

A Professional Golfer's Viewpoint

by **PATRICK J. RIELLY**
President, PGA of America

IN DEFERENCE to the golf course architects of the present and the past, we have to be reminded that God is the first architect. In all fairness to the modern-day architect, when you are provided with a flat piece of terrain in La Quinta, California, you don't have a whole lot to work with in comparison to the Pebble Beaches or Augusta Nationals of the world. But at the same time there has to be a balance between the old and the new. I'm going to relate some of my personal involvement in architecture, and tell of the different factors that had to be considered in setting up the Annandale Golf Club for the Southern California Open, what we in our area consider a major championship.

To digress for a moment, where did bunkering come from? Quite simply, bunkering came from the links concept. In the beginning, the only land that the Scots had that wasn't useful for farming was the links area between the ocean and the more favorable land on higher ground. These were areas that naturally had a lot of sand. When greens and other playing areas were defined, sheep actually grazed on the grass and kept it short. When it became very cold, the sheep would find shelter against the bunkers or the areas next to the green, eat away that area of grass, and ultimately we had bunkers along the sides of the greens.

All architects have a trademark, a signature. Some use bunkering as a key component of their signature. Pete Dye's bunkering, for example, leaves very steep grass slopes that are difficult to maintain. On the other hand, it's very easy to play out of these bunkers, because your lie is generally level, and the sand is generally quite firm.

There are other types of signatures, and every golf course has one. There are the 15th and 16th holes at Cypress, the 18th hole at Pebble Beach, and the 13th hole at Augusta, for example. Robert Trent Jones sort of challenged you, I guess you would say. He had a dynamic heroic taste for architecture, and he made you think about whether it was worth going for the green or not. He was probably the first architect in the mod-



Patrick J. Rielly

ern era who developed that particular form of architecture.

I believe, on the other hand, that Pete Dye's style must have been based on a trip to Prestwick. He took all the things he saw at Prestwick and brought them over to the United States and developed golf courses along these lines. PGA West is something altogether different, but I'm sure he had some specific marching orders and he followed them. It is certainly difficult; it is very target oriented, but at the same time it attracts long lines of golfers. I wonder, though, how much is repeat play. If I were asked to do something in an area like Palm Springs, though, I would probably want to over-build and over-charge as well.

What does all this have to do with the future? The National Golf Foundation suggests that we will have to build a golf course a day between now and the year 2000 to keep up with demand. Given the high cost of building and maintaining some of today's golf courses and the difficulty and time needed to play them, architectural styles will have to change. To meet the demands of the golfing public, golf courses will have to be built less expensively and made more playable. By more playable, I mean you will have to give the amateur golfer a bounce area in front of the green. Sure there should be some shots on a signature hole that demand precise positioning, but by and large, the golfing public needs some room for error.

Architectural style is important in setting up a golf course for one of our PGA events. Generally speaking, we use the same criteria as the USGA. We would like to test every club in the bag, from the driver to the wedge. In dealing with some courses of the modern architectural style, you have to take the driver out of the player's hands. Fairway widths of 25 to 30 yards don't give us much leeway in many instances, and sometimes, because of the architecture alone, it probably will have to be a lay-up hole.

I'll give you some examples. Traditionally the PGA Championship tries to have its greens read between 9 feet and 9 feet 6 inches on the Stimp meter. Five greens at Oak Tree last August had such tremendous undulations we'd still be playing if the greens had to be rolling 9 feet 6 inches. So we had to change one part of our game, because the greens that week were running at 8 feet 6 inches.

On the other hand, we expect a very different situation at Kemper Lakes this year. It's the first public golf course we've played in many years. We feel it's important that we move the championship around, and that we occasionally use this type of venue. Because of the large greens and lack of undulations, the putting surfaces will probably go between 12 feet and 13 feet, depending on the weather.

To show you what a difference weather makes, consider how the 18th hole at Cherry Hills was set up for the Open in June and the PGA Championship in August. Had the hole been set up for the PGA as it was for the Open, it probably would have been unplayable. The 18th hole has a large water hazard to the left, and the approach shot is played to an elevated green. Play was much more difficult in August, because of strong winds and high temperatures. Had it been set up like a June Open, golfers would probably have been forced to hit a 5-iron off the tee, and then go for an elevated green that was very firm and fast, with speeds around 10 feet 6 inches to 11 feet. The climatic conditions were different, so we put rough down along the left side of the

fairway to stop the ball from running into the hazard.

At Annandale for the Southern California Open last summer, we played a golf course that's one of the oldest in the state. About five years ago the club upgraded the golf course. This involved redoing all the tees and renovating many of the cart paths.

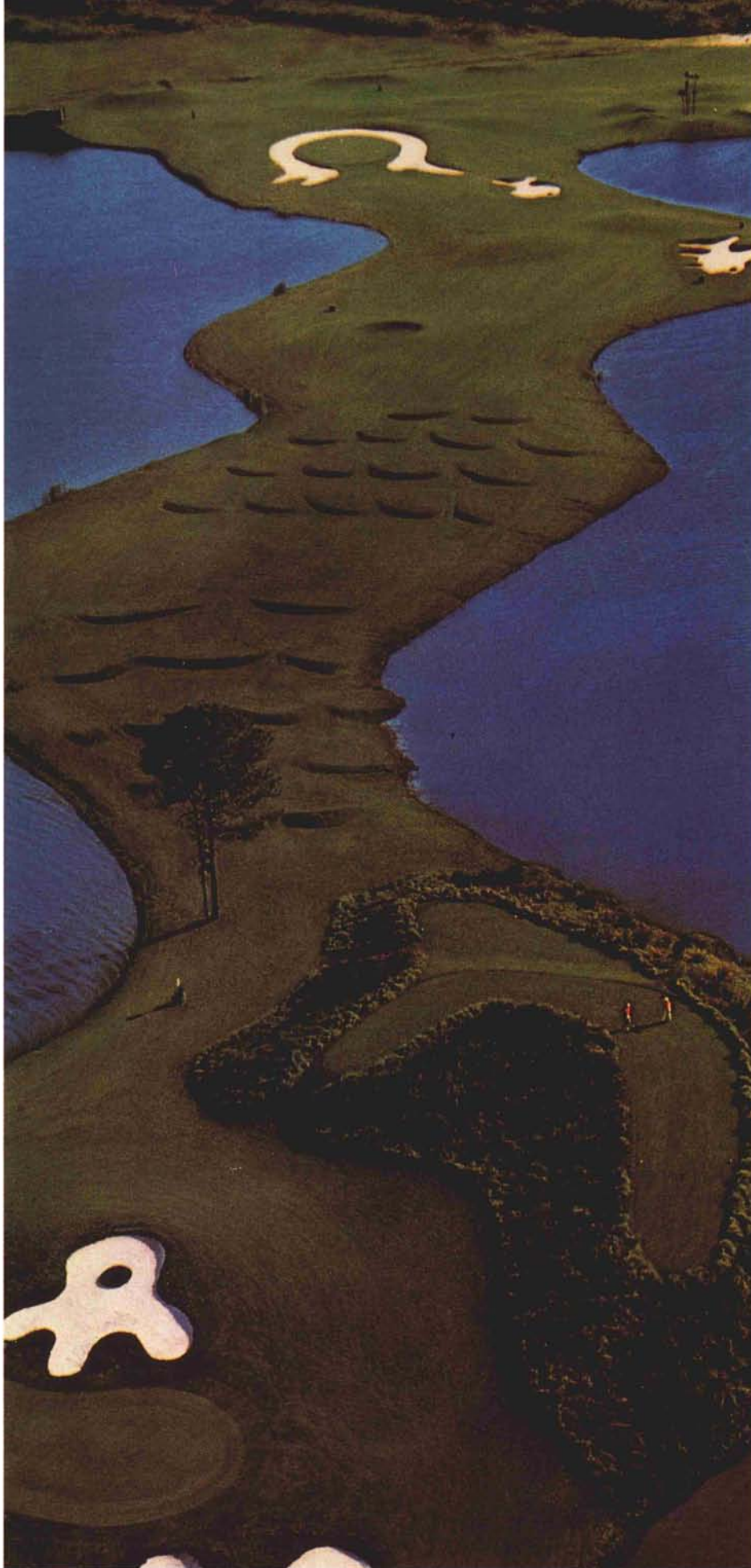
Interestingly, Annandale was the first golf course in the United States to have electric carts, in 1927, so the carts sort of decided where the cart paths were going to go. The cart paths were relocated on four or five holes, the tees were rebuilt, and the greens were redesigned. But we were concerned about the type of stress we can experience in July. Going for fast greens would have meant the loss of turf, and our golf course superintendent might not be there today if that had happened. As a result, we decided to keep the greens at a modest but reasonable 8 feet 6 inches, but we allowed the bermudagrass rough to grow a little, to about two inches, and we were able to maintain the integrity of the golf course.

In our view, the welfare of the golf course is most important, and the concerns of the individual golfer are secondary. Despite the concessions, though, the winning score on a par-70 golf course was 286.

Finally, I want to stress the importance of including the views of a competent golf course superintendent in the construction phase of a new golf course or the renovation of an older one. Our experience at Annandale was a case in point. Even though Dave Alex, our superintendent, warned the architect and committee about the severe slope on the 18th green, his advice was ignored. It appears now that we're going to have to redesign this green, an expense that could have been avoided if the committee had listened to Dave.

We made another mistake in allowing a contractor to install the irrigation system without Dave's supervision. Dave has had to do extensive renovation work on the system to make it functional.

Ultimately, golf course superintendents, golf professionals, club officials, and golf course architects must work together to provide enjoyable golf at a reasonable price. To achieve this, we must avoid the monstrosities so frequently seen on television each week, and concentrate on building challenging courses that are fun to play.



Some golf holes are best viewed from a helicopter or T.V. tower.