

Kicking a Ball

Outside the Box

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The last decade has not been the most promising for the golf industry. According to the National Golf Foundation, since 2005 nearly 300 golf courses have closed. The NGF also estimates that there are roughly 4.3 million fewer American golfers than in 2005, an 8.5% decrease.

It is no secret that the golf industry is currently facing a serious challenge. One of the main challenges being faced, in my opinion, is the age of golfers. According to the NGF, only 5% of golfers are thirty years old or younger. Compare that to the 61% of golfers who are over the age of fifty and it does not take long to realize that does not bode well for the future. The

PGA realizes golf needs new blood and is addressing the issue by promoting more junior golf programs and launching programs such as "Tee It Forward." These are moves in the right direction and will certainly help fortify the popularity of golf into the future.

When thinking outside the box, however, one cannot help but think "are there ways to bring new, young people to golf courses and generate revenue other than just by adding golfers?" In years past, perhaps there was not. With the creation of FootGolf as an official American sport in November 2011, however, the answer is yes.

To describe it in simple terms, FootGolf is a soccer-golf hybrid. Instead of a golf ball, a soccer ball is used and instead of clubs, your leg. A 21" diameter cup replaces the 4 1/4" cup used in golf. A flagstick is placed in the center of the cup to provide a target for the player to aim at. Scoring in FootGolf is identical to golf; one stroke for each "swing". The object of the game is to complete the holes in the fewest strokes possible. Just as in golf, there are nine or eighteen holes in FootGolf, although they are considerably shorter in length. The eighteen holes of FootGolf are etched out of just nine golf holes. This is of significant importance since the entire golf course is not shut down to golfers when footgolfers are in action; the two sports can coexist simultaneously on the same piece of property. The typical FootGolf layout consists of three holes on par-5's, two holes on par-4's and one hole on par-3's. This format may be different depending on the golf course but seems to be the norm.

If a golf course wants to host FootGolf, it will need to contact the Illinois FootGolf Association (IFGA) for courses in Illinois, or the American FootGolf League (AFGL), which is FootGolf's national governing body. Ample information is listed on their websites which I included at the end of this article.



Once the association has been contacted, a representative will survey the golf course and design the layout. The FootGolf holes ARE PLACED OUT OF THE RANGE OF GREENS! In fact, many of the holes are placed in areas of the rough. Once the course is designed, the next step is purchasing and installing the 21" cups. The eighteen cups cost roughly \$2,000. They include lids which are used to cover the large cups when they are not in use. I asked Luke Strojny, Golf Course Superintendent at Prairie Bluff GC in Lockport, IL about his experience installing these cups (last fall, Prairie Bluff became the first golf course in Illinois to be an

your golf course with minimal monetary investment. I genuinely believe that FootGolf could be a popular sport in this country. Here are some facts:

- FootGolf is not even two and a half years old in the United States, with its first official tournament held in July 2012.
- Of the sixty-seven golf courses that are members of the AFGL (at the time this article was written) nearly fifty joined the organization just this year, with many more expected to join during the year. That is a significant increase.



Changing cups for FootGolf could be a cruel April Fools Day joke.

accredited FootGolf course). Luke said that installation required a decent amount of man-hours. The cups are 18" deep, so a large hole must be dug to accommodate them. Prairie Bluff has extremely gravelly soil, so Luke thought it necessary to rent an auger to expedite this process. Once the hole is dug and the cup and flag installed, the work is pretty much done. The cups will remain in the same area for the entire season. If the hole is located in the rough, occasional mowing a few yards in diameter around the cup is needed to provide a "green" to speed up play and facilitate "putting".

Obvious concerns a superintendent might have with footgolfers are damage to the golf course and a lack of golf course etiquette. Footgolfers are not allowed to wear cleats on the golf course. They must either wear gym shoes or turf shoes which cause minimal to no turf damage. Furthermore, footgolfers do not take divots or make ball marks on the greens. Teaching golf course etiquette is extremely important to the FootGolf Associations. The AFGL realizes that footgolfers are visitors of the golf course and stress that respect must be given to the course, golfers, and other footgolfers. There is even a dress code and a 46-page rule book that describes in detail the etiquette that is expected.

FootGolf is not a fit for every golf course. I'm not a betting man but I would wager that Augusta National is in no hurry to apply for its AFGL membership. However, if the club you are at could use more revenue, then I think it is wise to at least take a few moments to research this sport. The worst that could happen is solidifying your distaste for the game of soccer. The best that could happen is providing a new stream of revenue for

- The roughly \$2,000 for the eighteen cups that need to be purchased is a small investment. Even if this venture turns out to be a complete failure, the financial risk is practically non-existent.
- Your golf course will receive publicity. With so much competition amongst neighboring courses, it is beneficial to be recognized for doing something different.

I realize FootGolf is not for everyone. Undoubtedly, there are a few of you out there that wished they had the few minutes it took to read this article back. However, for those of you that are interested, I would recommend checking out the National and State FootGolf Association websites and contacting our Illinois FootGolf representative, Carlos Stremi. Here is some contact info:



- Carlos Stremi – 312.622.1638, Email at cstremi@footgolfillinois.com
- www.footgolf.net – American FootGolf League website
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