

In the sport formerly known as golf, players were encouraged to approach greens by using any means necessary. They could loft iron shots high into the air. Or they might decide the wind was too unpredictable an opt to use the earth's surface to advance toward the green.

Or they might use a combination of both techniques: approach the putting surface most of the way through the air, and then let the ground short of the green take over.

Some genius in Scotland figured out that the options provided by short grass in front and around greens made the sport more interesting. So to accommodate this democratic version of the sport, greens now traditionally connect to the fairways whenever possible. An "approach" is cared for in the area immediately fronting the playing surface and sometimes all around the green.

Unfortunately, things like freedom, options and interest are annoyances in today's golf.

Maybe it's because such principles could spark a creative thought or allow — heaven forbid — a lesser player to occasionally beat a better player with a shred of ingenuity. Or luck.

The golfer who's against approaches believes that every shot should be a high-lofted masterpiece that lands softly and spins back three feet. That ground game stuff is for sissies, he says. Sometimes you wonder if these types would erect a wall around every green if handed brick and mortar.

There are a few golfers who still demand that the approach remain relevant. They recognize that firm short grass leads to more interesting possibilities.

So let's say you want your course to have good old-fashioned approaches in the true spirit of the game. Can such a concept be sold to a golfing public that listens to the likes of Peter Kostis for information on how the game should be played?

Well, if you should be so bold to suggest wider, firmer approach areas around greens, your campaign requires that you pander to special-interest groups (well, let's be honest, self-interest groups).

Here's how to tailor the argument to good golfers (and the growing legion that believes they play the game well): approaches and

Approach Should Remain Relevant

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short grass around greens will reward your beautifully controlled approach shots. Why? Because those drop-kicks and other misses that bad golfers get away with will now roll away from greens protected by firm, short turf. Those hacks will be penalized for their inferiority. Praise our golfing lord.

Now here's how you make a case to the skill-challenged golfer who is against tightly mown grass in the vicinity of greens.

Yes, we know you like a little rough to slow down your topped seven-woods from 120 yards out. However, consider this: Good players don't like approaches because they start to consider options. That means they have to think about multiple possibilities while you just casually pull-slap your ball to the hole, then pull out your putter when you inevitably miss the green.

When good players are faced with options when hitting into a green and chip-shot decisions — say between a sand wedge or seven-iron — you have them thinking. Getting their little brains working will often lead to bad play. Advantage to you, Mr. Hack.

Adding approaches or improving their playing quality makes golf more interesting by multiplying dimensions and adding layers to a golf course. But sadly, increased interest and fun typically lose out to many golfers' vain obsessions with slope and course ratings. They think more short grass equals easier golf, and then their precious little handicaps won't travel well.

Over time, however, more short grass around the greens makes a course more difficult in a cerebral way, not a penal way. There's a big difference.

However, most golfers won't understand the distinction. But it won't be the first time that has happened.

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