

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.

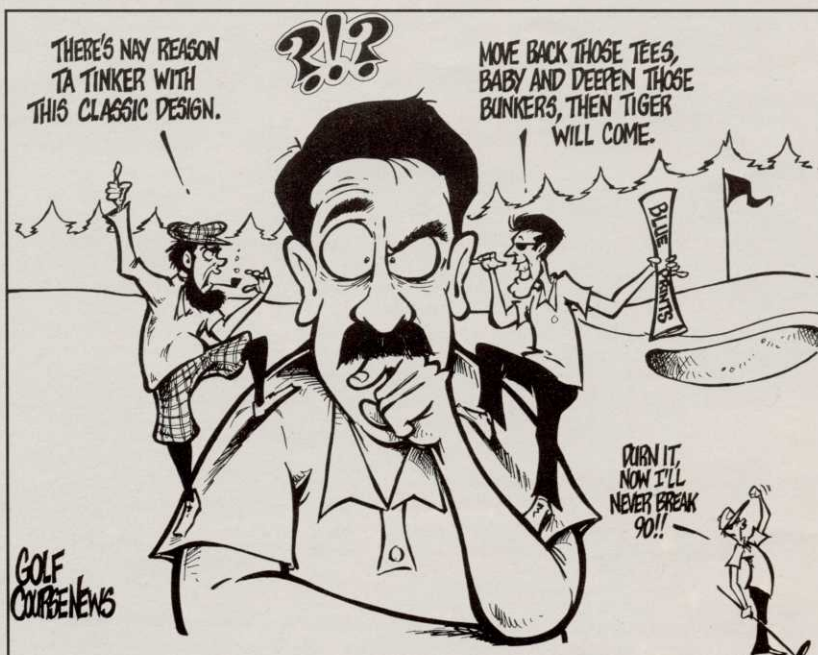
Are a majority of high-handicappers really slicing the ball 50 yards farther right and endangering homeowners relaxing on their patios? Or is the high-handicapper playing more golf because he can drive

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.

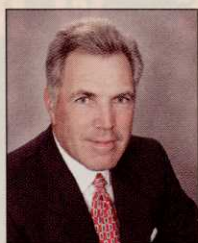
One of our ASGCA members prepared a detailed analysis on the effects of increased distance, and the results are disturbing. If the architect must provide more land (at least 10 percent) for

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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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Publisher

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Country Club of the Rockies

Editorial Office

Golf Course News

106 Lafayette St., P.O. Box 997

Yarmouth, ME 04096

207-846-0600; Fax: 207-846-0657

aoverbeck@golfcoursenews.com

drice@golfcoursenews.com

ADVERTISING OFFICES

Golf Course News

106 Lafayette St., P.O. Box 997

Yarmouth, ME 04096

207-846-0600; Fax: 207-846-0657

Midwest and Western U.S. Sales:

Jonathan Whitney

207-846-0600, ext. 263

jwhitney@golfcoursenews.com

Eastern U.S. Sales:

Michael Pajak

207-846-0600, ext. 223

mpajak@golfcoursenews.com

Marketplace and Classifieds:

Anne Washburn

207-846-0600, ext. 230

awashburn@golfcoursenews.com

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Golf Course News, P.O. Box 3047

Langhorne, PA 19047

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Organic management plan offers best results

To the Editor,

Here at Lahontan Golf Club, we strive to be 100 percent organic through sustainable agriculture, by feeding the soil, not the plant ("Organic golf activists score major victory" GCN April 2002 and "The time for organic golf has arrived" GCN May 2002).

Our results have provided exceptional turf conditions, however, we realize that the definition of organic vs. inorganic can be subjective and is open to discussion. Synthetic vs. organic is easy to understand, but if a golf course ever applies "organics" to the course, it could still result in leaching and runoff of phosphorous and nitrogen, requiring addi-

tional best management practices and mitigation to avoid contamination of waterways. Therefore, through all of this, management is pivotal to success, even if the course is organic.

I think Neal Lewis hits the point on the head by describing an "Organic Management Plan." That implies the use of non-synthetic fertilizers coupled with a management plan that understands the agriculture of turf grass wholly and holistically."

Take care,
Martyn Hoffmann
DMB/Highlands Group, LLC
Truckee, Calif.

Moss article covered bases

Editor's note: The following is contributor Kevin Ross' response to Neil Goldberg's letter in last month's issue that raised several questions about Ross' article "Moss hits Colorado hard, more research needed" (GCN April 2002).

To the Editor,

I would like to address a few issues from Neil Goldberg's response and offer additional information concerning the Colorado moss symposium.

As far as the Ultra Dawn issue, I stated

that Ultra Dawn gave the most consistent results, which is absolutely correct. The Oregon State study is the only study that had poor results using Ultra Dawn. However, their technique used Ultra Dawn as a broadcast application through a boom sprayer and not a drench application. It is widely believed that the broadcast application was the reason for the ineffectiveness. In Frank Dobie's Moss Network (cited in Goldberg's letter), Ultra Dawn was determined as the most effective control for moss. As far as the discoloration issue, the research shows that only slight discoloring happens with temperatures above 80 degrees. This is consistent with most all products, including Terracyte.

On the subject of research, I did mention Dr. Frank Rossi at Cornell University as a site where independently funded research was taking place. Rossi's conclusions to date showed Junction ranked first and Terracyte ranked second in his trials to control moss. Neither of these products are a one-time fix for moss and neither provided 100 percent control.

Concerning Terracyte, the article did indicate that Terracyte was one of the

potential products that looked promising. I also stated, as did Dr. Koski, and Matt Nelson, USGA, at the symposium, that more research is certainly needed. As mentioned above, Terracyte has only been tested in university research by Dr. Rossi, with quantifiable results.

The climatic conditions in Colorado are certainly much different than that of Ithaca, N.Y. It appears there will be moss research conducted at Colorado State University, led by Dr. Koski, starting this season. This research will be sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Golf Course Superintendents Association.

The purpose of the article was to call attention to a problem that requires additional research to find a solution. I interviewed many superintendents at the symposium, and most all stated they went home more confused than when they arrived. This should tell everyone something concerning moss.

Let's hope that we do find a cure-all for moss, no matter what product it is, and no matter who makes it.

Best regards,
Kevin J. Ross, CGCS
The Country Club of the Rockies
Edwards, Colo.

GCN NEWS POLL:

What impact will advancements in golf ball and golf club technology have on the golf course industry?

❖ "Whenever one is able to improve the average golfer's performance, it will raise the level of excitement about our game. We do need to be certain that we make the marketplace aware of the fact that there are rules that govern our play, and as long as we remain in the context of the rules we will all benefit."

— Jeremy P. Leon, chief operating officer, Royce Brook Golf Club, Hillsborough, N.J.

❖ "Overall, I predict minimal impact. The USGA has limited initial velocity of the ball (for a set club head speed) for 20-something years. I doubt that dimple patterns (aerodynamics) can add much more.

The biggest increase in length has been and will be clubs, particularly in the hands of bigger, stronger, more dedicated, and therefore more talented, players. So what if a few professionals and talented young amateurs are able to hit the ball farther? If we don't make new courses significantly wider, that length will ultimately translate into less accuracy and curb itself. The vast majority of us baby boomers are going to lose distance and we will be just fine playing enjoyable and strategically stimulating courses that are of the same dimensions as today."

— Mike Dasher, member, American Society of Golf Course Architects, Dasher Golf Design, Orlando, Fla.

❖ "Improved technology, although a positive influence in most fields, is not necessarily the answer for golf. Technological advances tend to make the current state obsolete, thus

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Uihlein: Golf ball not to blame

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Woods stands 6 feet 2 inches tall, weighs 180 pounds and can bench press in excess of 270 pounds.

Today's chiseled professional athlete who plays on the U.S. PGA Tour is using longer, lighter drivers with oversize clubheads featuring faces that trampoline at impact. The golf ball does not act alone, conspiracy theories notwithstanding.

NEWER COURSES WOULD BE A BETTER TEST

The U.S. PGA Tour plays 44 events per year. Since 1960 the USGA Men's Open has been played at 20 different courses. If it is the professional game that we are concerned about and this involves, at best, only 60 to 70 courses annually, why is there a debate that 16,000 golf courses are at risk due to the advances in the golf equipment technology?

In 1960 there were 6,000 golf courses in the United States. Today, there are more than 16,000. Over the past 42 years, more than 10,000 golf courses have been constructed and opened. Since these golf courses have been built anticipating the evolution of technology, why have only two (Bellerive in 1964 and Hazeltine in 1970) been selected to host a USGA Men's Open? Doesn't it seem logical that a modern course would be the best test of the modern player and the modern power game?

Continuing with the assumption contemporary designs anticipated the arrival of today's power game, why have we not considered selecting contemporary sites to host a USGA Men's Open? For example why not consider staging an event at Pumpkin Ridge GC or Bandon Dunes GC in Oregon, Double Eagle GC in Ohio,

Bulle Rock GC in Maryland, or Whistling Straits in Wisconsin?

Why is it that courses designed by Pete Dye and used by the PGA Tour (TPC Sawgrass and PGA West) hold up so well as contemporary challenges for today's professional golfers, but not one of Mr. Dye's venues ever has been selected by the USGA to host one of its men's championships?

And why is it that we only hear from player/architects such as Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Greg Norman concerning "limited flight" golf balls and a "one ball fits all" solution, but we do not hear from PGA Tour commissioner Finchem or players such as Tiger Woods, David Duval, Phil Mickelson or Davis Love on the subject?

After all, it is the equipment used by the contemporary PGA Tour players where the crusaders are demanding change.

Former USGA technical director

Frank Thomas states that we should not worry about major distance changes in the future because the laws of physics will continue to prevail. Why is his research and viewpoint (www.franklygolf.com) being ignored?

Each and every equipment rule in place has resulted from a working give and take relationship between the game's rulers (the USGA and the R&A) and those who are ruled (the golf equipment manufacturers). We have ideas about the direction of golf equipment-related issues. Unfortunately, with political white papers and a blatant media bias, the innocent golf ball has already been found guilty of crimes against the game. This situation makes any attempt at discussing where we go from here ineffective.

Walter Uihlein is the president and chief executive officer of the Acushnet Co.

Doesn't it seem logical that a modern course would be the best test of the modern player and the modern power game?

A line in the sand

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safety reasons then construction, growth and maintenance costs increase up to 17 percent. How many developers will be discouraged from including a golf course in their future projects if acreage requirements continue to escalate?

Wally Uihlein's comment recently that the golf industry is flat and "mired in the same recession as the rest of the U.S." is true, but the primary problem is cost. It is a simple equation. The farther players can hit the ball, the more length and width we need for safe and enjoyable golf courses. This additional acreage means more development costs and greater maintenance budgets. These additional expenses are most likely going to be passed on to the golfer in the form of higher greens fees.

We are not attempting to roll back the clock on the game. We just want to keep it affordable so golfers of all ages can enjoy it. Making golf more expensive, time consuming, and more intimidating is not the way to grow participation rates.

Damian Pascuzzo is the president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects and is a partner in Graves & Pascuzzo, Ltd., a golf course design and development firm in El Dorado Hills, Calif.

We want to hear from you

Letters to the editor are an integral part of GCN, so let your voice be heard. Send all correspondence to:

ANDREW OVERBECK, EDITOR
GOLF COURSE NEWS
106 LAFAYETTE STREET
PO BOX 997
YARMOUTH, ME 04096
FAX #: 207-846-0657
AOVERBECK@GOLFCOURSENEWS.COM