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HOW WIDE SHOULD FAIRWAYS BE?

At the Golf Industry Show in San Diego, I had the chance to meet many readers, talk with them and answer some of their questions.

One superintendent asked, "How wide should a fairway be?" I tried to think up a pithy response, similar to Lincoln's admonition that a man's legs should be just long enough to reach the ground; instead I referred him to a column I'd written a while back. But he was interested in information on creating strategy, not just a way to reduce fairways to reduce maintenance. He actually wanted to widen fairways to speed play and create more playing interest.

He was thinking like golf course architects, who know that courses don't need to be a repetitive, one dimensional series of narrow (or wide) fairways, and that most holes will be more interesting with some strategy and tee shot options.

Your original golf course architect had something in mind for those fairways. If your fairways have crept several yards inside your fairway bunkers, you should make them relevant again by taking fairways edges back out to bring them back into play. They might have been put there as a safety or directional device, as a target or for aesthetics.

But, most likely they are intended to create strategy. This can involve playing a full shot vs. laying up, or playing to one side of the fairway near a hazard to gain an approach advantage like a shorter shot, green contours helping your shot, or a better stance. But the advantage is typically an approach shot with no hazards on your direct line to catch a short shot.

U.S. Open-width fairways only 27 to 32 yards wide are difficult to hit at all, much less attempting to favor one side. Strategic holes need wider fairways, but by how much? It depends on *approach shot length*

and the *green angle*. If we want golfers to place tee shots near the fairway edge to gain advantage, it becomes a simple geometry problem. (Your teacher was right – you would use it someday!)

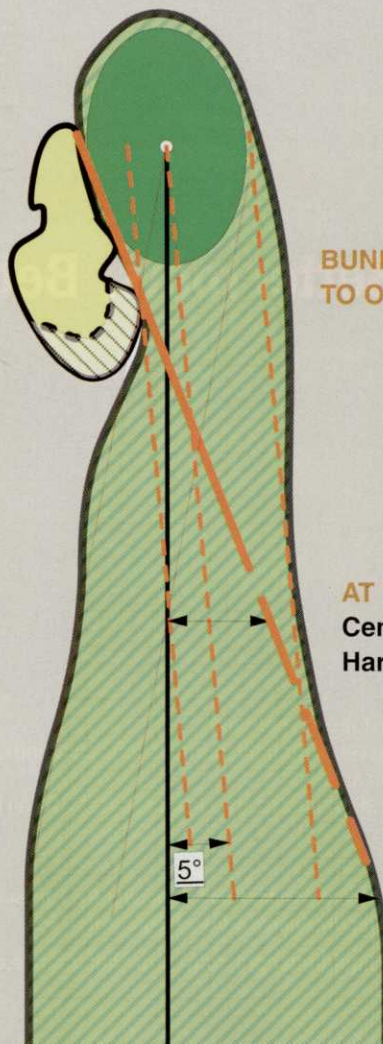
The illustration shows a green angling 5 degrees to the right, with a bunker on the front left. To create completely open access to the center of the green or to the tightest tucked pin, the fairway in the landing zone can vary from 9 to 21 yards right of the center line for a 100-yard approach and 14-43 yards right of the center line for a 150 yard approach. The angle dictates that longer holes generally need wider fairways.

Given the free-form nature of golf

courses, it can and will usually be somewhere in between those extremes. A mostly open green is an advantage over a bunker carry, and creating a fully open green can require a fairway much wider than is possible to recapture.

The diagram also shows the potential for reducing greenside bunkers to open up the green front slightly. The less the green set at an angle and the more the front is open, the narrower the fairway can be.

For all the mathematical study I might do, you can probably visualize possible changes just as easily in the field at your place. It's all too easy to miss how mowing gradually narrows fairways and reduces strategy and interest. By putting some thought into the original design, you can maintain and present the best possible experience for your golfers. For the passionate superintendent, no detail is too small to overlook. **GCI**



BUNKER POSITION MAY BE ALTERED TO OPEN OR CLOSE GREEN

AT 100 YARDS, OPEN SHOT TO:
Center at 5 degrees, 9 yards right
Hardest pin, max 21 yards right

AT 150 YARDS, OPEN SHOT TO:
Center at 5 degrees, 14 yards right
Hardest pin, max 43 yards right