducing the amount of fairway maintained.

Note that women who do hit a long ball, still have the option to play from the middle or regular tees, because courses can be and should be rated from several tees for women, just like they are for men.

So take a look at your golf course. Is it really playable for all golfers? If not, look at instituting a program to locate and build a proper set of forward tees and let women, as well as beginners, juniors and seniors the chance to finally play golf. Remember: **Golf is a game. It is supposed to be fun. & Golf is a game of accuracy not a game of distance.**

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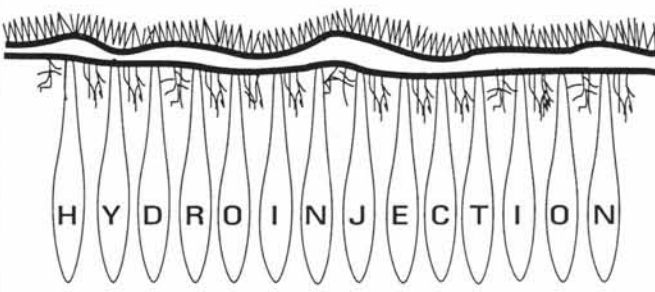
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