

Who In The World Put The Hole There!

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The Open had reached its most dramatic moment. As Jack Nicklaus crouched over an eight-foot putt on the 12th green at Pebble Beach, Arnold Palmer hunched over an eight-footer on the 14th. Nicklaus needed his putt for a bogey 4, Palmer needed his for a birdie 4, and if Arnold made and Jack missed, Palmer would lead the Open by a stroke.

Both tapped their putts at about the same instant, and both putts ran practically straight at the hole. As everyone with any interest in these things knows by now, Nicklaus holed and Palmer missed, and Jack won his third Open.

What some spectators found a bit unusual, or unexpected, was the paths of these putts. They had not expected them to run so straight. Their experience with other tournaments had conditioned them to expect holes to be cut in hillsides, behind bunkers or next to creeks, in places where only a lucky putt goes in or a lucky shot ends up in birdie range. They came prepared to condemn the man who put the hole there as some kind of a fiend.

They should not. He deserves not condemnation but pity. He is up before daylight, ready to start setting the holes as soon as light will permit. His early start expresses his concern that the players with the early starting times will have an equal opportunity with the late starters to see how the course is set up. He struggles with intense care to get it right. If he succeeds, he is blissfully ignored; if he fails, recognition is immediate, universal, bombastic and blasphemous.

I do not seek sympathy for these men. Theirs is a vital function. They can emasculate a great design, or they can accentuate its greatness. To assume such responsibility necessarily includes accepting its consequences. Like bad art, there is too much bad pin setting afflicting the championships to combine the art and the science of locating the holes so as to bring out all the qualities of the course on which they are played. Hopefully, the principles applied by the U.S.G.A. will be useful to others who squint into the rising sun hoping to find that small plot of good grass and terrain in the right part of the green for that day's play.

The first principle is to be fair. Never pick a placement that will not fully reward the properly struck shot played from the right position. The hole setter, therefore, must not only appreciate the design of the hole, but he must also weigh such factors as weather, wind direction, and firmness of the turf, and determine in advance how that particular hole will play on that particular day. He must have done some planning. In a four-day championship, for example, this means he must have analyzed the course and generally determined the four areas on each green providing hole locations appropriate for the particular tournament. He must then plan his practice round settings so that those areas will be preserved for tournament play.

He should set up a balanced course for each day's play. A common error is to set up the course to play progressively more difficult each day by using all the easiest pin placements on the first day and proceeding progressively to all of the most difficult settings on the last. This tends to distort the course, at least on the first and last days. In a four-day championship the U.S.G.A. will evaluate each of the four areas preplanned for each green, rating the most difficult as 1, the easiest 4 and assessing a 2 and a 3 for the intermediate areas. Each day's setting process involves planning to avoid something like an "18" course (i.e. 18 number 1 settings) on the one hand, or a "72" course (i.e. 18 number 4 settings) on the other. The optimum for each day would be a "45" course, and the effort each day is made to get as close to that number in the total course settings as conditions that day will allow. (continued on page 7)

There are other balance factors to be considered, such as avoiding too many left side, right side, front or rear settings sequentially.

After a particular area has been selected for a placement on a given green, care must be given to picking the right spot. Here too a number of factors should be weighed. The U.S.G.A. recommends at least 15 feet between the hole and green edge. Ideally, for a radius of 3 feet around the hole there should be no changes of slope. This does not mean that such area must be flat; it rather means that there should be no change in the angle of slope over the area. The angle of slope, too, is an important factor. There have been instances where holes have been set on slopes so severe that as the green dried out it would not hold a ball. One occurred in a recent regional amateur competition where one contestant 7-putted (!) a green and the tournament winner took 4 putts there.

The area around the hole should be as free as possible of ball marks, other blemishes and changes in grass texture. It is right around the hole where the ultimate action takes place; the particular spot should be selected with commensurate care. The location should "look" right. Care should be taken to avoid placements which, from the player's point of view, present a distorted picture. Golf is a visual game, and the ultimate vision is of the location of the hole.

To assess the player's point of view, the person setting the hole should bring along a putter (and, hopefully, a reasonably representative stroke) to roll the ball at the selected spot before the hole is cut to assure that it will, in fact, play properly.

Perhaps pity is not what the poor pin setter deserves. He experiences the quiet beauty of a superb golf course shimmering in the early morning light. And if he does his job properly he will have planned and worked and placed the hole so that it will add the final touch to the artistry of the course designer and of the shot-maker; so doing should be deeply satisfying.

Nutrient deficiencies, weeds, diseases, thin turf, insects.

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