

## Par 7

By Jake Schneider, Assistant Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

From what I've been told, golf is supposed to be fun, and during approximately 15% of the 30ish annual rounds that I play, I would have to agree with the statement. During the other 85% of the time, my time is spent sulking over a wayward drive, a chunky approach shot, or, worse yet, surrendering 50 cents to a playing partner who didn't succumb to the same maladies. Yes, we play for some pretty high stakes, and no, I won't give you that one-foot putt that's for double bogey. If you read my last column, you hopefully have a better understanding for the pain that is associated with money leaving my possession. Regardless, our Monday golf outings are a highlight of the week, which means that I'm either a sucker for torture or that I might actually enjoy the silly, little game more than I care to admit.

Despite completely lacking any form of leverage due to my less-than-imposing stature, I'm able to put a pretty good charge into my shots, and I at least have potential to par every hole. More often than not, this potential goes unrealized, but that's already been established. Eventually, the time will come that my Mr. Universe-esque physique will diminish and my bag will be filled with 13 woods and a putter. When that time comes, 200-yard drives will cause for celebration. The fact of the matter is that there are a lot of golfers, and more importantly, potential golfers, out there who fall into this same category.

At this year's Golf Industry Show in Orlando, Judy Rankin, the 2010 Old Tom Morris Award winner, gave a tremendous talk, and at one point, she suggested that making par a reasonable number is one way to grow the game. In other words, if the vast majority of the players who use the forward tee on a 500-yard par five have absolutely no chance of achieving par, why can't this hole play as a par

seven from that tee? Quite frankly, despite the handicapping system, people like to get a true bogey or better; it sounds and feels better (in my completely unprofessional opinion). As a 15 handicap, I only like those score reductions when it results in a positive cash flow. Even then, it still kind of feels like cheating, but not to the extent that any refunds are offered.

And, while this whole "par seven" proposal may be a little far-fetched, unreasonable, and void of most major details, it's no secret that we, as greenkeepers, must do our best to help grow the game. Having reasonable pins, tee blocks set forward, and peripheries that don't swallow errant shots and result in 15-minute search parties are some of the standard ways to keep players moving and to make the game enjoyable for the average Joe and Jane.

Now, the challenge is to come up with innovative solutions and practices that will get more people interested in this great (and frustrating game). Within the past couple of years, junior tees were established on all 18 holes at Blackhawk. These "tees" are nothing more than metal disks that are located in the fairways, but they give a much more official feel for our future paying golfers. Innovative, may be not (I leave innovation to the Judy Rankin's of the world), but it's a simple touch that makes the holes much more reasonable for our youngest members. It makes sense to me that we should do as much as possible for those that fill the cash registers. However, getting worked up over losing paltry sums of money during mostly free golf rounds also makes sense in my disproportionately large melon, so take it with a grain of salt. Regardless, let's hope that 2011 is a year filled with growth and not just for turf.

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**Bayer Environmental Science**

**John M. Turner**  
**Sr. Sales Specialist - Golf**  
**Bayer Environmental Science**

**Cell Phone: (630) 215-6110**  
**Office: (630) 443-7807**  
**Fax: (630) 443-7839**  
**Email: john.turner@bayercropscience.com**