

Target Golf

Superintendents and architects work out details to make American golf go forward into the past

By Michelle Palmer

The idea could be a blessing in disguise, a cost-cutting measure that consequently adds an important dimension to the game of golf. Or it could be an unnecessary move that opposes what most Americans value in the game. It depends on who you ask.

The idea is target golf. It involves reducing the fairway area on the course and increasing rough areas, which could include taller grass, sand traps and natural brush. The golfer is provided with a specific target at which to aim and the course is given a more natural look, such as those in Scotland. The American trend tends to be an extremely toned-down variation of the target courses found abroad.

Prompted by increasing maintenance costs and restrictions on water, the move involves, according to some architects, adding some integrity to the game that is present in courses in Scotland and England but absent from most American versions.

Jack Snyder, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, points out that while it is a recent movement in American course architecture, it is not a new idea.

"The trend, as far as I'm concerned, is going forward to the past," Snyder said. "It's really the way golf was played in Scotland and England. With the cost of maintenance going up, we have to find ways to reduce."

"For a variety of reasons, including maintenance costs, the integrity of the game and pure aesthetics, I think target golf will become a very important theme in golf course architecture," said Brian Silva of Cornish & Silva, Inc., Golf Course Architects, formerly an agronomist with the Northeast Green Section, USGA.

"We're still talking about beautifully maintained fairways, but just not as wide as in the past," he explained.

Just as the name implies, target golf makes the golfer concentrate on accuracy over power. As Silva sees it, the surface of the tees will be maintained with just as much intensity as they presently are, but the banks around them will be

rougher. At least 100 yards or more from the tee will be a fairway maintained just as nicely as possible, but not as wide as usual. About 30 to 40 feet from the greens will also be taller grass.

Much of the fairway restructuring will be accomplished through contour mowing. This step alone will not create the type of target courses Scotland is known for, but a more limited, Americanized version of the Scottish principle.

Architect Geoffrey Cornish believes this concept plays an important part in creating American target golf courses.

"We're doing it largely through contour mowing," Cornish said. "We're bringing the roughs into the fairways. I'm a great advocate of letting the grass grow taller, sometimes overseeding it," he says.

A common concern of opponents to the move is that, along with the change in course structure, the game will become more difficult. However, proponents contend that protection of the average golfer is considered.

According to Cornish, the concept behind contour mowing is to reduce the area of fairway turf to save maintenance money, and at the same time keep in mind the different ability levels of players.

The fairway is kept wide near the tee, where most high handicappers' balls land, and narrow where the long distance hitters and low handicappers place.

"We don't want to hurt the high handicappers," Cornish explained. "The longer one hits the ball, the more accurate he must be. That's our principle."

Ted Horton, superintendent at Westchester Country Club, said, "It puts a premium on accuracy rather than distance." Harder hitters may be discriminated against.

Silva points out, however, that with a 100 yard, wall-to-wall fairway, the golfer has nothing to aim at, no point on which to concentrate hitting or avoiding.

"I believe it helps the golfer when he stands on the tee to see where the ball should go," he said.

"It definitely makes the golf course more interesting," Cornish added.

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Jack Snyder



Geoffrey Cornish



Harry Eckhuff



Ted Horton

Jack Snyder believes this is a cost-cutting measure that is not only helpful but often necessary. "With the cost of maintenance going up, we have to find ways to reduce," he maintains.

According to Snyder, rough areas require less attention. Sprinkler systems, for example, can be modified to provide fairway areas with their usual amounts of water, but to reduce the water used on in-

termediate areas and roughs. Although the computerization of systems to perform in this modified way is itself an added expense, Snyder points out it may soon be necessary anyway due to frequent water shortages and restrictions on water consumption.

The target golf concept holds possibilities on some courses, but will it become a widespread trend to sweep American golf? Probably

not. Snyder points out not every course will be interested, and that it will gain more acceptance in private courses catering to better golfers.

"It certainly is happening on country club courses," Cornish agreed. But even an advocate of the idea, he explained that some public courses have shown a 10 to 20 percent drop after narrowing their fairway areas.

For Bill Lyons Jr. of family-operated Lyon's Den Golf Club, the results of such a transformation

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"I like to see a course where most of the hazards are visible so the golfer knows what he is up against." Cadanelli.

would hardly be advantageous.

"We are strictly a public course. I have no members to pick up the tab. I depend on daily golf fees," he explained.

Most players of his course are amateurs or beginners. He feels that making the game more difficult for them would slow them up on the course, create lines waiting at the tees, make people dissatisfied and business would drop.

Bruce Cadanelli, superintendent at the Hollywood Golf Club, maintains similar apprehensions.

"You want the golf course to be enjoyable and to be played in a moderate amount of time," he said. A course requiring six hours to complete is not going to encourage new golfers to play or return to a course.

He contends that most American golfers play for social reasons, for enjoyment of being outdoors and the chance to occasionally play an exceptional round. "I don't know if they want a constant challenge" Cadanelli said.

Lyons gives his patrons what he feels they want.

"We mow as much as possible with a fairway mower. We mow our fairways extremely wide. The only difference between rough and fairway is about 1/4 inch, just

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enough to get a change of color," Lyons said.

Public golfers aren't complaining. Lyons said that every year his business increases, not only from greens fees but from increased volume.

For golf professional Arnold Palmer, the idea of reduced fairway area is no problem. Although he foresees it happening on a number of courses, he also feels it can

discourage many golfers.

"I don't really mind. Target or restrictive golf is fine, but you have to consider all the people who aren't professionals," Palmer said.

As far as reduced maintenance costs, Lyons sees none. "I have to drag my mowers around anyway. There's no way I could justify decreased costs," he declared.

What Bruce Cadanelli sees in terms of maintenance is not so

much a cost reduction, but a change in quality. Having eliminated 1/3 of his fairway turf, dropping from 30 to 21 acres, he hasn't noticed any savings. What he believes may be happening, though, is that the money not spent on fairway turf may be spent elsewhere on the course in terms of better quality or improvements.

He maintains that strategy can be built into a course by design.

"I don't really favor target golf, per se, where a person has to hit a specific target and by missing it by a small amount is severely penalized. I don't think that person is likely to come back to that course.

"What I like to see in a course is a situation where most of the hazards are visible so the golfer knows what he's up against," Cadanelli explained.

He does advocate the type of strategic courses created by some degree of contour mowing. He also encourages multiple tees, so the golfer can choose how difficult a game he wished to play on a daily basis.

Brian Silva would like to see the

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attitudes toward tee positions changed. He finds it would be beneficial if older players or beginners would use the closer tees, discarding the stigma of women's and children's tees. Three or four separate tees would almost be necessary to the idea of contour mowing, so different types of players are not discriminated against.

As far as this direction changing the way golf is viewed by American golfer, Ted Horton believes that pros and amateurs are playing better golf; so there should be little difference in attitude between private and public clubs.

Bill Lyons maintains that his public golfers want the ball to sit on fairway turf like it was on a tee. They tend to scoop the ball.

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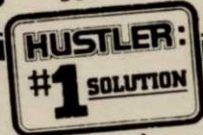
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"You've got to appeal to the people
you serve," he contends.

Most agree, however, that the
spread of the target trend will rely
largely on superintendents.

"A large part of it is the initiative
of the superintendent. They want
to get down to 20 acres of fairway
instead of 50. Everyone is after
them to reduce," Cornish said.

Silva adds, "As an agronomist, if
I suggest to a superintendent he
only mow in front of the tee twice a
week, he's the one who must listen
to the complaints of the golfers
who are used to having it another
way."

"I don't think superintendents
are afraid of strategic golf,"
Cadanelli offered. "I don't know if
the American golfer wants a chal-
lenge on a day to day basis."

He sums it up as a matter of de-
grees. "Scotland is one end of the
spectrum. They may be under-
maintained and are operating on
lower budgets. We are probably
overmaintained."

He would like to see some sort of
middle ground established, which
would reduce some maintenance
and still appeal to the average
golfer, which would make private
courses more accessible to every-
one. He points out that most super-
intendents could find some places
on their courses, far off in the dis-
tance where no ball usually lands,
to reduce care.

Jack Snyder would like to see a
lot more of the target concept, not
only through contour mowing but
by wild roughs and tricks as well.

"Architects haven't been able to
hide sand traps, for example, like
in Scotland," he said. "What was
called the 'rub of the green' has
been eliminated. Maybe we can
bring a little of that back within 5,
10, 20 years.

"On the other side, some archi-
tects say that the structure of golf
doesn't have to return to the past to
tighten the game."

Snyder hopes target golf will be-
come a theme new course designs
will take into account.

"I think all new courses will be
modified slightly with this concept
in mind, but not nearly as tight as
those private clubs that want to
employ it."

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