

There are so many new design terms that mean so little, and they keep rearing their ugly heads at courses throughout the land. A modern classic is the notion of giving a golf course “strength.” The Augusta folks loved falling back on this one in 2002 to justify the boring mess they created.

Strength sounds so manly, so masculine and so tough. It’s a touch of NASCAR in Augusta. But what *does* it mean to give a golf course strength? Is “strength” actually length? And if it is, wouldn’t you just say, “We gave the course length?”

I vote for “strength” masquerading as a subtle way of saying, “We really aren’t sure what we’re doing. But we do know we don’t like to see some rich, talented, young stud hitting a 330-yard drive under extreme pressure and making a heroic birdie in front of millions. So we’re going to strengthen our resolve, protect our egos and strengthen the odds against that happening again.”

Another favorite started by Hootie and his blowfish that has sadly spread down to other golf courses is another ego-based design concept — “We’re putting a premium on accuracy.” It sounds so noble, so wise and so proper. But it’s really only an excuse for tightening fairways, shrinking greens and generally making players hit shots where the committee wants them to go so that scoring doesn’t get out of hand.

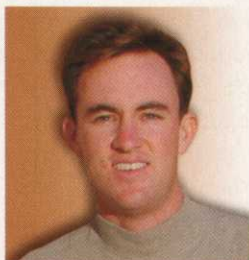
Sound a bit controlling? It is because there’s a big difference between putting a premium on accuracy and what they’re really doing, which is putting a premium on straightness. *Anyone* can make a golf course difficult by determining a center line of play and forcing players to follow it.

What is tricky and rare in modern golf is the notion of genuinely putting a premium on accurate *and* well-thought-out shots. But the evaluation of any golf course setup these days, whether it’s a major championship site or the club member/guest, is sadly based on numbers. The premium has bypassed straightness or accuracy and jumped right to scoring.

After all, if a player is accurate, wouldn’t he be able to break par and then some on a well-designed course? Nope. High scores are the sign of a successful setup.

Putting a Premium On Shallowness

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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Confusing isn’t it? Actually, it’s shallow and lame more than anything else.

Throw into this mix the rapid changes in technology, the unbelievable improvements in turf consistency on tournament courses and the battle to put a premium on scoring, and it just gets goofier by the day. People are better at the game, and they have instruments that make them score better. Courses are so well-maintained that bad breaks are minimal.

Yet fairways keep shrinking on many courses, tees keep going back and, like robots, young golfers are learning to hit their balls long and straight, chase them, and hit them long and straight again. Not only is that boring to watch, it’s boring to play. When it seeps down to everyday courses, it makes golfers want to become bowlers.

A genuine premium on accuracy means a course asks golfers to maneuver their way around in a various ways, placing their shots on the left side for a good view of the back-right hole location. Genuine accuracy is “tested” (another dreaded modern day buzz word) by asking players to tackle a par 3 at 220 yards one day, and then making them play it from a 158 yards the next day — with a different pin position.

But that kind of flexibility and potential vulnerability in a course might put a premium on creativity. It would also put a premium on humility because, after all, someone might score well and the people in charge would have to deal with the awful humiliation of a low score.

But in the big scheme of life, someone who posts a good score is not committing a crime against humanity. In fact, it’s a great accomplishment. A good score puts a premium on fun, excitement and talent — premiums that in modern golf seem tough for way too many folks to deal with.

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