



## An Architect's Opinion

# THE ART OF PUTTING GREEN DESIGN

By Bob Lohmann

No one part of a golf course has as much effect upon the golfer's score as the putting green. The ideal round would require 18 approach shots to the green and 36 putts on the green's putting surface. Over 75 percent of the strokes in an ideal round are decided on or in the approach to one of the smallest areas on the golf course. Rarely is an ideal round played, but even the average golfer who has a 17 handicap accumulates 55 to 60 percent of his score on or around the green area.

Putting greens and the adjacent area form the most important part of the golf course and are often the most costly items to construct and maintain. Because of their importance in both use and development of character, each dollar spent on them is well worth it. A. W. Tillinghast, famous American architect of Winged Foot and Baltusrol Golf Clubs, once said, "A controlled shot to a closely guarded green is the surest test of any man's golf." The quality of the putting greens are determined by design, construction, and maintenance.

***"A controlled shot to a closely guarded green is the surest test of any man's golf."***

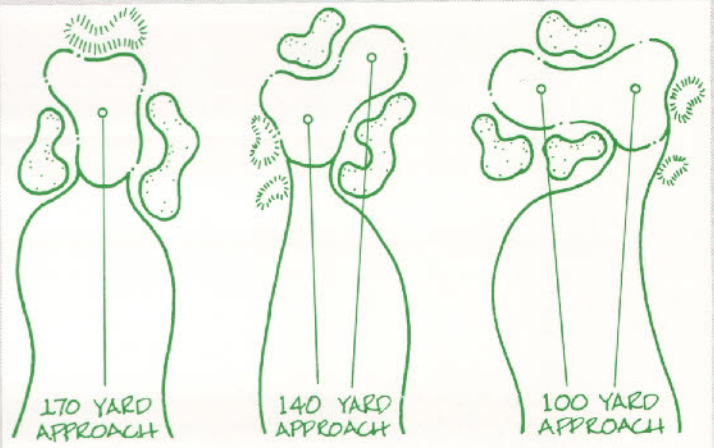
During the design phase, the putting green area is considered the most important part of the golf hole, the one target area every golfer is aiming for. Unlike the target areas in the fairway, the putting surface must be kept closely mowed, firm, and consistently smooth to provide the best possible putting surface. It is designed to fit the adjacent ground, but varies in size and contour relative to the length of the golf hole, position in the round, placement of adjoining hazards, and eye appeal as determined by the architect.

Assuming that the technology involved during construction is proper and consistent, as well as the maintenance of the putting green, the design will determine the appearance and playability of each individual putting green. The skill and imagination of the architect will set the groundwork for developing putting greens that are attractive, playable, and maintainable. Differing from the precisely engineered highway bridge, the drawings for putting greens are only guides, and the final touches need to be completed in the field by the architect during construction. Avoiding the architect's onsite inspection will cause the putting green to be somewhat different from that originally envisioned by the designer. The most obvious are the golf courses designed by famous architects who were seldom or never onsite during construction. These courses lack the character and quality of natural blending that were present on their masterpiece designs.

Two important items necessary for ease of

maintenance are good drainage, and the use of internal components that resist compaction. The superintendent, through maintenance procedures, can then determine the putting speed of a green regardless of its size, shape, or slope. Pin placement on fast, undulating greens can become out-of-hand if not carefully monitored. Because there are few relatively flat areas, the pin is sometimes unfairly placed on a slope. The superintendent, attempting to keep the putting surface in perfect condition, must use the sloped area in order to avoid excessive wear on the continually used flatter areas. Many older golf courses have small and sloping greens that, because of modern maintenance procedures, have become unfair for today's golfer.

As the amount of play increases, and smaller greens with limited pin placements receive heavy traffic concentrations, the options available are placing the pin on the slopes more often, wearing out the flatter areas because of excessive use, or enlarging the putting surface. When the green is enlarged or rebuilt, the architect's design should provide for multiple pin placements with at least one difficult area for tournament play. The shape, size, and angle of the putting surface is determined by the adjacent hazards and the approach shot that will be attempted.



Depending on the pin placement, the golfer aiming for the fat of the green assumes two putts will be needed to hole out, but if he plays for and successfully negotiates a shot at the pin, the reward is the possibility of needing just one putt.

Slopes on the putting surface vary from relatively flat for pin placements to undulating for character development. The undulating ground should be between and adjacent to the potential pin placement areas. This guards the pin placement area, demanding a controlled approach shot, while allowing for a challenging, but fair, putt. Placement of undula-

tions behind the putting surface improves visibility and helps hold shots from rolling off the back of the green.

The putting green should be contoured to accept and hold good golf shots while guiding water off the surface in multiple directions. A crowned putting surface provides good drainage, but will direct golf shots into adjacent hazards or off the back of the green.

The total green area should be built to blend with the adjacent terrain and the putting surface itself. Small mounds and grassy hollows develop

character that, along with the undulations on the putting surface, will demand accurate approach shots and will provide challenging chip and pitch shots for the golfer that misses the putting surface.

With all the numbers, charts, and specifications provided by different golf organizations, it is important to remember that putting green design is an art as much as a science and that the aims are still the same—to blend all the elements together to create a unique character, and to provide pleasure for each individual golfer.



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## **GCSAA Convention Site Some tips to help you survive your trip to D.C.**

By David Iyata  
Chicago Tribune

*Editor's Note: The following article, which appeared in the Chicago Tribune, comes your way from Bruce Williams, GCS of the Bob O'Link Golf Club. Williams, a 1984 WGCSA speaker, is editor of Chicagoland's Verdure newsletter.*

TIPS FOR NEWLY elected politicians [and other Washington visitors] on getting around the nation's capital:

• The nation's capital is a great

city for walking—in the daytime. At night the muggers, hookers and drug pushers come out. Some areas such as the central business district in the northwest quadrant are reasonably safe. Most other neighborhoods are not. When in doubt, take a cab. [Chicago's "sides," as in Northwest Side, are called "quadrants" in D.C.]

• If the muggers don't get you, the district fathers will. Every so often they crack down on jaywalkers, and the fines can be hefty.

• When walking around downtown Washington, take your bearings from the Washington Monument, which is on the Mall south of the central business

district and the White House. The giant white obelisk is the tallest structure in town; it towers over other buildings and is brilliantly lighted at night.

Another pedestrian landmark is the Capitol, also lighted, anchoring the eastern end of the Mall. Keep in mind that if you're walking toward Capitol Hill, you're heading away from downtown and into a rougher part of the city; so watch out.

• Don't drive if you can help it, and if you must, do what the cabbies do: Stick to the side streets. And lock the doors. [Never walk down a dark side street at night. Which means never get a flat tire on one, either.]