

**A** well-regarded American golf course recently lost much of its finishing par-5 hole to the ocean. Mother Nature left behind just enough room to play a one-shot hole, therefore cutting the course par to 70 from 72.

Scouring the Internet soon after learning of this unfortunate, uh, sea change, I found a local news piece complete with the video report that aired the night before. In it, the local reporter dutifully questioned the head professional about this sad twist and what it meant for the future of the course.

His response?

Many of our finest courses are played at par 70, including the U.S. Open every year where the United States Golf Association lowers par to eliminate red numbers, effectively compensating for other areas where they are lacking.

OK, he didn't say that last part. But, yes, the entire interview revolved around the new par 70 and how that was not a negative. It was noted that 70 is alright for our national championship and in other parts of America, so it'll be fine here, too.

Mind you, they just lost a hole to the sea — one of two holes that played along the ocean. Yet the spin is not that the other 17 holes are just as wonderful as before.

No, it was all about par.

Initially, you might think, wow, how absurd. But we live in an idiocracy after all, and it would not surprise me if the course in question had already heard from golfers leery of tainting their self-importance by cow-towing to a measly par 70, as opposed to the holier than-thou par 72.

Most of you reading this have been nodding your head and asking, "What's the big deal? We've listened to this ridiculous argument almost daily at our home course. Yes, golfers are irrational. Move on!"

Unfortunately, if you haven't had to sit through one of those painful debates over the merits of par 72 versus 70, you better prepare yourself.

The short par 5 is all but dead thanks to the modern ball conspiring with land-locked

## Par 70 Isn't Exactly Chopped Liver

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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courses. The only way to restore dignity is not through added rough or more bunkering, but by lowering the par on the shortest of the reachable fives.

I used to subscribe to the belief that this was an absurd abdication in the name of protecting ball manufacturers and cowardly governing body types who seem to think their job is to protect the business interests of only one portion of the golf industry.

Well, I still feel that way. But there are rare examples of par switches that actually improved a design. Most notably is St. Andrews' Road hole, which became more interesting when it was reduced in the 1960s from a par 5 to a par 4.

This simple scorecard switch did not eliminate any options nor did it alter the second shot decision that had to be made for those hitting a decent tee shot. A case could even be made that the par reduction added a sense of urgency to the approach shot by making good players feel guilty for laying up.

Still, a lowering of par will not always be the right answer for vulnerable par 5s, but it sure beats the cost and likely headache involved in adding sand, water, hay and the other usual suspects.

Furthermore, should someone complain that the lowering of par will somehow "devalue" the course or embarrass them in front of friends and family, just remind them that Numero Uno in America, Pine Valley, is a par 70. So is Merion. And Shinnecock Hills. And Crystal Downs, and ... well you get the idea.

Thank you for letting me vent.

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