

Architect's Services Needed In Course Modernizing

By EDWARD B. DEARIE, JR.

In considering problems of alteration and modernization of golf course construction and architecture one who has been in the business a long time must write with complete candor. Some of the changes that should be made are in his own work of long past years.

Regardless of what we say and believe about nature making the finest golf courses there has been such a development in the game that even the classic jobs at St. Andrews and Pinehurst have had to undergo some drastic revision. The game of golf has remained fundamentally the same but the players have become more demanding, the traffic on courses has become heavier and the ball and implements have improved, as have almost all other mechanical devices and the implements of all sports.

Furthermore, there has been great progress in the science of turf culture and that has necessitated revisions of practice in handling a crop of grass which, especially in the case of greens, has had to be kept in superlative condition regardless of an unnatural routine of maintenance.

Also of exceedingly urgent importance has been the problem of maintaining golf courses with far less labor than was available when most of today's first class courses were designed and constructed.

Now, while the advisability of modernization is so urgent and clubs generally are in good financial condition, the subject of bringing golf course construction up to date cannot be sidetracked by informed club officials.

It's a gross injustice to the course superintendent to be asked to make any major architectural changes to the golf course without due consideration or understanding of his ability to do this kind of work. It requires years of study and work to master the art of golf architecture, particularly in one of the exacting features, the placing of traps or mounds on any golf course.

Therefore, I will not put too much emphasis on the skill of the average greenkeeper to make any changes to a golf course or green site or revise any of the original construction mistakes without

thorough knowledge of this work. I have really seen some sad attempts on reconstruction of greens and traps, in fact, they were worse than the original done by the resident greenkeeper.

I can understand very well the average greenkeeper's point of view on the job of correcting some of the errors on his golf course. He is usually given the old build-up by the Green committee. They tell him he is the man of the hour to correct the existing mistakes. Therefore, he is given the first opportunity to exercise his imagination and has the full cooperation (including much inexpert advice) of the committee to build the ideal golf hole or make the perfect green, and change the hazard arrangements if necessary.

Not a Greenkeeper's Job

Suddenly he discovers in the process of the construction work he has lost some of his imagination or in most cases discovers that they never had the required type of golf architectural imagination.

Do not subject your greenkeeper to this embarrassment. It's unfair to expect too much from him. The demands of his maintenance job are numerous and complex and the redesigning of a green with its necessary hazards is a branch of art in itself and is obviously risky to expect the maintenance authority to acquire mastery of a highly specialized department of golf work.

For 30 years I have been interested in golf architecture, construction and maintenance and the game itself. Of great interest to me has been the study of golf architecture in its development to the present day designing of mounds and traps.

The fascination of golf play lies in its intricacies and problems. The more interesting the course the higher becomes the standard of play and keener the enjoyment of the game. Most golfers have an entirely erroneous view with regard to the real object of traps and hazards. The majority of them simply look upon hazards as a means of punishing a bad shot, when the real object is to make the game interesting and develop skillful play. In fact, any uninteresting area of land requires an artist's vision and constructive

imagination before you can call it a championship layout. And that's no easy matter to accomplish on some of the land I have seen chosen for golf course sites. In fact the land would be better for race tracks.

This condition is somewhat different today. The most interesting, beautiful and artistic golf courses are those upon which the least obvious attempt has been made to modify the attractive features of the natural terrain. Nature is the great artist and while you can change the landscape in appearance by planting and the earth-moving jobs that are done so speedily now, you've got to do the work so it looks like nature has done it. Harmony of proportion and form may always be observed in natural landscapes. Therefore in designing mounds and traps it is best not to attempt to exaggerate nature but to cooperate with her.

Those Old Design Mistakes

Too well do I recall the ancient cross bunkers and chocolate-drop mounds and pot traps, with stairs going into the traps. You could only see the top of the golfer's head. How monotonous such a course was to play, how hideous in design, and impossible to maintain except by hand labor that very few clubs can get and afford now. That has been the history of a lot of golf architecture in the past.

No set rules ever can be laid down for the construction of specific golf course features. To do so would provide standardized golf courses that would diminish interest in the game.

Considerable sums have been wasted yearly in trying to rearrange hazards and traps that were badly located in the initial construction and traps that were placed too far out in the rough and have no effect on the shot whatsoever. Others were too close to the line of well-directed tee shots or badly placed as to distance, angle depth and size for second shots. In fact I have seen mounds blind the approach to the green on a number of courses.

Therefore I cannot put too much emphasis on the question of trap placing on a well designed course. It requires keen imagination and the ability to understand golf as it is played—certainly not a job for the average greenkeeper.

There are too many so-called golf courses that have been laid out and constructed by pitifully unqualified men who as golf course architects have proved very impractical.

Their experiments—all well intentioned—have given this country a great many golf courses which are deplorable examples of guesswork and a violation of many of the sound principles of golf

course construction and designing. Such courses have been costly to maintain and impossible to understand. Not only have these costly mistakes been made in the past but even today in the face of the advanced knowledge we possess these mistakes seem to continue for some strange reason. The idea persists that any enthusiastic person can design, construct or alter a golf course, and this delusion is responsible for constant changing of badly constructed and poorly located greens and traps.

Every Change is Important

It is folly not to exercise the greatest care and discrimination in choosing a golf course architect to make even the so-called unimportant changes to the course. To think otherwise is a mistake. Don't look too much for the greenkeeper to solve this problem.

In placing a hazard on any golf hole one must have in mind accomplishment of a definite purpose. Unless this is very clearly in the mind of the designer the placing of a hazard becomes nothing more than a guessing matter and possibly a continual annoyance as long as it is there. Hazards—natural or artificial—are the risks that the golfer must take. Skill and daring, not luck, should be the demand in every well played golf shot. Nothing ventured nothing gained, is particularly true of golf. The soul of the golf game lies along the fairway on the way to the green.

I could go on for hour after hour on golf course architecture and maintenance but not too much on the jobs done by my fellow greenkeepers correcting errors in the original design. On construction—for soil condition, drainage and grass selection and development—the greenkeeper can and will do a job up to the high current standards. And in checking design for machine maintenance he will show command of a very important phase of the work. But course architecture of the same high standard as his turf development and maintenance very, very rarely is in his line. That's certainly no discredit to the course superintendent whose achievements and progress in his own field have accounted for bright pages in golf's history.

Golf architectural talent is rare enough to deserve rating on its own merits, and fortunately there are enough architects whose fees are within the reach of every first class club to relieve the course superintendent of responsibility for new design that he seldom is qualified to assume. The sooner club officials, course superintendents and architects realize this and properly place responsibility, the more certain we may be that alterations now contemplated will be made soundly.