

## X Hole an Xcellent Idea



SHARON GC

**Superintendent builds spare hole to play when there's work to be done**

BY MARK LESLIE

### Problem

How to take a hole out of play, work on it and still have 18 regulation holes.

### Solution

Build an extra (or X) hole.

**H**igh-flying skaters and death-defying skyriders have the X games. Football has the XFL (for the time being). Now golf has the X hole.

"X stands for extra," says Frank Dobie, superintendent and general manager of Sharon GC in Sharon Center, Ohio, where last September he opened the X hole to play. "We can now close down any hole to work on it and still have 18 holes in play."

This is not a new idea and has been done elsewhere.

"It's something that should be considered when

designing a new course or if there's space on an existing course," Dobie says. "In today's society, no one wants to wait or be inconvenienced, especially club members.

"Players will grumble if they lose a green to play for a day," Dobie notes. "They are really unhappy if it's several weeks while work is being done on a hole. If a green needs to be rebuilt [completely], then the time out of play is unacceptable. Temporary greens cut in the fairway are just not acceptable either."

### Problem

The idea for the X hole

**A five-acre plot of land adjacent to the 10th green and 11th tee proved to be the perfect site for the extra hole.**

came to Dobie when there was a drainage problem with the seventh green, he says.

"Getting a backhoe and workers in there during play was a nightmare, so we postponed the work until we closed in November," he says. "The weather window here is very short. We got it done, but it is an inefficient and frustrating way to work on a green."

Because he had other greens that needed work,

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## Real-Life Solutions

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Dobie knew he needed another solution.

### Solution

A spare hole seemed like the best alternative. It happened that a five-acre plot on the northwest corner of the property adjacent to the 10th green and 11th tee was a perfect setting to insert a short par 3.

Coincidentally, the Ohio State Department of Dams told Dobie that a dam on the property should be elevated by 4 feet to meet new water-containment standards.

"In order to do that, we had to have a dense clay, and the only source on the property for this was the same five-acre section," Dobie says.

You could call this the "Perfect Dig." It provided clay for the dam and a 1.3-acre pond for the new par 3, plus the necessary fill dirt for the green and tees.

"We married the two projects and it worked well," Dobie says, adding that he built an alternate 11th tee so that people playing the new X hole could proceed onto the 11th hole. Returning to the original 11th tee would have meant backtracking against following players from the X hole tee. The alternate 11th tee is situated so the hole plays the same distance as from the original tee.

Dobie designed the new hole to be low-maintenance — a par 3 with no fairway to mow and a predomi-



nately fescue rough. "We do have three pot bunkers on that hole, but all the slopes can be mowed with a triplex and the bunkers are large enough to accommodate a power rake," he says.

Dobie says the entire project cost about \$80,000. He hired a local contractor in the fall of 1998 to do the heavy earth moving, so the X hole had the winter to settle. In the summer of

1999, Dobie's staff did the final grading, shaped the bunkers and installed irrigation and drainage.

The USGA-style green was built next, and last June the green was seeded with A-4 bentgrass. The tees were seeded with Penncross bent.

What is Dobie's outlook on the project?

"We accomplished a major project with the dam

**(Above) The green complex features three bunkers and a USGA-style green. (Bottom) The near-finished hole at a glance. The entire project cost about \$80,000.**

work that was required and added a unique feature that will serve us in the future," he says. "The X hole is like a spare tire. You hope you never need it, but if you do, it saves a lot of grief." ■