

I'm not sure where it comes from. Maybe it's Biblical. Maybe it's Shakespearean. But we've all heard golfers cite the following quotation — "Every hole must be a thing unto itself" — without ever bothering to ask themselves why it must be so.

For years, golfers have labored under the belief that to have a respectable design, each hole must be by itself. Each hole must also be free of views of other golfers, even if it means lining the rear of a green with a straight row of spruces. What hogwash.

Still, the quotation gets repeated. So if it's not classical in origin, where did this mentality come from? Well, we can blame George Crump, who once said that one of the reasons for building Pine Valley was his desire to keep every hole free of view of any other.

Of course, that oversimplification of his philosophy blatantly ignores the fact that Crump cut down, at great expense, every tree on the property before construction. Nor does it account for the fact that he didn't replant trees to block off every hole.

But through some bizarre foray into myth-making that has turned legend into unquestioned truth, it has become fact that the world's No. 1 course is so because each hole is by itself. Unfortunately, that's the least interesting aspect of its magnificent design.

Ironically, the same golfers who want to plant trees excessively or who fight to keep the most offensive ones around, are the same golfers who sit in the locker room playing cards, oblivious to when 80-year-old Mr. Havercamp and his shriveled body walk around naked.

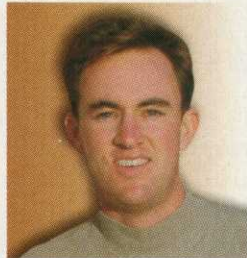
The sight of old men who bare all apparently does not offend the golfer. But the world nears its end when the same member can see Buffy Dalrymple on the eighth fairway while said member putts out on the fourth green.

For the most part, the "every hole unto itself" virus has been a fetish with golfers, though we all know of a select group of architects who have revolved master plans around the concept. You read their report and it's obsessed with closing every conceivable tree gap to satisfy the illness.

Recent activities at golf courses through-

Trees Distort Clear View of Game

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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out America suggest that some golfers are reluctantly moving away from this obsession, however.

Thanks to the educational efforts of superintendents and architects, golfers are beginning to understand that it's not a good enough reason to plant trees to be used just as framing pieces or as a preventative measure from seeing other golfers.

Let's not minimize the damage that the obsession has already done. It comes after too many greens have died, too many superintendents have been fired and too many architects slaughtered for daring to suggest the removal of problematic or unattractive trees. But there is progress being made.

Some courses are still headed in the wrong direction by planting unnecessary trees instead of removing them. But most others are finally allowing superintendents to take down the nursery of willows that border the rear of the green. Fairways are returning to areas previously covered by trees.

Holes are no longer things unto themselves, and the game is not only surviving, it's improving when the trees are removed. Other mature trees, previously out of view, are now being appreciated. Turf is allowed to grow again. Golf can actually be played as it was meant to be.

Best of all, golfers are learning that the sun will rise in the East and set in the West even if you remove a few trees.

Now, if we could just get golfers to be as outraged about old and decrepit naked men strolling around the locker room as they are when trees are removed, we'd really be making progress.

Geoff Shackelford will be signing his new book, "Alister MacKenzie's Cypress Point Club," at the GCSAA convention in Dallas. He can be reached at geoffshackelford@aol.com.