

Hills: Golf popularity increases need for practice facilities

Practice facilities are taking the pressure off golf courses by providing areas for golfers to improve their shot-making and for beginners to learn the game, according to Arthur Hills, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

"Golfers who can't get a tee time can work on their game at practice facilities, which are usually more accessible than golf courses," said Hills. "In addition, golfers who don't have the time to play an entire round can practice putting, driving and many other shots even if they have less than an hour to spare."

Training centers provide an excellent opportunity for new players to learn the game in a relaxed environment.

"Practice facilities allow beginner golfers to learn and enjoy the game without the pressure of playing on the course," he said. "New participants also can learn the etiquette and rules of the game, which will make for a more enjoyable experience once they actually play a round on a regulation course."

DESIGN TRENDS

There are several types of practice facilities, including stand-alone driving ranges, extra holes on golf courses, and deluxe training centers that feature driving ranges, putting areas and bunkers. Upscale practice facilities often include such features as large practice tee areas, target greens, lesson tees and practice bunkers that should be considered independently and collectively when designing the project.

Large practice tee areas allow the golf course superintendent and golf professional to distribute wear over a larger area. Teeing areas are often one-half to one acre in overall surface area.

Target greens at designated distances from the teeing area are becoming more common. The greens help concentrate golf balls in the middle portions of the facility by providing the golfer with a visual target similar to those found on the golf course. Aesthetically, the greens can be dressed up with mound work and sometimes even sand bunkers.

Lesson tees are often designed as separate teeing areas at the end of the practice range or at the sides of the teeing area. If the lesson tees are located at the end of the range, an adequate buffer distance of approximately 350 yards (or greater) must be implemented.

Practice bunkers and practice greens are often implemented into designs by the golf course architect. Practice greens should be of ample size; 10,000 square feet plus is typically a desired surface area which allows for a variety of cup settings.

FACILITIES ADD VALUE

Practice facilities built in conjunction with golf courses help golfers

develop skills, while providing an excellent location for testing new equipment before purchase.

In addition, these facilities offer an excellent source of revenue for golf courses.

"The additional revenue generated through lessons and from the driving range can be used for capital improvements to the course," said Hills. "This helps keep it in good condition for the players."

Another advantage of on-course facilities is that they provide a

preview of the course.

"They offer a great way to warm up and groove the swing, especially for a player who might only play once every few weeks," said Hills, who believes training centers help speed play by developing better players. "Developing better golfers results in faster rounds, less waiting and increased revenues."

RANGES/LEARNING CENTERS

Driving ranges are usually free-standing, commercial facilities that

provide many of the same benefits as practice facilities on golf courses.

A typical driving range has 40 to 100 tees, requires approximately 15 to 20 acres of land and can accommodate hundreds of golfers each hour.

Taking the driving range concept a step further, learning centers offer golfers the opportunity to work on a variety of shots. As an example of an elaborate learning center, Hills cited the Man-O-War Golf Center in Lexington, Ky.

"The 30-acre project is designed to enable a golfer to work on every aspect of the game by providing a variety of shot-making challenges," said Hills. "It features a three-tiered driving range, chipping area, putting green, realistic target greens and golf-swing video analysis."

Practice facilities often include a separate green to practice chipping and bunker shots. Many are designed with bunkers enabling golfers to practice using their sand wedge.



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