

A number of golf courses hosting mini-tour stops, college tournaments and Monday qualifiers are using these events to showcase their layouts.

Golf facilities stand to be rewarded by good word of mouth from scratch golfers, and it's satisfying to give back to the game by hosting a successful event. However, all too often lately, tournament officials, course owners, green chairmen, head pros and, dare I say, superintendents use these events to humiliate the players.

An alarming number of these low-profile events are turning into mini-Carnoustie fiascos. Usually someone decides to "protect the integrity" of their course with a setup that puts these young technology-benefiting flatbellies in their place.

Now, there is some fleeting pleasure that can be derived from watching great players struggle at your course. And there are some fine golfers who will admire your facility for its excessive difficulty.

Or at least that's what they'll say to your face.

But too many of these events are turning into slow-play fiascos, where golfers end up hating your layout, vowing to tell all of their friends about the silly setup and, in general, to tell the world how loony the architect must have been for not thinking of what would happen with the 4-inch rough, high winds and slick greens.

When these little fiascos occur, the point of hosting an event is negated. Bad buzz is deserved. And nobody seems to ask: What did we gain from pushing things over the top?

There is a big difference between a difficult setup that makes the players earn their pars and birdies, and one that merely becomes a miserable survival test.

Narrowed fairways surrounded by high rough and accented by silly green speeds will produce high scores. But if you want to do your course justice and send the players away feeling humbled but respectful, make them think.

Start with less rough (flier lies, baby!) and emphasize firm conditions, weather permitting.

Instead of burying the cup one pace from the collar, try using some alternate tees and unexpected hole locations.

Golf Shouldn't Be 'Survivor' Episode

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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Say you have a super long par three. In round one, play the back of the back tee to a nice middle-green cup placement. In round two, move to the most-forward tee possible and tuck the hole location.

Having to adapt to radical yardage differences tends to annoy most of the field, but the superior player will adapt and embrace the challenge.

After the round, those who complained about the surprise tee location will realize that they still had enough information at their disposal to adequately play the surprise shot.

Also, there's a setup rule of thumb that our governing bodies used to live by. It can still work for you (and them): six tough hole locations, six moderate ones and six easy placements.

Why this common-sense approach disappeared from the game, I have no idea.

Within that framework, you can have a lot of fun throwing surprises at the players. And in preparing, don't forget wind and how it could impact play under heightened setup conditions.

Instead of looking at these events as opportunities to harvest rough, use them as an opportunity to install a few short grass chipping areas around greens. Good players don't like these short grass areas because they take the ball further away from the hole and they generate options. Those pesky options lead to thinking. Thinking leads to uncertainty, and that leads to poorly executed shots.

The goal should be to make these players work and send them home feeling like the course required sound judgment and rewarded exceptional play. This will leave everyone feeling good about the event. Which is the point, isn't it?

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