

# Golf Course 2.0

By MIKE NUZZO

**What we need to do today and tomorrow is simply give people what they want, not what we think they should want. – John Reed**

For too long, golf courses have been trying to be everything to everyone. So many golf courses were built lavishly and have been excessively maintained over the past 20 years. The result? They have become longer and more difficult. There are even some fiscally-stressed courses compounding their problems with new alterations that only increase their already too-high maintenance expenses. I say these practices have mostly increased cost, difficulty and time to play, which are considered, not coincidentally, the largest factors for not enough people playing.

Given the task creating a new golf course for the public recreational golfer, what could be done to avoid making the mistakes many developers have made through the years? The solutions are simple but not easy. If I were creating a new course, I'd focus on minimizing course expenses, enabling more people to play and reducing the time it takes to play. Very few courses outside of Scotland have ever had these objectives.

I would not have cart paths. They can always be added later. I would start with a minimal clubhouse that sells balls, tees, hot dogs, burger dogs on the same buns and cold beers. The course would have generous fairways and strategic greens. The goal would be to have the most interesting greens in town, not the fastest. Someone else can always come along and win the speed battle at higher and higher costs with flatter and flatter greens. Probably the most valuable aspect of interesting greens is the ability to have great variance in complexity depending solely on the hole location. One day a hole can be hard, the next day easy. The greens wouldn't be surrounded by trouble, many would be wide open. The better player is often frustrated when the novice can hit near the green with an average shot and still be competitive for a hole. That is why there are 18 holes.

Fast and firm conditions are more resourceful and more enjoyable. A simple and reliable irrigation system that can be expanded and driven by an efficient pump can save \$1 million up front (and even more over time). A short game practice area with a handful of pitch-n-putt holes, but no driving range would be ideal. Hitting a few balls into a net will suffice. A good routing

always leaves room to play a short loop of holes. While it can be a challenge to incorporate play, a goal would be to make available a short loop in 1 - 1.5 hours. I would use grasses, plant materials and soils indigenous and suited to the site. Many of these ideas will find a lot of resistance and naysayers, but those naysayers don't pay the bills.

It seems every golf course tries to appeal to every type of golfer by having four sets of tees. This many tees may make for a nice looking scorecard, but it does little to ensure everyone will enjoy the course.

A big issue we have is that most golf courses do not appeal to the beginner. When you get to the golf course, they don't ask if you have ever played before. From the management side, I would invite the beginner, even if it was his first time. I had never seen a website with a beginners section before researching for this essay. I looked to see if I could find any examples. I found one, but unfortunately it was only a FAQ and read like a foreign language to a non-golfer. Even doors have instructions— why not a golf course? I found a sole blog post that said their course was great for beginners after you rented clubs and brought a golfing friend.

To encourage more people to try golf, a course website would ask if you have ever played before, and they would have a banner section for first time visitors with instructions on what to do when you get to the course. The signage at the golf course would tell you what to do as well. If I were managing a course, I would ask visitors and callers if they have ever played before, and I would really want to make it special for first-timers, letting them know that it would be a privilege to play with someone for their first time. I may still recommend bringing a friend, as that can be so much richer an experience. I would also give expectations and would probably share a caddy for their first time, or even find them a friend.

Pull carts and non-professional caddies would be encouraged. There is a ton of ways a friendly caddie could help the first timer around the course. And, I would have free golf clubs available for anyone to play, not a deluxe set that costs \$45 to rent for the day.

Could you imagine the first time golfer playing our golf course as compared to the norm? They would think they were in heaven, or at least Nordstrom's.