

Golf Course Architects Look for Help To Defend Courses Against Technology

Golf Course Architects believe there should be "a line drawn in the sand soon" – at least for tournament golf – or technology could render some courses obsolete.

The Board of Governors of the American Society of Golf Course Architects stated that "it is difficult and sometimes impossible because of land restrictions for architects to design courses that will challenge top players using high-tech golf clubs and balls, and the challenge will grow even more difficult with each passing year. "It is not just an issue for new courses, but for every club that finds its best golf holes rendered defenseless by technology.

As modern golf becomes more of a power game, designers are finding it difficult to create holes that require good players to hit long irons onto the green. In the recent U. S. Open, for instance, players were hitting with two irons on a 490-yard hole – not the driver and long iron intended.

In 1994, the ASGCA issued its original warning on the subject. At that time the Society distributed the White Paper that pointed out that the advancements in golf course maintenance, club design, and ball technology have altered the way the game is played and how courses are designed.

Some Restrictions Needed

Many of the group's most prominent members, including Jack Nicklaus (who received the group's Donald Ross Award during the most recent annual meeting in Columbus) and Pete Dye, have long called for a "tournament ball" that would control distance. Many ASGCA past presidents – including Bobby and Rees Jones, Ed Seay, Art Hills and Geoffrey Cornish – support the call to review technology's impact on the game.

"Technological parameters would enable some of the great traditional courses to continue to host major tournaments," newly-elected ASGCA President Damian Pascuzzo said, "and enable us to design new courses that won't be obsolete in a few years." Longer drives by high handicap

players also are forcing designers to widen corridors to accommodate more pronounced slice and hook shots. "Safety is a real concern," said Pascusso. Pascuzzo added that if technology dictates longer and wider golf courses, it will further escalate land acquisition and maintenance costs.

Longer Courses Discourage Newcomers

"If technology continues to give more distance, it will be impossible for us to design courses that will be a challenge for more than a decade. We're already designing 7,000-yard courses. What's next – 8,000 or 9,000 yards? Or does technology force designers to "trick up" a course in order to defend par? Frankly, we think that the solution is not good for golf," explained Pascuzzo.

The new ASGCS president stressed the fact that golf needs to attract more new players who find the game fun. Research shows that many players drop out because they become discouraged, and Pascuzzo believes that percentage would increase if courses had to be longer and more difficult to challenge better players. "It's becoming increasingly difficult to design a course that all levels of players find interesting," he added. "Many new courses have five or six sets of tees and even that might be enough to satisfy all needs."

Urges More Cooperation for the "Good of the Game"

The ASGCA Board of Governors urges golf's ruling bodies and manufacturers to work more cooperatively so that the game of golf can continue to prosper. "We don't think it's a good idea to have different classes of golf courses – just a handful for the touring pros, certain others that only excellent players can master and then those for the everyday players. Reasonable parameters for clubs and balls will help the great golf courses of America stand up and defend par, as their original designers intended, and that will benefit everyone who enjoys watching players go up against the best in strategic design."

News from the Commonwealth

The Dept. of Environmental Quality adopted two rules that create a Virginia Water Protection (VWP) general permit for 1) wetland impacts resulting from the activities of construction and development projects and 2) activities causing wetland impacts of less than one-half acre. The general permits become effective Oct. 1, 2001. Under the general construction and development permit, an individual is authorized to impact up to two acres of nontidal surface waters, including up to 500 linear feet of perennial stream channel and up to 1,500 linear feet of nonperennial stream channel for general development activities after meeting certain application procedures. The construction or expansion of a recreational facility would be authorized under a VWP general permit according to regulation text. Further, golf course expansions could qualify as a recreational facility provided the construction of the proposed facility would not result in a substantial deviation from the natural contours and the facility was designed to minimize adverse effects on state waters and riparian areas. Individuals would be able to minimize adverse effects on waters and riparian areas from construction activity by including the implementation of integrated pest management plans, adequate stormwater management, vegetated buffers, and fertilizer management plans. Under the general permit for wetland impacts of less than one-half acre, an individual is authorized to impact less than one-half acre of nontidal surface waters including up to 125 linear feet of perennial stream channel and up to 1,500 linear feet of nonperennial stream channel. Golf course developers are still required to obtain an individual VWPP permit for all water withdrawals from surface waters. For a copy of the final rule, go to <http://www.deq.state.va.us/regulations/xwaterregs.html#wetland>.