

The roar of the Golden Bear on the quiet island of Cayman

The Golden Bear is making headlines again, not so much with his play but with his ideas on golf course design and golf balls.

His latest is a 20th century application of a not-so-new idea, a lightweight, reduced-distance golf ball. Jack Nicklaus' MacGregor Golf Company poured \$100,000 in research and development into a ball that goes half the distance of its traditional counterpart.

The reason for the short ball's celebrity status is Grand Cayman, an island country with limited space for anything, let alone a golf course. Nicklaus was commissioned to design a resort golf course on 38 acres of land. Voila! The short ball made perfect sense.

Nicklaus has maintained from the outset that he's not trying to change the traditional game of golf, only to offer an alternative where land may be at a premium. Side benefits of the game could include an alternative for seniors who find regular courses too strenuous, beginners learning the game, municipalities, schools, office parks, and hotel chains with limited space. The short course could also open up night golf, allow courses to sell a few acres for needed funds, and reduce property taxes.

Detractors contend the Golden Bear is just trying to add more lustre to his coat; all hale and hearty sentiments about "for the good of golf" conveniently taking a back seat to healthy design fees.

Regardless, it takes guts to be the "first" at anything. Nicklaus' celebrity status, while catapulting whatever he does into the limelight a little quicker, also catapults his mistakes into public scrutiny just as quickly—the bigger they are, the harder they fall.

Where does the superintendent figure into all this? Supposedly, the short course is not as maintenance-intensive as traditional courses. With the ball being lighter, some claim fewer divots will plague the superintendent. With the course being smaller, less equipment will be needed to care for it, less chemicals to keep it green and weed-free.

Other tradeoffs, if the Cayman claims are true, would be increased hordes trampling the same small piece of land and no cart rental fees.

The golfer will decide if what's right for Cayman is right for the rest of Goldom, or whether the Cayman concept and ball will find the same fate as the Pet Rock.



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