

# Golf Courses of The Future

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**M**Y SENSE of satisfaction at being invited to participate in this panel was somewhat modified by a lukewarm personal reaction to its four topics.

Here's how I come down on the four:

- I can't even define the *natural look*, so that surely has nothing to do with me.
- *Target-area mowing*: does it reduce costs? How would I know? No one trusts me enough to put me on a club's Green Committee.

- As for the other two — *gallery architecture* and *television considerations* — I find those subjects to be inconsequential. They have little to do with genuine golf, and are of interest only because they have a patina of glamor. Therefore, they are, perhaps, unworthy of your undivided attention.

But — that doesn't mean I don't hold opinions and prejudices on the subjects assigned to this panel. More than that, I got excused from jury duty in order to be here today — from the Superior Court of New Jersey's Hunterdon County. Therefore, I am legally committed to pontificate. *Thus*:

**Gallery Architecture** — This comes to us courtesy of media attention devoted to a creature we have come to know as "stadium golf." That's a catchy title. It's very marketable. The end product is dramatic, and the sponsors undoubtedly perform a service by enabling more of their customers to see more strokes.

In the final analysis, however, I find all the talk about "stadium golf" to be a great deal about very little.

You see, for golf to succeed as theater (and that's what stadium golf is all about), an audience is required.

But it doesn't much matter whether that audience is 4,000 or 14,000 or 40,000. All that's necessary is that the audience be large enough to surround a green, to be involved, interested, appreciative — in brief, to play its role as an audience.

Remember, on this level of golf — theatrical golf — the primary audience

is no longer on the premises. The primary audience is the television audience. And it's counted in millions, not in thousands.

A Nielsen television rating of 5, so-so for golf, means that the sets in about four million homes are tuned in during any minute of the program.

This audience of millions, the primary audience for theatrical golf, is *influenced* by the look and sound of the audience on the site. If Mr. Aoki had holed his wedge shot in Hawaii with no one to witness it except players and caddies, it would not have seemed nearly so dramatic and gratifying to the television audience. For the shot to be sensational, it had to be validated by a live audience.

But 4,000 surrounding a green will do that quite nicely, thank you, and there's no need to bulldoze half the state of Florida from point A to point B in order to create an illusion.

So while it's possible that 15 or 20 "stadium" courses will eventually be built in this country, the motivation is "marketing." It's harmless, but it has nothing to do with what goes on where *you* work — and that's where real golf is at.

**The Natural Look** — As I said, I don't quite know what it means, but I expect to be enlightened by Paul Voykin.

Where I'm lucky enough to play golf, it appears that what nature had in mind for those 125 or so acres was many hardwood trees, some low and swampy areas, uncountable varieties of weeds, and impenetrable thickets of things with thorns on them.

Someone had to outwit the hell out of nature in order to create a marvelous golf course in Bernardsville, New Jersey.

**Target Area Mowing — Does It Cut Costs?** — I hope so because golf, which was never cheap to begin with, has become far too expensive.

As I understand target mowing, which sounds good, it is the antithesis of parkland golf, of mowing everything "through the green" either at one height

or, even worse, of cutting fairways in straight lines — The Runway Look.

Wall-to-wall turf, even lush and healthy turf, cut at a ½ or ¾ of an inch, is boring.

Straight lines should have no place in golf. They belong in tennis, bowling and a number of other minor sports.

**Television Considerations** — What looks good on the screen are vividly contrasting colors and dramatic vertical shapes.

Pebble Beach, as the 1982 U.S. Open Championship surely proved, is the ultimate television golf course. That's because of the eight holes adjacent to the cliffs, the beach, the ocean, the sea lions, the otters, and the wind surfers.

Unfortunately, television isn't very good at revealing much of the game's subtleties, particularly on and around the putting greens. It's a two-dimensional medium — one that tends to make everything come out flat.

But it's up to television to do the best it can with whatever courses are available. This year the U.S. Open goes back to good old Oakmont, outside Pittsburgh. Instead of the Pacific Ocean and otters, we're going to give you the Pennsylvania Turnpike, the original ugly American superhighway. As most of you know, 11 holes are on one side of the Turnpike and seven are on the other side.

But that's okay. Oakmont is a singular course in American golf, in terms of both its architecture and history. And we will reveal Oakmont better than it's ever been before.

There will be three cameras on platforms and ladder-towers 80 to 100 feet high which will offer wonderful looks of the countryside as well as the Turnpike. You'll see that extraordinary picture of the ball in flight beneath the camera — a trademark of our coverage. And we'll also give you very tight shots from cameras mounted on tripods alongside the greens, again something you get only on our telecasts. These just might show something of the unique character of the justly famous Oakmont greens.

So let television work its electronic marvels on the courses *as they are* and don't fall into the trap of trying to design, or redesign courses, for television. The end products would be stereotypes.

Again, think of the numbers and the perspective. We're talking about 40 courses in any given year which entertain televised golf tournaments. The proper concern of this Conference is 12,000 courses.

**T**HERE IS, though, one television consideration that does happen to coincide with my feelings as a golfer, not as a pseudo-television person, about a disturbing trend in the way courses are built and maintained.

That has to do with trees. Trees are the bane of golf television directors. Quite simply, they get in the way. For example, we will not be able to do a very good job showing you the par-3 8th hole at Oakmont this June. There's no decent location for a high camera directly behind the green, which is set off by huge evergreens.

But forget television and camera angles. We've become victims of the arboretum syndrome. There are too many trees on golf courses and too many trees in the wrong places.

By wrong places, I mean approximate to targets. There's something very wrong in suffering an unplayable lie under a blue spruce when you miss the green on a 440-yard par-4 by 30 feet.

Besides, too many trees tend to obscure the beauty of the game. They block out the sky, they rob us of the perspective of the roll and pitch of the land itself, they interfere with what were intended to be uninterrupted vistas from way out on the course back up to a stately clubhouse — they diminish the panorama of golf.

The contemporary and mindless appeal of trees is remarkable. Any one of you could walk into the men's grille at one of your courses on Wednesday at lunch time and announce that you were taking up a collection for one of your men whose left leg had been nearly severed at the knee that morning by a chainsaw. The reaction, at best, is going to be mild annoyance. One member, probably a doctor since it's a Wednesday, is likely to suggest that your guy should walk it off.

But go into the same grille and say that you can get a terrific deal on 100 moraine locusts and people will throw money at you.



Green committees over the years have treated courses like organic crossword puzzles by filling in all the blank spaces with trees. So I hope we'll be a little more careful about trees in the future.

**S**PEAKING OF the future, I'd like to see more attention spent on the location of the short tees and, where it's practical, to think about inserting a fourth and very short set of tee markers — shorter than those we now think of as the women's tees.

Joe Moresco, an excellent club professional at the Woodmere Club near New York City, has been arguing effectively that the existing women's tees on most courses are irrelevant for the average woman golfer whose drive never exceeds 150 yards and who, consequently, never reaches a green of a 300-yard hole in two.

Perhaps, as a long-range goal, we might even think about eliminating the very label "women's tees." Golfers should simply gravitate toward those teeing areas they feel most comfortable playing.

Most senior men golfers, who play a disproportionate amount of golf in this country, should be playing courses that are less than 6,000 yards long. In many cases, the existing women's tees are perfect for golfers whose drives average 150 to 175 yards. But "real men," alas, are loathe to go forward to play on something called "women's tees." So let's think about not calling them women's tees anymore.

**O**VERALL, I tend to think that the selection of topics like "gallery architecture" and "TV considerations" confirm the suspicion that we've spent too much of our time, effort and money in an inane quest for something called a "championship course" in a foolish attempt to satisfy the macho instincts of less than 1% of the golfers. Too little of our talents have been directed at satisfying and pleasing the 99.5% — whose game it is.

We tend to forget that golf is a sport for participation. It is a spectator sport only secondarily. The relatively few golfers who thrive on the professional tours, both male and female, are the fortunate beneficiaries of a love for the game by the average player whose handicap is 17, if he's a male, and 30, if she's a female.

*Television crews work from high places.*

The money for the pro tours and the U.S. Open Championship, in defiance of gravity, trickles *up* from amateur golfers.

It's not at all like the big-money spectator sports. Imagine, if you will, that big-money football was abolished. Assume that the pro leagues are outlawed and that the colleges and universities are made to treat football as a game, rather than as a business.

It's quite possible, even likely, that football would become extinct within a decade. Soccer might replace football as the primary sport in elementary and high schools — without the commercial spectacle and example of big-money football.

But imagine the same situation in golf. Suppose the existing pro tours dissolved. Would any of you give up golf? Would your members stop playing golf? Of course not.

Within five years, *new* pro tours would sprout, seeded by amateurs. Within 10 years they'd be thriving, and they'd be building stadium golf courses, and proclaiming them the wave of the future all over again.

The wave of the future in architecture?

I sort of wish it was more like some of the seepage of the past.

I am hopelessly nostalgic when it comes to golf course architecture whose Golden Age, as I see it, took place in a period that began at about the time of World War I and ended, with a thud, at the onset of the Great Depression.

As evidence, look at the list of America's 100 Greatest Courses compiled and revised every other year by the magazine *Golf Digest*.

Of the top 10 in the last revision, not one of the courses honored is less than 48 years old.

Of the top 20, only two were built after 1940.

Of the top 50, I believe only 15 were built after World War II.

Something's wrong here, of course. It may be that what is wrong are the perceptions of the *Golf Digest* selectors, of whom I happen to be one, but I think not. If anything, I think the selectors and editors lean over backwards to try to give modern courses a break.

So this, at least as I see it, is not the golden age of golf course architecture.

It is, however, the golden age of golf course maintenance. Anyone who doesn't see that courses are better cared for than they were 10, 25, 50 years ago, simply isn't paying attention.

# Some Thoughts on Target-Area Mowing and Maintenance Costs

by JAMES A. WYLLIE, President, GCSAA, and CGCS, Bayview Country Club, Ontario, Canada

I WOULD LIKE to preface my views about golf courses of the future by telling of my recent experiences in recontouring the fairways at Bayview Country Club as we converted fairways from *Poa* to bentgrass. I would also like to comment on target-area mowing, which we have implemented on a few of our fairways. Finally, I would like to share a few of my thoughts on the stadium-type architecture that is being discussed today.

While preparing for the fairway renovation program at Bayview, I came upon an article by Jack Snyder, the President of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

On existing golf courses, indiscriminate change in mowing patterns without taking into account the aesthetic and strategic factors would be risky at best. It must be done with a golf course architect, the club professional, and with the golf superintendent — as a team.

It was after reading this article that we at Bayview hired Robert Moote, of Toronto, a golf course architect. Bob visited our club often and presented a plan of how the finished product would look. We all agreed it was acceptable.

At this time I became involved with target-area mowing. We had decided to renovate our fairways by removing all *Poa annua* and converting to bentgrass. This would require us to kill off all existing grasses and then overseed with a 50/50 mixture of Penncross and Penneagle bent.

Two days before the spraying was to take place, the team staked out the fairways for the new contours. The stakes were set at approximately 25-foot intervals, and I personally sprayed the herbicide as the new contours were established (*Figure 1*, June, 1982).

As to specifics, the fairways were sprayed with two liters per acre of the herbicide Roundup. It was applied using a Broyhill sprayer mounted on a

Figure 1.

