

*Player demand and need for economical maintenance call
for architect to compromise his ideas on layout*

Lower Costs, Lower Scores Asked in Course Design

By ALFRED H. TULL

THERE has been a lot written about the relation between modern golf course design and the cost of course upkeep. There also has been a lot said about the things a golf course architect can do to reduce maintenance costs. I wrote a booklet on that subject, almost 30 years ago. Then and now good design lowers maintenance costs.

Most of the improvements in design have been forced by players' demand for more pleasurable golf, and supts' demands for courses that can be economically maintained in spite of high labor costs.

The player eventually pays the piper and calls the tune. If he wants to play a round without losing a single ball, if he refuses to climb a steep grade, if he wants to shoot a 90 when his skill and ability is only half that of a scratch player, his demands will be recognized because he pays the bills.

There is a continual battle between course architects steeped in traditions of the game and the vast majority of players who, imbued with the American spirit of attempting the impossible, expect to come within measurable distance of Sam Snead's or Bobby Jones' ability.

The result is that a good course architect must compromise. He must weigh good against bad. When he finds an irresistible demand for some modification of design on the part of the golfing public he must make every effort to satisfy this demand without sacrificing those essentials of design which keep a competitive sport, in which each player reaps a reward — or penalty.

There have been many such modifications forced upon us and our skill in adapting course design to these demands is a measure of our skill as designers.

Thirty years ago the epitome of design was the "sporty" course. In spite of the reflection it might have on my age I think golfers must have been younger in those days! Certainly they were more willing to climb hills. A course without a ravine or

two, a couple of water holes and at least one "eye-of-the-needle" terror didn't get much of a rating.

Power Mowing Influences Design

Greens in those days were not merely "undulating" — they were ruggedly contoured. The advent of power green mowers changed the design of greens very quickly. Today's supt. rightly demands plenty of cup space, and greens that can be cut in any direction by power green mowers without scalping.

Tees in the old days were pretty small. After all, back in the '20s, a hundred players a day on a weekend were a crowd. Now some metropolitan clubs can expect to reach a peak of 300 or more rounds a day and supts. demand tees large enough to handle the traffic without undue wear.

A more recent demand is for parallel tees, one planted to Zoyia or Bermuda for summer play and one planted to cool-weather grasses for use during the rest of the year.

Old timers can remember when rough was rough, and was cut with a hay mower once a year. At best it was Hard or Sheeps fescue or native clump grasses. At worst, it was a mat of trodden-down hay or its aftermath. Certainly no one expected to get out of it with anything less than a mashie-niblic. And if you know what a mashie-niblic is you are an oldtimer.

Player demand for faster rounds, or unwillingness to hunt lost balls, or acceptance of a penalty for being off line, has changed the picture. Coupled with the topflight golfer's demand for low-cut fairways, we now often find a better lie in the rough than on the fairway. Elimination of the penalty, inherent in oldtime rough, accounts for much of today's low scoring but it is one player demand that cannot be, and is not, ignored. In major tournaments, the rough is usually allowed to grow up a few inches to hold down the long, wild drivers but no club can afford to maintain

such a condition for its members. What's more, they probably wouldn't hold still for it very long.

Many of the old "sporty" courses were as full of sand traps and rough mounds, as a dog is fleas. Most of them bothered nobody but the dog. Their presence could not always be blamed on the designer; many Green committee chairman have had a yen to add something of performance as a personal memorial. Today most reconstruction work consists of removing these duffer headaches.

Why Punish Duffers?

Modern trapping on a course is big and bold, designed to catch good players' bad shots only. Why not? The duffer pays the bills and why should he suffer a 110 when a 91 would make him happier?

This is not a plea for easier courses on which any duffer can shoot an 80. I do think, however, that players have a right to expect courses on which par is improbable, and 90 is fair going for the average member.

Recently the advent of the caddy cart and the electric "golf buggy" has been a factor in changing golf course design. Their use tends to concentrate traffic and cause wear and tear. Proper routing and parking of these vehicles must be considered. I think it quite possible that eventually we shall have to hard-surface off-fairway lanes for golf buggies on hilly holes and provide mandatory parking space for both carts and buggies between the green and the next tee. Certainly the wear and tear on greens and aprons caused by caddy carts can't be tolerated much longer. This is a striking example of player demand creating a problem to which superintendents demand a solution.

These are just a few highlights on the whole problem of designing golf courses as much as possible in the tradition of the Royal and Ancient game and still making them adaptable for the present day need of golf for the millions.

Par 3 Course Gets Former Golfers

Bernie Marzonic, gen. mgr., Arroyo Seco 18-hole par 3 course at South Pasadena, Calif., says it's amazing how many customers of the course are people who used to play golf but for various reasons gave it up. Lots of beginners are playing the par 3 course, too. Marzonic says the unique problems of maintenance under heavy play call for special procedure which superintendent Bob Jones has devised.

Pro Confronted by Economic Problems

The club official or member who has even a dim idea of how pro department operating costs have increased in the past two years is a very rare person.

Inquiries by GOLFDOM show figures indicating that pro shop expenses in 1956 were from 15 to 20 percent higher than in 1954. The increase has been higher than those of course and clubhouse operations over a like period.

What makes the situation tough for the pro is that the cost of labor has been rising at a time when there is less opportunity to have the customer share the increased expense.

Club-cleaning boys now get more than pros were paid as salary at many clubs ten years ago. Good assistants are hard to get and keep. The hours are long. The pay, while high considering pro department revenue, doesn't compare favorably with other businesses which have insurance, paid vacations, sick leave and other benefits not offered in professional golf work.

Pros state that the majority of youngsters looking for jobs as assistants want to play golf rather than work at it.

Club Fitting—All Important

The older professional whose bench clubmaking experience was a valuable part of his training has to teach his assistants what clubmaking taught him about club fitting.

Clubs are definitely better made in the leading factories than they were made at benches. But progress in manufacture is offset by diminished capacity for using the important fitting factor in the pro's effort to command strong club business. Pros made their club business great by knowing how to expertly fit the right clubs to the player's physique, swing, temperament and general type of game. They should look to protecting this advantage.

More attention and study should be devoted to the relationship between the lesson and practice tee and proper fitting of clubs.

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