

**W**ill 2005 be the year we actually see the golf course industry fight back and stick up for itself? Showing unusual — even

unprecedented — bravery in an industry increasingly unwilling to think outside the box, the National Golf Course Owners Association has issued a thoughtful and informative “Technology Position Statement.”

The NGCOA pointed out that not only is this pointless quest for another extra 10 yards via \$500 drivers and \$5 balls bad for the golf economy, it's costly for anyone who owns a golf course.

“Increased golf ball distance results in errant shots missing their intended target by greater distances than before,” the position paper said. “New golf courses are required to be built with more land in order to accommodate the need for larger safety buffers to either side of the preferred line of play. The effect has been that golf courses take up more land, with subsequent increases in land acquisition, construction and maintenance costs.”

OK, fine. You've heard that before. It gets better.

“In most cases the older courses are faced with a concern due to their inability to expand the safety buffers required with the longer-hitting golf equipment. Owners and operators of older courses are burdened with increased liability costs as a result.”

Getting warmer, aren't we? And now, the piece d' resistance.

“Off-line shots, due to the greater dispersion that is generated by increased distance, also contribute to slow play. Additionally, greater hitting distances subject longer hitters to increased waiting periods between many shots, further impacting the pace of play. The result is diminished enjoyment of the game and increased cost of play.”

Not to quibble with the NGCOA — because, after all, it is going out on a limb here — but the organization's new release also says that it's joining the USGA, PGA Tour, R&A and American Society of Golf Course Architects in their concerns over distance.

Exempting the ASGCA, which has been

## Owners Speak Up. Who's Next?

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



THE NGCOA SEEMS  
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the lone consistent voice on the distance matter, the other three organizations are only concerned about saving face and padding their swollen trusts. The actual everyday golfer, industry worker or course operator are of little interest to these organizations.

With more than one-third of all courses holding memberships in the NGCOA, it's only a matter of time before other organizations jump on the proverbial bandwagon and demand that the focus return to fun, affordable golf over expensive equipment.

Ironically, all we need now is the actual product to set us free. That comes in the form of a competition ball, or Tour ball or classic course ball or whatever it will be called. All of the manufacturers have developed one for their doomsday scenario when the sport finally can't afford itself anymore. The working theory goes like this: Tour players and other fine golfers would use this ball. In theory, the everyday golfer who thinks he's better than he really is will also use this ball.

The rest who crave nothing more in life than an extra 10 yards will need some incentive to lose the 10 yards that cost them upwards of \$1,000 to attain.

How about a discount on green fees for those who play the competition ball? Or offering the cost price on these balls? Or preferential early tee times to golfers willing to play their home courses as they were intended — and more likely at a faster pace because they spend less time waiting for a fairway to clear?

Either way, the NGCOA seems willing to do something to ensure golf's place in the hearts and minds of sports enthusiasts across the country. Who will step up next?

Callaway? Titleist? Nike? Hootie Johnson and his Green-coated band? 2005 may just tell.

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