



# A Lesson From Linksland

## Let's allow the architects to do what they should

By Mark Leslie

**T**he story goes that when God spoke the world into existence and separated land from sea, He stretched out His hand upon the

British Isles to create linksland — with golf in mind. Thousands of years later, man fulfilled his destiny in that fine game. But like Eve with the apple, he's about to mess things up again.

Author Will Durant once told posterity: "One of the lessons of history is that nothing is often a good thing to do and always a clever thing to say." Risking the latter part of that statement to emphasize the former, I plunge on because some things are worth the danger — like golf.

You see, history and golf are inextricably woven together — at least for the last 400 years — yet today we are allowing the game we love to devolve. We are ignoring the axiom, "Nothing is often a good thing to do."

Are we are forgetting our roots by de-

manding lush-green, turf-only, no-weeds-allowed, wall-to-wall watered courses with hold-the-ball greens that are glass fast? And will these demands kill the game? Probably not. But we will lose sight of its origins, its intentions and the way it was meant to be played.

"A good walk spoiled"? Poppycock! Better, a good hike enhanced. Let's allow the course architects to do what they want.

I traveled Northern Ireland and Ireland with 70 of them this spring and wondered: Did they get it? After a week of playing the island's best linksland tracks, would architects return home with the aura of Ireland coursing through their veins and into their designs? But they told me the question is not if they get it, but does the American golfer get it.

Americans, they agree, are spoiled. "And [that] has major ramifications for our game and to future development of courses," says California-based architect Damien Pascuzzo. "As they continue to demand perfect conditions, the cost of developing golf will increase, its affordabil-

ity will decrease, and we will lose players. We clearly have to build simpler courses."

"If you hit the ball 30 feet off center, everybody thinks you're supposed to have a good lie and a good shot," says Georgia-based architect Bob Cupp. "That's not what it's all about. We can simplify our lives a lot if everybody could experience [Ireland]."

I have a challenge for golfer and architect alike:

- To the architect: Hey, you think it's the best for golf? Then don't be bullied. Do it!

- To the golfer: Suck it up and play the ball where it lies!

Imagine you're a bricklayer and the boss tells you to mix the mortar without water. Or you're a landscape artist and someone steals your blue paint. What do you do?

Similarly, American golfers have stripped designers of a major tool of their craft: freedom. Freedom to be fun and quirky. Freedom to place bunkers in other than orderly places. Freedom to create green complexes and undulations that roll off into the bunkers or low swales.

We golfers have stifled designers' creativity and deadened their work. Therefore, we've lost for ourselves the opportunity to play golf in America as it's played on the links courses of the British Isles.

All of this, of course, would meet heaviest resistance from superintendents — the very ones it should help the most — because they would fear for their jobs. Nightmares ring in their minds with crowds wailing: "He has wildflowers on his fairways. Off with his head!"

A majority of superintendents would agree to would work in the sparse, links-like environments of their U.K. counterparts — if the courses down the street would do the same. If only someone prominent would make the model.

Nevertheless, here is my warning: History connects the dead to the living and the yet to be born. Forget that history in golf, and you lose its essence. ■

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