

Jeffrey D. Brauer is a licensed golf course architect and president of GolfScapes, a golf course design firm in Arlington, Texas. Brauer, a past president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, can be reached at jeff@jeffreymbrauer.com.



WHAT WOMEN WANT (GOLF DIVISION)

The golf industry has recently focused – again – on women. Perhaps with play down, we are desperately seeking women more than in past efforts, I don't know. Golf seems an inherently attractive sport for women, and it shouldn't be that hard a sell, should it? Nevertheless, translating great ideas from numerous industry golf conferences to real results hasn't happened, and I wonder if it ever will.

At the PGA Show, the National Women's Golf Alliance (NGWA) announced it will establish base standards and best practices that should enhance golf's overall appeal to women. Actually, much of that kind of work is already out there. If you want some advice from real experts, I suggest checking out www.golfwithwomen.com or www.nancyberkeley.com.

While I will never be confused as an expert at understanding women, I do get design feedback from my forward/family tees (*They like them. They really, really like them!*). And, I have asked a lot of the questions they will be asking as part of those formal surveys! Asking women about golf is always a revelation about course and service shortcomings! The most typical answers I get when asking why women don't play more are as follows:

I don't have the time...Golf is too hard...I feel like a second class citizen on the course.

I am not sure any of us can answer the "don't have the time" complaint, for men or women, and golf could sure be easier for all of us. New generation clubs and balls help, of course. But, design plays a part, too. We need far shorter forward tees to start.

Golf still puts in only indifferent effort at designing the course and gearing the golf experience around women. This indifference manifests itself many ways. An example, I recently proposed forward tees at 4,100 yards, and the manager's response was "Isn't 5,000 yards good enough for the women?"

Well, um, "no." Merely advancing a ball on a par-5 second shot has less inherent appeal than the drive or approach shot. At 5,000 yards, most holes play like par 5's – or more – for women, making nearly half their full shots dull.

The math is simple – with 140-yard-average tee shots, and a variety of second shots averaging 2/3 of that, or about 90 yards, forward tees on a par 72 course should be about 4,140 yards to allow women a chance to reach every green with two good shots. Where I have shortened tees to this length, I find that mid-handicap females are "thrilled" to reach holes in

regulation, and wonder why more courses aren't like this (and why I didn't shorten even more holes below 280 yards).

They say length alone doesn't please women. They note that many forward tees force shots into ponds, or play from behind trees, or cause blind shots up steep hills, etc. In other words, after over 100 years of "women's tees" evolution, they are still largely afterthoughts, and not designed for the way women play.

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Approach shots aren't "woman friendly," "either – many greens have only a narrow fairway opening to the green, and many "perfect" shots (i.e., airborne and nearly straight) end up in green side hazards. When you hit about less than ten good approach shots per round, you don't want the good ones trapped. Yet, at one club, female members who complained about a deep bunker in front of their par 3 9th hole caused most to just quit there because they couldn't either clear it or play out, they were told "the architect should have put it in front of the first green."

Beyond design, wooing women starts with changing the prevalent male attitudes...also a hard sell. As one example, a course marshal approached the female in my group to note our slow play, even though she was far from the problem.

Then, we need to start designing service around their likes. Think ultra clean restrooms, and menu items other than hamburgers and beer. Think Sak's Fifth Avenue before the first fairway. Think of this scene from "Pretty Woman":

Edward: I think we need some major sucking up.

Clerk: Very well, sir. I could see the second you walked in here; you were someone to reckon with--

Edward: Not me. Her.

Women sense that they are not welcome, which is a big buzz kill out there. The most important factor is replacing the "No Girlz Allowed" signs currently hanging at most golf courses with a true welcome sign. **GCI**