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## GOLF SHOULD BE FUN, DAMMIT, PART 2

Traditionalists be damned, we have to learn new ways to love golf.

I inherited the title phrase from my father, who uttered it during his prolonged golfing slumps. I inherited his tendency towards golf slumps. Restrained language? Not so much.

Golf is inherently fun when I hit great shots, play with my grandson, or see kids hit rocks with sticks. I see it at Top Golf ([topgolf.com](http://topgolf.com)) a "golf experience" combining the driving range with competition and entertainment. Players hit micro-chipped golf balls at targets and the high-tech balls instantly score each shot's accuracy and distance. Top Golf draws serious golfers, corporate outings, families, dating couples and non golfers from every walk of life.

Yes, golf has "still got it" (meaning the fun factor) even if its leaders clearly "don't get it."

In reality, the USGA and PGA aims mostly to preserve traditions for the 8 million core golfers, for whom golf has always been great the way it is. In preserving "old ways" they seem reluctant to promoting "new ways" of converting the next generation from non-golfers into "real" golfers, sometimes because they fear having to accept "reasonable facsimiles" as part of the bargain.

The persistent idea that traditions should be "preserved as is" ignores the real tradition of change in golf for over 500 years. For example, in the 1850's they removed much whims and gorse from St. Andrews. Many play-

ers of the day resisted the change as too radical, and because it made golf "too easy." Sound familiar?

Nothing is constant but change and the rate of change constantly increases. Can golf really dedicate itself to staying as it is?

Golf has changed with time and society, reflecting real life as we know it. Golf carts mimic the automobile age, distance finders mimic our information age and course within housing tracts reflect our post WWII move to suburbia. For the next generation, instant digital information may be the most important aspect, and hence the

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popularity of Top Golf. Traditional golf won't appeal as much without more tech. I expect this feature to work its way on to the courses within a decade. It might help sell the game to youth as a sort of real life video game. For geezers, it will be marketed as "losing fewer golf balls."

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Golf also holds strongly to the notion of the par 72, 7,000-yard course,

even when 99 percent of golfers play only 60-90 percent of that yardage. Traditionally, alternative courses receive little acceptance, but I recently played the Challenge Course at Monarch Dunes (in Nipomo, Calif., designed by Steve Pate and Damian Pascuzzo) which bucks that trend. It is a 12-hole, par-3 course designed to championship standards. Each hole has several tees, ranging from a chip shot for beginners up to a full-length par 3. Each green also features both a standard size and large cup.

We played to the large cups from a variety of tees. Some would complain that it wasn't "real golf", but I never had more fun on a course. Our group hit more shots that every golfer craves – one holed out wedge, three chip ins, and a dozen made long putts,

most to win a hole and a nickel. The allure of golf is pulling off wonderful shots and shorter holes and larger cup increase those exponentially.

More excitement, less boredom. How can that not be a good thing?

The next generation needs to shape golf, just as in previous generations. We can't fear what might happen (think how golf carts, jumbo drivers, and female golfers enraged "traditionalists"). It's been said you can't force someone to love you a certain way. You have to accept that they love you their way. The USGA can't insist that everyone loves golf their way, and will eventually accept more golfers loving it in a new way. **GCI**