

Golf growth prospects far from 'bust'

You may have read or heard of the recent article in *Forbes* (Dec. 24) reporting on the National Golf Foundation's Golf Summit.

The feature story titled, "Extrapolation Madness," questioned the NFG's growth figures for participants and the real demand for golf facilities.

In some instances I agree that the NFG's figures may be aggressive, but I disagree with the conclusion that the future growth of the industry is a bust!

I responded to *Forbes* with the following letter. I'll look forward to

your comments.

Dear Sir:

Golf Course News associate editor Peter Blais responded to the National Golf Foundation's predictions as "wishful thinking"... He's right.

The NFG's numbers may be wishful thinking—and I personally think that 350 new golf courses per year is preposterous.

But remember, the NFG never projected that 350 new courses would be built. The projection is that 350 new courses will be needed to meet the demand.



C. von Brecht

new golf courses.

The problems involving golf courses are not necessarily the courses, but rather the real estate development surrounding the courses. The demand for stand-alone

The methods used to count golfers may not be valid. However, you should understand that there is a demand for

courses, primarily in the public and municipal categories, is real. Just try to get a tee time at a Chicago area muni on a Saturday morning in July.

I have presented *Golf Course News*' projections for new facilities on a number of occasions.

Although more conservative than the NFG's estimate (we're projecting 150 new courses per year for the next five years, along with 200 renovations), this steady growth is far from a bust!

Sincerely,
Charles E. von Brecht

COMMENTARY

Family affair leaves no widows, orphans

Everywhere you turn, the courts, the government, the schools, the voters — someone somewhere in the country is putting a chink in the armor of the American family.

And now, just as the golf industry has resolved to be a part of the solution, not a part of the problem with the environment, it should resolve to be part of the solution to the destruction of the family, not a part of the problem.

I don't know exactly when the decline of American society began. I'll let the sociologists and psychologists argue about that. But you don't have to be a "ologist" to figure out some of the actions taken in our country have been devastating to family life.

If you're a **job-ologist** or **school-ologist**: Children and parents alike are faced with more pressures out-

side the family — either from jobs or school. More extracurricular activities keep more kids away from their families. (When your son's basketball team practices nearly every day over Christmas vacation, including New Year's Day, this suddenly becomes very real to you.)

Jobs also are often more demanding and many send parents traveling much more today. Mobility itself, from airplanes to automobiles, has hurt family life.

If you're a **mother-ologist**: Each year, more and more mothers are joining the workforce, either by choice or necessity as inflation eats at family earnings. The one person who has traditionally been home to hold the family together is often not there for the children.



M. Leslie

and children.

If you're a **TV-ologist**: Television and movies alike have desensitized child and adult alike to violence, death, bad manners and degrading sex... a complete list could fill anyone's scroll. Family values are next to non-existent, and Christians, Christian values and morality undergo constant attack.

How often in the last month did you see a family presented as a real, hon-

If you're a **father-ologist**: More men today are taking second jobs. More time away from home means less time with wife

estly communicating unit on TV or in a movie? How often were father-mother-son-daughter doing something, anything together as a family? Check out the new subtlety — little white lies that are just fine in the ads ("Sorry, honey, there's no more Coke in the fridge."). Lying as much as anything pulls child away from parent.

If you're a **vote-ologist**: We're doing some crazy things in the United States that are just tearing apart parent-child relationships. Some places have voted that a minor girl can have an abortion without her parents being informed, for instance.

Just last November Maine voters joined those in other states who have approved Sunday store openings. Did the "yeah" voters ever consider the

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GUEST COMMENTARY

ModCourses the answer for many

By Bill Amick

Golf seems to be on television almost constantly these days, with professional events for men, women and senior men. Superstars of golf are even well-known to millions of non-golfers.

Then why aren't greater numbers of people heading towards a first tee? It's a challenge to shoot a good score. You can compete with a single opponent or a whole field, have a friendly match, or try to lower your handicap. Golf is an eternal quest, changing daily and with each course, never completely learned or conquered.

Is golf perfect, or could it be that not all is paradise in fairway land? With all of golf's popularity, many public courses are crowded and play at some private clubs is exasperatingly slow during the busy season. Not everyone has the time to wait to tee off and then the patience to suffer through a five-hour round.

In metropolitan areas all of the nearby courses may be clubs with long membership waiting lists or fees too high for most working people or the young or retired.

If only enough new courses could easily and quickly be built in these

places. The demand by golfers is usually there. But in populated places 150 acres of vacant land can be impossible to find or extremely expensive.

Just as critical, construction and annual maintenance of these huge grassed playing fields is costly.

With today's long-driving game have come bigger courses that require more land, more money to build and maintain, and more time to play.

Yet the game continues to be just as difficult to learn, possibly more discouraging with the longer holes. With high land, construction, and financing costs, a conventional-sized golf course often is not feasible. When elected officials start discussing building a municipal course, even where there is an obvious need, a large block of non-golfing taxpayers usually gets very vocal. These voters fear such a project might increase their taxes or reduce the monies available for new roads or the police force.

And in an increasing number of places, a limitation to building a big course is finding enough water and obtaining permission to use it to irrigate all of that thirsty grass.



Bill Amick

A way to reduce the size and cost of building courses would make it easier to provide the joys of the game to more people.

We certainly don't expect long hitters to start swinging easier or hitting 5-irons off every tee so that golf holes can be made shorter. Nor do golf's rules makers—the United States Golf Association and the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews — seem ready to throttle back on how far today's "hot" golf balls can be hit.

A SOLUTION

Fortunately, a solution is already here and being used to accomplish these goals — playing a reduced-distance ball on modified golf courses.

MacGregor Golf Co.'s "Mactec" ball goes about 60 percent of the distance of a golf ball when driven

Are there any solutions for this new golf course dilemma, a shortage that continues to grow near most large cities?

by a long hitter. It weighs approximately .84 ounces (24 grams), a little more than half of the 1.62-ounce (45.93 gram) golf ball.

A modified golf course can be set up several ways. What many golfers and developers think of first is what housing developer Andy Combs opened in 1987, at Eagle Landing near Charleston, S.C. This is essentially a miniaturization of a conventional golf course, at a scale to fit the modified ball.

A second option is a par-3 course that can also be played as a modified course with a modified ball. This is the route taken by Charles Pasternak in building his Missing Links course near Milwaukee, and Joe Clark in remodeling the Highlands Links Colony par-3 course in Plymouth, N.H.

Another choice is what the developers of the Britannia course in the Cayman Islands decided upon. There are alternative ways the course can be played, depending on where the tee markers and cups are placed. It can be arranged as an 18-hole Cayman course for the modified ball, an 18-hole executive course when played with a golf ball,

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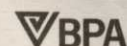
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ModCourses may resolve problems for some

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or as a nine-hole course with a regulation golf ball.

At Britannia, use of golf balls has pretty much won out because golfers visiting the resort bring with them on their vacations their old orientation towards golf. After all, the game of golf does have at least a five-century head-start over modified golf.

To date, the types of courses have not generated enough rounds to support themselves from modified golf alone. Asking longtime golfers to quickly adopt modified golf may be like asking older people to learn another language. Not many do unless forced by the circumstances.

There is often peer pressure against a golfer trying something new and different. Comments from friends at the suggestion to try modified golf often follow the lines of: "What do we want to play goofy or whiffle-ball golf for? Ah, let's play real golf!"

The present modified courses have either not had the means or made the effort to effectively advertise and publicize modified golf. People who have never played or not yet become regular golfers are likely to comprise the bulk of the future modified golf market.

One fact revealed from the results of questionnaires from participants of modified golf tournaments is that women of all ages and a number of men older than 60 immediately find hitting a modified ball very satisfying. These are people who cannot drive a golf ball a great distance and can hit a modified ball almost as far.

FRESH APPROACH

A better method for setting up a modified course could be to take a fresh approach to it and to the game's procedures, while getting rid of as many of golf's weak points as possible.

These courses might be called "ModGolf" courses, or simply "ModCourses." They might be a single loop of 12 holes. This would reduce the area required for a complete course, allow players to complete a round even faster, eliminate delays caused by some groups stopping at the clubhouse at the turn, and perhaps fit the limited concentration span of many players better than 18 holes.

Most golfers find par 3 and par 4 holes more interesting to play and these are more land-efficient than par 5s. So ModGolf courses should be a mix of par 3s and 4s. If a developer has the land, several 12-hole loops could be built. This would provide additional fairway frontage for housing and give players a variety of courses to play.

Six-inch diameter cups could be used, rather than golf's 4-1/4 inch holes. This would reduce the dominating importance of putting to scoring. These larger cups have already been tried in a couple of modified golf tournaments and were enthusiastically received by almost all participants.

In addition, greens, sand traps, tees and fairways would not have to be or look like the features on golf courses. Not only because they are smaller, but if ModCourses features are built more simply, they could be maintained at less cost.

A ModCourse, requiring fewer clubs and shorter distance, would make walking and carrying a bag easier than on a conventional course.

WHAT'S NEEDED

What does a ModCourse require? Thirty-five acres for a 12-hole course. Another five acres is ample for a

driving range, and this can be a pond, since these balls float.

With another 15 acres ModCourse can be designed so that it can be converted into a nine-hole executive course. Five additional acres would be required to go from a driving range for modified balls to regulation balls.

This backup approach gives a developer the option of converting or combining a ModCourse to play with golf balls. There would be an extra expense to this, mainly in preparing the extra area needed for expanding fairways and roughs, and

lengthening some par 3 holes.

A ModGolf course could fit nicely as a second or third course, where space is too limited for another regular golf course and/or a mix of courses is desired to attract different types of players.

Creating a ModCourse is also an option due to highway encroachment, for more land to develop housing, or other reasons to reduce the size of an existing big golf course.

Lighting a ModCourse for evening and night play can be considered because it is so small.

If a ModCourse has a good loca-

tion, is well designed, efficiently built and maintained and operated, promoted properly, and the fees are right for enough of the player market, a lot of people should eventually find happiness playing such a course.

Bill Amick, of Daytona Beach, Fla., has had his own golf course architectural firm for more than 30 years. He is a past president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects and is the founding president of the American Modified Golf Association, a non-profit group promoting the development of this new game.



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