5 *The Future of the Game*

Much of this book has dealt with the beauties of the game and aesthetically contrived beauty of course landscapes. Chapter 5 discusses the concepts of artistic beauty and aesthetic beauty. It is important to understand their meanings and differences if we are to deal with landscape effect and make its beauty compatible with the game.

Before Hutchinson's days there were no scenic landscape costs; but costs for today's typical state-of-the-art course landscaping, ornamentation in pursuit of beauty, exceed one million dollars. Alister MacKenzie, a proponent of beauty of artistic natural golf course design had disdain for the money spent on course (aesthetic landscape effects) improvements. He stated, *"The more money these clubs have had to spend, the more their courses have deteriorated (playability) . . .so that these glorious natural courses have become as dull and insipid as a second rate inland course."* The power of beauty is real, and its ornamentation is without conscience and needs to be understood and properly respected as it will continue to be a force in our culture as well as in the design of our golf courses. Art historian Brolin observed, *". . .excavators uncovered a grave in an Iraqi cave, under the bones were found bachelor buttons, hollyhocks and grape hyacinth, gathered from surrounding hillsides and woven into a funerary liter of pine boughs. The grave is sixty thousand years old. . .a touching expression of humankind's desire to ornament."* Horace Hutchinson's scenic movement was about ornament. He stated at the end of the 19th century that *"Pleasant scenery is not golf, but a more pleasing experience when played in its surroundings. . ."* No matter what had been intended, pleasant scenery has evolved into landscape effects that are now part of golf. Since Hutchinson's time, we have seen changes: beautiful contrived waters, repetitive patterns of flash-faced bunkers, lush green fairway and margin grasses, foliage and other landscape effects and in regard to play, frustrating experiences, lost balls, challenges and skills out of balance, excess costs, excess time searching for balls, severe penalties, and denial of recovery play. Is this the future of golf?

Chapter 5 explains that this does not have to be the future of golf. Unlike many pundits and low handicap golfers, this book is not burdened with imaginative math formulae to suggest that the decline is an insignificant aberration but instead suggests taking action to understand the underlying cause of the decline and to regain the 10 million defectors. It offers new insight into the influence of landscape effect and understanding the power of its dangerous beauty. There are two methods of reform discussed in Chapter 5: 1) A slow incremental method involving individual courses in the United States. 2) An expeditious, comprehensive, cost effective, and industry-wide project that involves activities to achieve social and economic goals and evaluation of methods and outcomes. The emphasis is on the 95 percent of all players–that core group who cannot break 80 who have been denied equity of play, and dismissed by glib remarks such as *"life is not fair so why expect it on the golf course?"* Our society, laws, governance entitlements and games are built on equity.

The declining trend of the game could be turned around and the pleasurable excitements of the game might be more frequently experienced if a different approach is taken. This approach involves more accommodation of the qualities of games, elimination of obstacles of the game, and imaginative course design solutions and renovations that produce courses with challenge/skill balances for both low- and high-level handicap players. Designing courses so that they are more fun with fewer obstacles and delays will drive creative design solutions that could also result in lower maintenance costs and beautiful landscape effects without obstacles.

The Future, a Different Approach

There are indications of a better future for players of the game. Course designers have known for years how to eliminate course obstacles to make courses more accessible and enjoyable for different challenge/skill levels but quite often final design decisions regarding landscape effects are made based on the interests and motivations of committees, owners, and entrepreneurs. And if the beauty aggrandizers cannot bend designers to their will to build more bunkers, water ponds, lusher grasses, and trees in their designs, then they get built after the designer has been long gone. Presently, some designers, committees, and owners have taken the approach of making a commitment to no half-measures for the modification and/or relocation of landscape effects. A course may be adjusted to variable levels of play and made more visually beautiful and more cost effective by artistic and aesthetic measures requiring less maintenance. Here perhaps is the future of the game and a solution to improve golf's current problems of high costs, excessive playing time, difficulty of play, and lack of and diminishing fun. There is no other single cause other than landscape effect that impacts all of these four problems.

Incremental success of individual projects will be slow in turning around the decline of the game, but will assuredly be a start in turning it around. Expeditious, more comprehensive, cost effective, and useful industry-wide results may be achieved by implementation of a planning model as outlined in the **Golf Logic Model** (GLM) in Appendix A, based upon a proven planning technique that is offered by the International Organization of Standards, ISO, and practiced by countless industries and institutions worldwide.

The goal and objectives of the GLM is to develop a continuous improvement process and a foundation for sustained future growth of the game. The process involves activities to achieve goals, involvement of partners and their roles, and outcomes and measurements for evaluation of these processes and outcomes. A major activity of GLM is based upon the thesis that landscape effect is corrupting the game. To arrive at useful conclusions of this thesis, a scientific social process is needed for measurement and evaluation of players' golf course experiences interfaced with architectural components of a course. Psychologist Csikszentmihalyi's Experience Sampling Method (ESM) is a proven process and may be adapted and designed to measure a player's experiences and time to play a broad variety of different golf holes. A meaningful experiment would involve golfers with all levels of skills playing a series of holes with landscape effects, before and after course alterations. With a big data base acquired of on the spot subjective experiences the data would be useful in arriving at practical, objective conclusions, cost/benefits, and other analyses.

Once criteria is developed for judgment of excellence of a well-built course, experiments performed and evaluations completed solutions to the underlying cause of golf's problems may be readily resolved. Prioritized, additional issues such as golf equipment, environmental objectives and standards, and others may be most effectively addressed by the continuous improvement process made part of the Golf Logic Model. Processes, results, and measures to overcome barriers to goals plus new objectives are continually evaluated and acted upon by the partners who will perform roles as designated in the GLM.

The Future, a Step toward Reversal of Decline of Golf

During the time it would take to organize and implement a comprehensive GLM there are two golf landscape components that would best serve golf's future as a beginning step in recovering golf's defectors. Their benefits would increase the enjoyment of the game for the most numbers for the least cost. The components are the fairway and margins, both which consist of grass, a material proven and preferred for its performance, maintenance, and beauty of colors.

Color is the most powerful feature of creative expression, more important than line or form. When J.M.W. Turner, the great English watercolorist, was asked about art, he replied, *"Color is absolute."* As an artist, I have been fascinated with the idea, by appearances of courses around the world, that the fairway and its margins possess the capability to provide all the adornment necessary to achieve a beautiful course and satisfy man's innate desire for scenic beauty. Refer to images of fairways and margins that are depicted in paintings of Royal Troon, Turnbury, Schinnecock Hills, Garden City, Oakmont, Hollywood, Black Bethpage, Pacific Dunes, and Erin Hills in Chapter 4 for a look at colorful grasses and ground covers that make a lovely scene. The colors change with the seasons and the time of day. They make a powerful statement and are memorable. If the grass in margins is wispy, a ball will be findable and playable. If not and if it holds up play, thin it out or cut it twice a year. The key is to achieve the "look" and reduce maintenance but not slow down the pace of play.

Since the development of the art of golf course architecture in America, aesthetic refinements of grass have been directed toward its color, green. Grass has many colors but the predominant choice is the classicized color green, which now has become conventionalized. If tan or yellow colors appear in a fairway, they would be called a blemish.

For turfgrass, taste for the color green is the favored choice in spite of attributes of other turfgrass species of mixed different colors that are available for optimal fairway use. Choice of unblemished green as the only color for grass is largely a matter of convention influenced by taste.

As progressive landscape/gardening ideas were being developed in England, one group of landscape/gardening ideologists had issues with performance and color. They held that landscape plant selection based upon color was a corrupting influence of landscape design rationale and that other considerations were equally or more important.

An example of course beauty aggrandizing by non-golfers is the behavior of TV producers who have not been enamored of brown grass. They have been known to ask course owners to dye their grass greener for TV events. Ted Steinberg (b. 1961), author of ***American Green*** (2000), wrote: *"To make the scenes more beautiful to the viewing audience the media's request was: fertilize this … paint that!"* (1) To dye and paint grass to achieve a landscape effect is just the tip of the iceberg of overindulged pursuit of beauty through contrived landscape effect.

"Green is Not Great, Golf is Played on Grass Not Color" is the title of an article written by Alexander M. Radko, former National Director of the USGA Green Section and published in Golf Journal in August 1977. He made a case for sensible use of water and management of grasses: *"Lush green color turfgrass means undesirable, soft succulent, out of condition, filled with juice or liquid…which often results from the needless race for color despite the fact that color has minimal effect on turfgrass quality for golf… off color grasses hold the ball nicely for fairway play."*

George Peper and Malcolm Campbell past editors of golf magazines, co-authors of the book ***Links*** (2010), foresee a crisis in maintaining green courses that threaten the future of the game. They said, *"The days of consuming millions of gallons of water and vast amounts of chemicals to keep modern-style courses green are coming to an end. In fact, the game will teeter into crisis if it fails to adjust."* (2)

In the Northern United States, bluegrass provides a better playing surface and needs less maintenance than bent grass, but the golf community prefers tightly mowed bent grass because of its color contrast to bluegrass, which is used for rough. Here is another case of rampant visual tastes that have trumped intelligent maintenance practices.

Mixed color grasses promise future benefits for American golf courses, particularly in the use of less water, chemicals, fertilizers, costs, and environmental resources. The change may arrive soon, as the engine that drives taste is powered by economics. Then, the conventional color green will be considered for what it is–only a color.

Conventionalization of golf course art forms provides another insight. Sir Herbert Read, English poet and art historian, was knighted for his service to the arts in society. His quotation below is relevant to institutions as well as cultures, individuals, and the things that people make like the art of making golf courses; bringing them to life and making adjustments to natures requirements in maintaining their life. Courses consist of aesthetic and artistic forms of landscape components and features. Read said, *"The degree of conventionality of all art forms is directly related to the degree of decadence of that culture. Whether an individual, or country, or culture, the great cultures of the western world have undergone periods of greatest artistic expression at the height of their cultural period, then the art forms pass a stage of refinement into a stage of classicism, then conventionality. Shortly thereafter the culture has passed into a period of inactivity and decay."*

There will always be some applied arts in different stages of decline, ascent, or reform. Most arts in the United States appear to have diversity and creativity in their art forms. However, conventionalization of pure color green for lush golf course fairways and margins is indicative of regressive maintenance practices and course management's delusions in the publics' aesthetic tastes. It is a pitiful situation to see organizations and courses that sponsor tournaments that appeal to great numbers of followers exploit the beauty of nature and set a poor example with abuse of the art forms of fairways and margins. A lush green monotone of grass and margins is not as attractive when compared with other examples as shown in the following illustrations, nor has it been proven to be optimal for play or cost effective. Tournament sponsoring organizations owe much of their success to the institution of golf. Why not exercise their leadership and bring indulgent turfgrass management out of the dark ages?

Example of Progressive Individual Course Improvements

Creative improvements that have been proposed for Columbus CC (CCC) hole nos. 5, 6, and 7 fairways and margins are shown below. Similar improvements have been suggested for other areas of the course as well. The changes include elimination of lush green margin (rough) grass for substitution of a mixture of native species of sedges, fescues, and little blue stem or similar. Wider fairways, elimination of some greenside bunkers, and altering contours of greenside collection areas to bring back more of the run-up game are proposed and some have already been implemented.

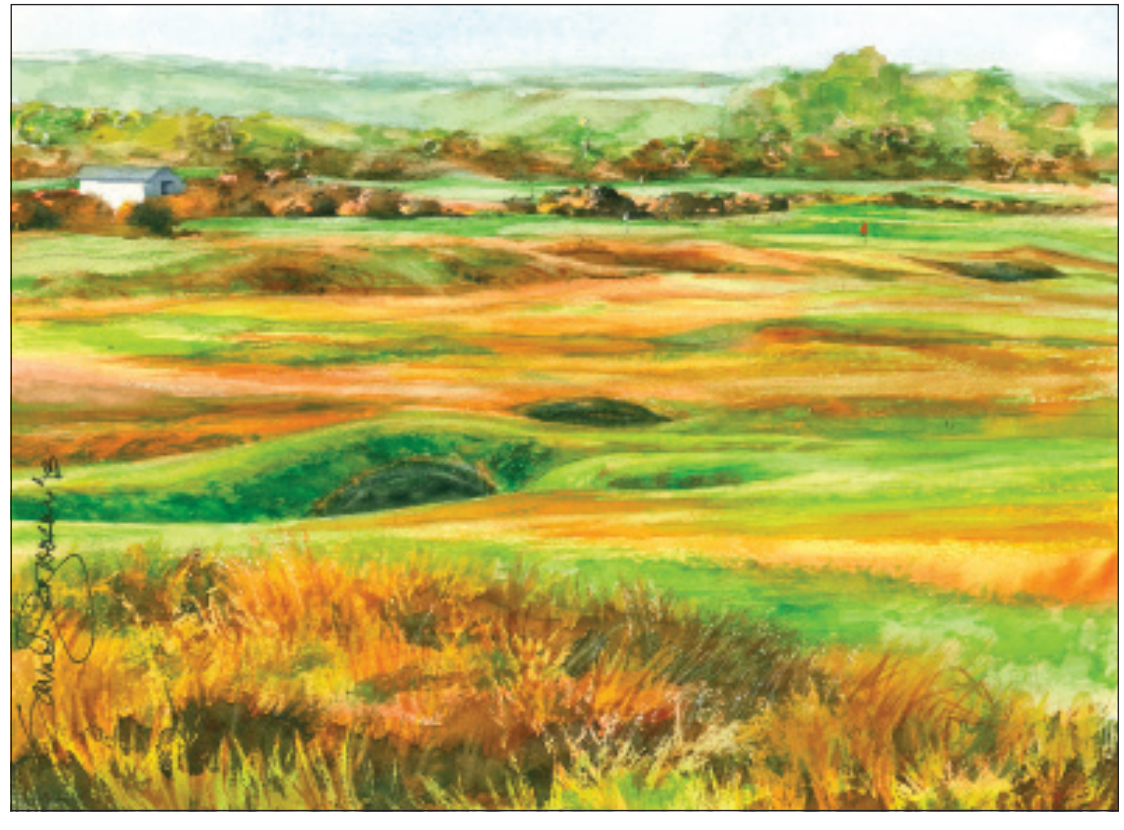
The run-up game is enjoyable to rabbits and a few scratch players. It's perceived challenges offer a great variety of opportunities for players of lesser skill perceptions, the essence of flow. The run-up, chipping game is many times more fun than the bunker game because it is

Ohio. Fairways and rough colors: Tan, yellow, reddish brown, beige, rust, and green. The artist's 2016 concept for Nos. 5, 6, and 7 Columbus CC. 4

New York Rough/margins colors: Tan, beige, rust, yellow.

Ohio Fairway/margins colors: Green, purple. Nos. 5, 6 & 7 Columbus CC.

Oregon Fairway colors: Tan, gold, brown, yellow, green.



Scotland Fairway/margins colors: Tan, gold, brown, yellow, green.

Go back to Excerpts page