

**I**f we want to grow the game, the first-tee experience needs to be revisited.

No, not *that* First Tee.

I'm talking about the first tee where we all tee it up nervously, wondering who is watching and what wretched thing we're going to do in front of prying eyes.

No sane golfer enjoys the opening tee shot or experiences a nerve-free start to the day. But because many golf architects decided long ago that watching duffers line out to shortstop translates to fun viewing or some sort of rite-of-passage gut check, all too many first tees are placed next to the clubhouse or starters shack.

The operation side's ability to control the first tee — as if herds of golfers might sneak by — has placed too many opening tee shots where everyone can watch. However, this increases the noise from idle chatter or the inevitable beeping golf cars that help get your round off to a rip-roaring start.

While we've all admired the stories of golfers overcoming stage fright to strike an opening tee shot against the backdrop of clanking dishes and lunchtime chatter at Merion Golf Club or some other spot, there just isn't much fun in such a setup. That fine club's dining terrace abuts the tee, and the only thing worse than hearing the quiet chit-chat of diners is the silence that falls when they stop to watch you flail away at your opening shot.

Equally nerve-wracking is the tee shot made more complicated because of increased nervousness associated with teeing off from high above at a Riviera Country Club or Bethpage Black. Both typically include an audience, though it is not always one attentive to the need for silence.

The most widely revered opening tees are small, elevated and would have been placed in the main dining room if they could grow grass indoors. While that desire may make them function friendly and dramatic, such intimacy can often prove just a bit too quaint.

That's why the ideal starting box is set slightly away from the commotion. Oh, it's still in view of the starter and clubhouse, and hopefully not far from the warm-up area.

## What to Do About the First Tee?

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



HOW ABOUT  
PLACING THE  
STARTING BOX  
SLIGHTLY AWAY  
FROM ALL OF THE  
COMMOTION

Sometimes the tee is even part of the practice putting green. Even better, a small green is cut into the tee complex, allowing for a few final putts as you wait for your group to assemble. Sure, this encourages the occasional loser to hang around the tee, but in most cases it has the opposite effect — announcing that the first tee area is for golfers about to go out. And no one else.

Preferred is the subdued beginning found at Pine Valley Golf Club or Winged Foot Golf Club, where the ensuing architecture is anything but mellow. Those great places feature tees that rest low or flat to the surrounding ground and just a bit away from the clubhouse activity. Yet, they are never so far to rule out a quick run back to the locker room for a forgotten sweater.

The lower-profile opening tee shot is essential because it increases the likelihood of beginning a round with your dignity intact, since even the meekest of tee shots can be found and played.

Of course, you can't go spontaneously redesign your first tee now that you've read this brilliant column. However, do keep in mind the importance of a certain first-tee ambiance. Perhaps start by not parking golf cars so close to the tee and eliminating other forms of congestion and general loitering. While a wall of hedges looks ridiculous, some nice landscaping to buffer the tees from golf cars and gawkers will discourage some from hanging around.

Anything to improve the first-tee experience will be a boon for your course and the game.

---

*Golfdom* Contributing Editor Geoff Shackelford can be reached at [geoffshac@aol.com](mailto:geoffshac@aol.com).