

Should other courses follow Augusta National's lead?

As I was walking up to the 18th tee at Augusta National during the practice rounds at the Masters, I stumbled upon Tom Fazio explaining the changes he made to the hole to CBS announcers Jim Nantz and Ken Venturi. That's when it struck me: how many armchair greens committee architects watching this year's telecast would be left with the impression that they, too, needed to lengthen their course?

With increasing golf ball and club technology, many courses are already adding length and new courses are getting longer and longer. While the effects of the 285 yards that were added to Augusta National were impossible to gauge due to wet conditions, the changes made to golf's Mecca fanned the flames of the technology vs. tradition debate. Not only did Augusta National add length, using land from adjacent Augusta Country Club in the process, but Masters chairman Hootie Johnson also stopped just short of endorsing a limited-flight "tournament golf ball."

While many in the golf industry are tiring of this ongoing argument, the fact remains that



Andrew Overbeck, editor

increasing technology and other factors are altering the game to some degree. However, as this month's Point/Counterpoint feature and News Poll illustrate (see below and page 7), the industry is still firmly divided over what, if anything, should be done about the problem.

There is no doubt that professional golfers are hitting the ball longer, but tweaking layouts for professional events has been going on for years. The big question is how technology will impact the average golfer and the 16,000-plus average golf courses in the country. Unfortunately, there isn't much hard data on this. Most of the "evidence" that exists is purely anecdotal or based on unwieldy assumptions or estimates.

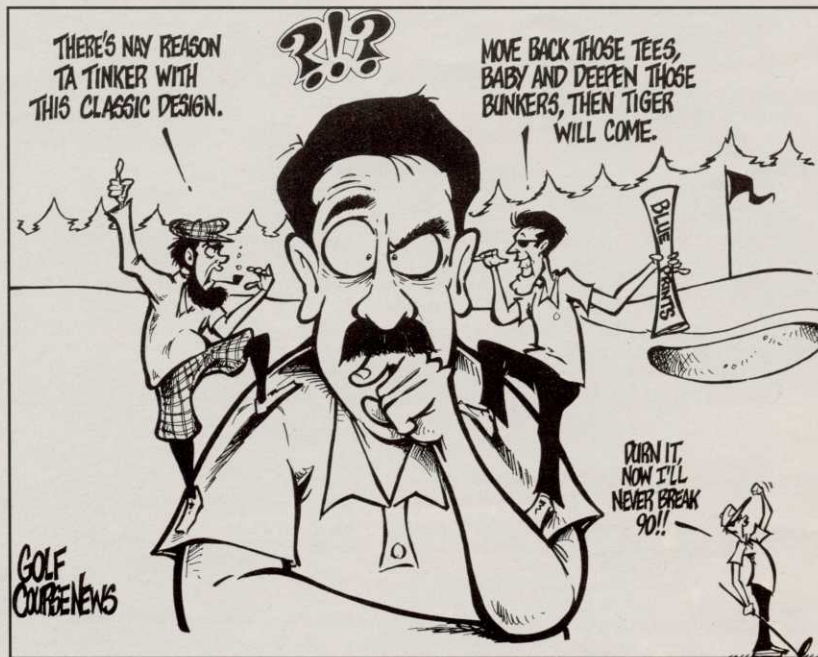
Are a majority of high-handicappers really slicing the ball 50 yards farther right and endangering homeowners relaxing on their patios? Or is the high-handicapper playing more golf because he can drive

the ball 50 yards farther right down the middle? The last thing the industry needs is another survey, but quantifying the problem would be better than making unnecessary changes (to both golf courses and equipment) to solve what could just be a misconception or misperception.

Speaking of using hard data to assess the severity of a problem, check out John Strawn's review of Bjørn Lomborg's "The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World" (see page 18). According to

Lomborg's assessment of the data on environmental problems, it turns out that the environment on the whole is actually getting better, not worse. The golf industry has known this for some time, but finally there is a body of data that provides an alternative perspective to the usual gloomy environmental scenario.

Here at *Golf Course News*, we never stop counting. Turn back to page 28 for a listing of the 40 industry professionals quoted in this issue.



POINT

Drawing a line in the sand

By DAMIAN PASCUZZO



Damian Pascuzzo

As golf course architects we are trained to be problem solvers. Given a piece of land, along with a list of development constraints and the client's goals and budget, we set out to design the best course possible. That's our job and we'll continue to do it the best we can. But how about a little help from our friends making all of these new high-tech clubs and balls?

Has anyone seen how far people are hitting it today? No, I'm not talking about the tour pros. We all know how they pulverize the ball. I'm referring to the high school kids, the 20-somethings, and all those other flat-bellied golfers to whom a 280-yard drive is the rule, not the exception. No doubt about it, it's fun to watch even a recreational golfer catch one on the sweet spot and send it sailing off onto the fairway. But it's downright ugly when that same player hooks or slices. We're no longer concerned only about the houses that border the fairways. Now we have to worry about the houses that sit across the street from the houses that border the fairway.

Over the last 30 years, designers have gradually increased the width of corridors for a safe golf hole. Where will it end? Left unchecked, how far will players be hitting the ball in 10 years? How about in 20? It is not unusual for the planning and permitting process for a new golf course to take 10 years, not to mention at least two years for construction and grow-in. If today's focus on power golf continues, it is conceivable the acreage allotted for that golf course will be insufficient the day it opens.

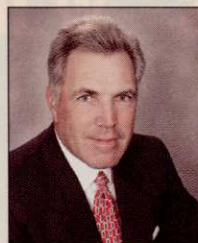
One of our ASGCA members prepared a detailed analysis on the effects of increased distance, and the results are disturbing. If the architect must provide more land (at least 10 percent) for

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COUNTERPOINT

How has the golf ball harmed golf?

By WALTER UIHLEIN



Walter Uihlein

For the past 70 years the United States Golf Association and the Royal & Ancient have had performance controls in place concerning the golf ball. These performance controls have included limitations on size and weight (adopted 1935), velocity (adopted 1942) and overall distance (adopted 1976). At the same time the performance controls on golf clubs did not occur until 1998.

To discuss and debate a "limited flight ball" is to conclude that the golf ball is the cause of some current problem. If there is a problem, the golf ball is not the cause.

PLAYERS ARE BIGGER, STRONGER AND LONGER

The cause is a combination of stronger competitors and better clubs. In 1992, the average height and weight of the 125 exempt players on the U.S. PGA Tour was six feet and 180 pounds. Today the average height and weight of 125 exempt players on the U.S. PGA Tour is six feet two inches and 195 pounds.

At the same time, club technology has improved. In 1992, the average size driver clubhead and driver length on the PGA Tour in 1992 was 180 cc and 44 inches. The average size driver clubhead and driver length in 2002 is 325cc and 45.25 inches.

In 1992 average clubhead speed on the U.S. PGA Tour was 108-mph. Average clubhead speed today is 112 mph. This increase in clubhead speed (and the ability to generate distance) involves the player and the club. The golf ball has not been hit yet.

The 1992 Masters Champion was Fred Couples, who stood 5 feet 11 inches tall, weighed 180 pounds and could barely bench press 175 pounds, while the 2002 Masters Champion Tiger

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