

Off The Fringe

Morrish Will Call It Quits

ARCHITECT, TIRED OF TECHNOLOGY RUINING THE GAME, HAS HAD ENOUGH. THAT'S UNDERSTANDABLE **A Commentary by Anthony Pioppi**

Jay Morrish has had enough. After 40 years in the golf course design business and more than 100 courses to his credit, he's getting out at the end of the year — and not because he wants to.

"I've had all the fun I can stand," he says, the sarcasm oozing through the phone lines all the way from Texas to Connecticut. "It's a mess. It really is. I'm disgusted with it."

What's taken the fun out of work for Morrish, 67, is the length the golf ball is flying these days, not just off the clubs of pros, but all golfers who regularly



Jay Morrish

hit it more than 300 yards.

Morrish isn't some hack who has been stamping out mundane work in his more than 40-year career. He is an accomplished designer with such well-regarded layouts to his credit as The Stone Canyon Club in Oro Valley, Ariz., and two he drew up with Tom Weiskopf, The Rim in Payson, Ariz., and Double Eagle Golf Club in Galena, Ohio. The pair also created Loch Lomond in Scotland, the first American architects ever to build there. Morrish also partnered with Jack Nicklaus from 1973 to 1983.

The quick and best and correct answer to Morrish's dilemma is for the

USGA to push back the golf ball. You know it. Morrish knows it, and the USGA surely knows it.

"It would be so simple to slow down the golf ball," Morrish says. "Let them keep playing with their clubs that look like they have mailboxes tied onto them."

No chance.

Morrish is concerned that the classic courses are being put out to pasture by technology. He seethes at the Titleist ads that mock architects and their desire to preserve those designs.

Somewhere Wally Uihlein is chuckling. Like the chairman and CEO of Acushnet, Titleist's parent company, cares what Morrish thinks.

"We're all in this together. I hope the tour will decide this is not good for the game," Morrish says, but knows better.

He tells a story of watching Phil Mickelson on television as he recalled his round: driver, nine-iron; driver, wedge;

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three-wood, nine-iron. No long-iron approaches. All short clubs. Ridiculous.

"The only hope is if people get bored watching it on TV," Morrish says.

As a result of the "advancements," Morrish has thrown his hands up in the air. He is at a loss on how to design in a way to defend against the long hitters without building 7,700-yard layouts.

How awful for someone so talented to realize the skill and artistry that made him such a sought-after architect is now somehow out of date and irrelevant.

The simplest of tasks have become impossible to achieve for him, like an accomplished guitarist not knowing where to place his fingers to play a basic chord. "I don't have a clue on where to put a fairway bunker," Morrish says.

Sad.

Morrish says he has one way to at least make a stand against length, and that is building six par 3s into every

layout (course owners who want a traditional par-72 layout scoff as his idea), which allows him to exert control to some extent. He did it years ago at a course in Flagstaff, Ariz., called Forest Highlands Golf Club to combat the length golf balls fly because of the elevation.

Given his druthers, Morrish would design one-shotters beginning at about 250 yards and working their way down in increments of 15 yards or so.

"I can at least make you hit six different clubs during a round of golf," he said. "The test use to be you had to hit 14 clubs during a round. Not any more."

The other accomplishment of six par 3s is that it allows for players of different levels to be using the same club into greens. A midhandicapper playing from the middle tees could be using the same club as a lower handicapper at the back tee markers.

Morrish has some business left before

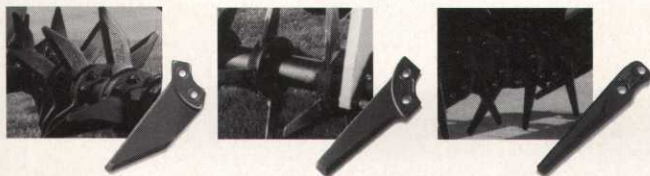
he goes. There are three courses in the works with his name on them. They will be his last. His partner, son Carter, will carry on what will then be a one-man business after his father departs.

Morrish intends to travel when he retires. Yeah, he knows that sounds crazy — someone who has spent the better part of 40 years on the road, wanting to travel. But now, he says, he is going to travel how and where he wants.

Driving through rural West Texas is high on his list, as is visiting New England to see the leaves in the fall. If he heads up this way, where I live, I hope we can get together and visit some of the classic courses.

Maybe we'll stop into the Titleist headquarters so Uihlein can look us in the eye and tell us technology isn't ruining the game. Maybe Morrish and I will look him in the eye and tell him he's a liar.

Pioppi is a contributing editor for Golfdom.



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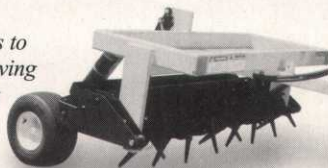
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