

Dueling Hurdzans in Colorado

Despite skepticism, developers say similar courses can co-exist in the same market

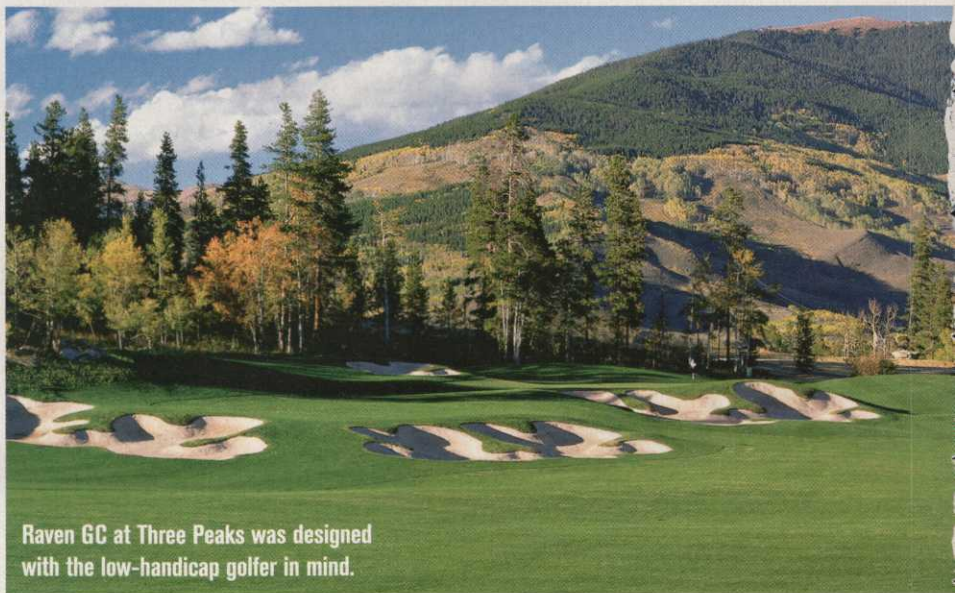
BY PETER BLAIS

Since the number of new courses is growing at a faster rate than the number of new golfers, developers shouldn't oversaturate markets with similar courses.

This wisdom received a boost from the "Trends in the Golf Industry: 1986-1999" report from the National Golf Foundation: "In the short term, particularly in specific local markets, oversaturation may already be a reality or may be a legitimate possibility. Over the next several years, development success will come to those who find the appropriate market niches by building golf courses to well-identified segments of the market."

But the operators of two new courses in Colorado have defied the NGF's findings.

Vail Resorts-operated The River Course at Keystone Resort opened for public play in June 2000. Three months later, golfers teed it up less than



Raven GC at Three Peaks was designed with the low-handicap golfer in mind.

10 miles down the road at Intrawest-owned Raven GC at Three Peaks. The Columbus, Ohio-based design team of Michael Hurdzan and Dana Fry designed both semi-private layouts.

Both courses provide expansive mountain vistas, \$12-million price tags and mid-summer green fees in the \$140 range. Despite their similarities,

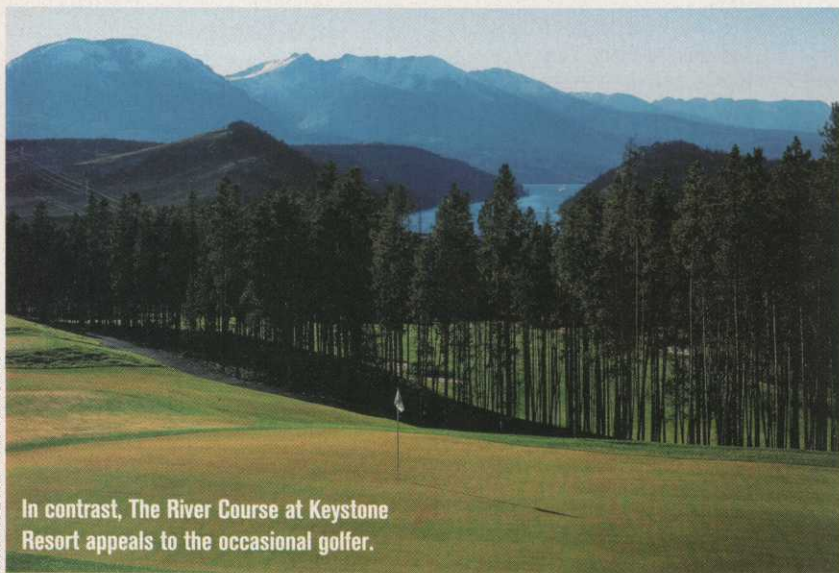
Vail Resorts and Intrawest predict both courses will succeed because the courses target different audiences.

Stretching to not quite 6,900 yards from the back tees, the shorter River Course at Keystone challenges low-handicappers. But it's designed primarily for the resort, conference guest and mid-level public player who may only play a handful of times per year, says Steve Corneillier, Keystone director of golf courses.

The Raven GC at Three Peaks, on the other hand, is roughly 700 yards longer than The River Course, stretching to almost 7,600 yards from the back tees. While high-handicappers can experience enjoyable rounds from the right tees, The Raven is primarily built with better golfers in mind.

"We offer low-handicappers a real challenge," says Steve Adelson, Intrawest's vice president of development and fee management. "Our goal is to be the must-play facility in the area."

If Coloradans didn't know about Hurdzan-Fry a couple years ago, they



In contrast, The River Course at Keystone Resort appeals to the occasional golfer.

COURTESY OF VAIL RESORTS

JOHN AND JEANNINE HENEBRY

certainly do now. The River Course and The Raven at Three Peaks bring to three the number of courses the team has designed in the state since 1998. "Not only is Hurdzan-Fry rated as one of the top design firms in the country, but the firm is also known for environmentally sensitive designs," Corneillier says.

Corneillier insisted the course's design incorporate Keystone's hiking, biking, fishing and kayaking facilities, as well as native plant species such as sagebrush, native grasses and wildflowers. "We want people to walk off the 18th hole saying, 'Now this is a Colorado course,'" he says.

Intrawest, on the other hand, consciously imitated the old courses from the East. Specifically, the company asked Fry to craft a number of Alister MacKenzie-style bunkers, similar to those found at The Country Club at Brookline (Mass.). "There's nothing like that around here," says Randy Kish, marketing director at The Raven at Three Peaks.

"The bunkers are Old World, MacKenzie bunkers we copied out of Robert Hunter's book *The Links*," Adelson says. "We wanted a rough and rugged bunker to complement a rough and rugged site."

The \$12-million price tag at both courses might shock many people, Hurdzan admits. While Hurdzan says he would love to see green fees closer to \$40 rather than \$140, he understands construction costs render the wish impossible. "The economic reality is that when you spend that much to build a golf course, you have to charge those types of rates to get back your investment," Hurdzan says.

Hurdzan says the proximity of the courses establish Colorado's Summit County as a golf destination, opening the door for someone to build a lower-cost course with appropriate green fees.

"The pent-up demand in that marketplace is huge," Adelson says. "The municipal course in nearby Breckenridge fills up four days in advance,

which is the earliest you can make a tee time. By 10 a.m., both courses at Keystone are extremely busy."

Adelson adds that the developers knew the risk in having both courses designed by the same architect, but it was a risk they were willing to take.

"It's not a hindrance, but an opportunity," Adelson says. "Some golfers

love to play certain architects' golf courses. When people come up to Summit County, they will have the chance to play The Raven, the chance to play The River Course at Keystone, and then decide which they like best." ■

Blais is a free-lance writer from North Yarmouth, Maine.



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