

Do golf and casino gaming mix? The jury is still out

America has either come a very long way or sunk to its moral depths, but this much can be said without fear of contradiction: Casino gambling is beginning to carve itself a niche in the nation's fastest-growing vacation trend, the family-style destination resort.

Indeed, the idea of changing your average resort into a theme park may have already taken hold. Don't expect the good folks at Disney to install slot machines in Epcot Center anytime soon, but don't be surprised if more traditional vacation spots start buying into the lucrative, low-overhead appeal of gaming.

Las Vegas, because it's the birthplace of modern American gambling, is further along this curve than any of its resort competitors. As it matures further, Vegas will look more and more like a giant, gambling theme park. By day, "fun for the whole family" will mean parents playing golf and shopping; kids frolicking by the pool and indulging themselves in various "theme" activities. The whole brood will get together for dinner, after which the kids will go to bed and parents will make a bee-line for the casino.

Indian tribes across the nation have begun to see gaming as their economic panacea (see story page 1), drawing millions of Americans to out-of-the-way places like Fort Thompson, S.D., and Loughlin, Ariz. Following the lead of Las Vegas — the gambling community's role model — tribes also see gaming as the first step



Hal Phillips,
editor

toward creation of full-service, destination resorts.

You may have gathered I'm not a big fan of organized gambling, which tends to separate cash from the pockets of those who, in general, can least afford to lose it. However, it's impossible to ignore the bright side here, which is the huge potential growth for golf.

The game has long been a favorite of resort developers who must occupy vacationers during daylight hours. Unlike seaside resorts, most Indian reservations have no beach component — making golf even more important to providing outdoor activities.

Golf developers who've spent the last 10 years wading through seas of red tape may salivate uncontrollably at the idea of building courses on land unregulated by local pols. Land on Indian reservations is often plentiful and, because the tribe owns it outright, beyond cheap.

Don't get me wrong: There is money to be made here as golf rides the coat tails of this burgeoning trend. But, developers beware: There are pitfalls that shouldn't be underplayed (see story page 33).

The temptation — as it was in the late-1980s with regard to real estate-based developments — is to seize immediately upon this new golf vehicle before the competition does.

Yet the family-style gaming theme park is not a proven commod-

Continued on page 51

Knott's call for return to classic design a worthy crusade

In the beginning: Brown. Unmanicured. Unruly. Natural. Unique. Not bound by rules beyond a tee box, a green and a cup. This is what golf courses were made of.

Today: Green — always green. Grass smooth as a billiard table and fast as a speeding bullet. Holes in multiples of nine. Well-defined. No blind shots. Never (well, hardly ever) two consecutive par-3s. Never (well, hardly ever) two consecutive par-5s. Contrived. This is what golf courses are made of.

Such is the Tale of the Prodigal — The Prodigal Golf Nation, that is. Just as the United States is an evolving analogy of the prodigal son, is not golf as we know it today, at many facilities and in many ways, an analogy of the prodigal son?

Just as the prodigal son left his roots to frolic in the (Egads!) pig stench, among other things, has not Golf Nation departed from its roots?

While it has fallen victim of the "We Can Do It Better Syndrome," the natives are stirring. Many course designers in Golf Nation are now espousing "Back to Basics," calling for a return to "classic design." They may not actually be doing it, but they are espousing it.

A few others are actually Doing It. And, hooray for Hollywood, the president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, Don Knott of Robert Trent Jones II International, has proclaimed this return to the classics as his Number One Call to Duty. Why nine holes, or 18 holes when the land you're dealing with is too small? he asks. Why always have lush green turf? he asks. Why,

Letters

TORO RESEARCHER ANSWERS WALL STREET JOURNAL REPORT

To the editor:

Your May 2 Marketplace article, "Golf Courses Are Denounced as Health Hazards" did a great disservice to the golf industry as well as the emerging group of environmentally responsible turf-care companies working to pioneer new management techniques.

Virtually every superintendent will agree that the turf management practices used on a golf course need to evolve as our understanding of the environmental impact of fertilizers and pesticides grows. Most golf superintendents are well-educated, skilled agronomists anxious to make their

(The above letter to the editor appeared in the June 1 Wall Street Journal. It has been reprinted with the author's permission)

courses environmentally safe for their players, crews and communities.

A new breed of turf nutrition companies is emerging. Their programs use the natural balance in the turf to control infestations and promote improved playability on the golf course. These products use environmentally responsible formulations (and no pesticides) to minimize the impact on the local ecosystem. Many employ "spoon feeding" programs that apply light but frequent doses of liquid nutrients stay in the root zone and less is leached into ground water or runs off into holding ponds.

New diagnostic techniques also can help the superintendent apply only the nutrients and trace minerals needed at that particular time.

All of us associated with the

why, why to scores of little rules man has made over the last 100 years that have narrowed the concept of a golf course to, in effect, rule out the very classics from which golf grew.

In the end, the prodigal son saw the light. He realized the error of his ways, how they led to his destruction. His father welcomed him back home with outstretched arms. The sentinels of Golf Nation would do the same to our own prodigal — wouldn't you say?

...

He has been called sinister, diabolical (or was that "dye-abolical?"), and a savage envisions of nightmares for golfers. But those who know him, love him. Next winter they can know him better.

Golf course architect extraordinaire Pete Dye, not to be outdone by his author/designer buddies, is coming out with his own book in November (see story, page 32). What will Pete title it? "Bury Me in a Pot Bunker." Appropriate enough. Word is, Pete is leaning toward the subtitle "18 Holes That Changed the Course of the Game." But, how about "Bury My Heart (or Driver or Putter) in Crooked Stick" — and subtitled "PGA (Purgatory Grabs Able-bodied) West Revisited"? — Or "Spitting Upwind in the Teeth of the Dog"? Any ideas?

Meanwhile, Pete is venturing into the world of clothing design. The Bowie, Md., firm Membership Bounce has announced its Pete Dye Architect Series golf shirts, which will consist of signed interpretations of newly created golf holes. His trademark — island

Continued on page 39



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

More letters on opposite page

golf industry recognize that our horticultural practices need to change as our knowledge of environmental pollution grows. Rather that vilify the golf superintendent for past practices, you need to recognize their pioneering work to improve the environment on the course. We will all benefit from that work and still enjoy a good round of golf."

H. Parker Smith Jr., director
Toro Probiotic Unit
Scottsdale, Ariz.

FAUBEL AGREES: GOLFERS SHOULD HELP FUND TURF RESEARCH

To the editor:

Mark Leslie's editorial in the June issue of *Golf Course News* ("It's time for golfers to pay their fair share") is right on target.

Superintendents have worked diligently for years to provide research support so they might pro-

vide better playing surfaces for golfers. The United States Golf Association has probably made the most impact with the millions of dollars it has provided for turfgrass research. The full impact of their efforts will be felt for years to come.

At the present time, the turfgrass industry in Michigan is being used as an example by other traditional agriculture groups for their efforts to raise money for research and extension, an effort which is having a very positive effect on the College of Agriculture & Natural Resources (at Michigan State University).

Ultimately, it is the consumer who pays the bill. However, if the funds are to be raised, it is the responsibility of those within the industry to find the vehicle.

Jerry Faubel, CGCS
Saginaw (Mich.) Country Club

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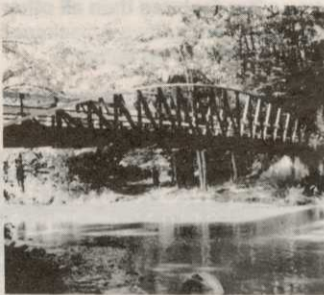


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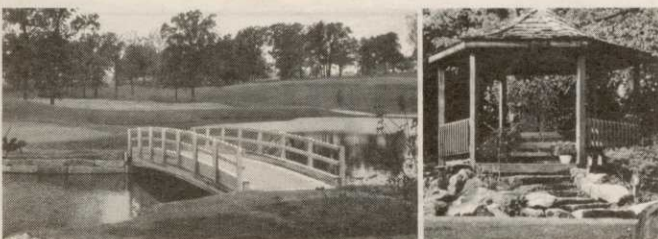
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CIRCLE #156

Homestead case

Continued from page 3

expectations regarding the wetlands.

A local environmental group, Friends of Crystal River (FCR), appealed and the matter remains deadlocked.

"We are not against golf or golf courses," said Scott Jones, president of FCR. "We would be for [the development], if it were on another site."

In 1992 the Chicago Region 5 branch of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) vetoed the wetland permits. Later that year, the EPA in Washington, D.C., reversed its Chicago branch decision.

According to Jones, the EPA in Washington, under pressure from the Bush Administration, lobbied to overturn the Chicago decision. Michigan Gov. John Engler, an ardent Republican backer, has voiced his support for The Homestead expansion throughout the six-year permitting process.

Jones said he believes the Engler/Bush connection was behind the federal appeal of EPA's own branch office.

"The EPA exceeded its authority in overturning its own Region 5 — the [jurisdiction] really belonged to the Army Corps of Engineers," said Jones. "Michigan is the only state in the country where the EPA permits the local state to grant wetland permits. If politics had not gotten into it, the EPA would not have overturned its Midwest region."

"Is this golf course going to pollute the waters, or isn't it? That is what this should be about."

The decision of the EPA in Washington — rendered May 8, 1992 — was appealed by FCR and six co-litigants: The Sierra Club, National Wildlife Federation, Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Lake Michigan Federation, Michigan Council of Trout Unlimited and the Indiana Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America. A federal judge granted the environmentalists an injunction against the federal EPA on May 11, 1992. This prohibited construction. It was the last decision before April's pro-Homestead finding and FCR's subsequent appeal.

"It has gone through gauntlet after gauntlet — legal gauntlets, emotional gauntlets and design gauntlets," said Ben Whitfield, town supervisor for Glen Harbor. "[The golf course is a] state-of-the-art design, being sensitive to the environment. The township voted in favor of the golf course. DNR approved it... I'd like to know where the leverage, the pressure is coming from."

Phillips comment

Continued from page 12

ity. Las Vegas has only recently decided to push for this more wholesome, all-encompassing image and — in my humble opinion — the jury remains out as to its profitability.

A similar transformation is taking place in Ledyard, Conn., where the Mashantucket Tribe is adding golf and other resort components to its wildly successful Foxwoods casino complex. But this is a special case. Ledyard is situated between Boston and New York in a heavily populated area. The Foxwoods courses will get significant play irrespective of gaming patrons.

Further, from a golfing perspective, the Greater Vegas area has long been under-supplied, meaning daily-fee and resort development was imminent regardless of whether Las Vegas decided to make The Strip more appealing to "the whole family."

Similar golf development may be inevitable in Loughlin and Fort Thompson, but I'm not so sure the rounds will be there.