

Unfortunately the original article was randomly abridged by the editor. The full and original version is to be found below:

DEALING WITH THE GREENS COMMITTEE

Personally, I think that the renovation and re-modelling of existing courses must be the most nerve-racking, unthankful and ungrateful commission bestowed on any golf course architect.

At most member's clubs such a project is usually entrusted to a formidable elected body normally called the greens committee. Many other names have also been bestowed on this particular committee but they cannot be mentioned in this article.

The committee generally provides the architect with a brief or lengthy scope of work and reviews the architect's suggestions, preliminary and detailed construction drawings, specifications, designs and construction supervision.

A greens committee is normally composed of a group of highly intelligent and successful professionals, managers and directors who have absolutely no clue about renovating or up-grading golf courses but think they know all about the subject as they have read all about it in "specialized" magazines. Unfortunately, and clearly because of the clever marketing and hot-air gurus who are followed by the exalted and credulous media, most committees and golfers seem to think that any course worth its name must be a par 72. This means that the unlucky course that is not blessed with the magical par 72 and a length of 7,000 meters is immediately the target of instant disdain and mockery. That situation compels most committees to instruct the architect to reach that magical par even if the amount of land available will never accommodate such a standard or required length. They do not really care if their course is interesting, beautiful, outstanding and unique, no! It must be a par 72!!! Why does everyone listen to this marketing bull? Why does everyone insist on a par 72? What is wrong with a good 69? (I speak of golf, of course).

Unfortunately golf clubs do not usually elect committees that are only represented by one or two persons. This happy eventuality only happens with the re-modelling of pay and play courses that are privately owned, or courses within real estate projects that belong to companies or corporations who generally rely on managers to entrust such tasks to one or two company employees.

Usually, the number of representatives varies greatly and can be anything from 4 to 20 people! Some of these representatives are periodically replaced or absent, which means that any decision taken at previous site visits might be reviewed again during the following site visit.

Anyway, my father always said that any committee should always be composed of an uneven number and that three were too many.

One might ask: what is the purpose and function of such a committee? Basically, it is supposed to represent the club or owners to ensure that the course will be renovated according to the agreed brief, quality and members' wishes. It is of course very difficult to defend the view of 600 members, so the representatives usually reflect their own opinions which strangely coincide with the way they play the game themselves. I suppose they just hope that their perception corresponds to the ideas of the members they are supposed to represent.

The best time to inspect a site with a committee is during a torrential downpour, a strong wind and an average temperature of -5°C, or at 45°C with a humidity of 100%. Of course, we instruct everyone to walk! No riding in site vehicles or buggies. How can one inspect the works if one rides in a vehicle? Absolutely impossible! Surely every golf course architect knows that?

Walking is a great pleasure in the pouring rain with five kilos of mud sticking to each shoe or boot. Very few representatives have rubber boots as such an important piece of equipment is completely alien to their own profession. Some members (especially bankers and lawyers) are actually walking around with nicely polished town shoes! and the ladies in their stiletto heels!

Under such pleasant conditions and after the first few holes, most members suddenly remember that they had some very important appointments, or their wives / husbands needed some very unexpected, unforeseen and urgent medical attention or they had to phone President Bush to discuss the situation in Iran. The most sincere amongst them, however

actually admit that it is really a hell of a crappy day and only idiots such as the architect, the contractor and of course the greenkeeper would walk around in such weather.

Those days are in fact, the most productive site visits as decisions are taken quickly and without partisan bias (unfortunately most of those decisions are disputed at the next site visit!)

The committee is usually split into various groups which I shall try and define as follows:

The hard liners: (handicaps 5 and below) they defend the tough, challenging and uncompromising "championship course", the harder the better.

The not-so hard liners: (handicaps between 15 to 20) their policy allows compromise and they usually want a course that is not too hard but at the same time not too easy.

The undecided: (handicaps 20-30) they would like the course slightly difficult but also quite easy and not too long but long enough.

The defenders of the "fair" course: (handicap 30 to playing certificate) the course must be fair especially for seniors, beginners and high handicaps. Fairways must be a 100 metres wide, no rough, no semi-rough (except around the car park), no bunkers (except at the pitching green) no lakes, trees, streams or any other stupid obstacle that might decrease their chances of improving their handicap. But of course, it must be a 72! they read it somewhere or were told by the real "experts" in the game that a "real" course can only be a 72!

Sometimes and very rarely there is actually a member who defends the interests of the greenkeeper! Yes, that great unsung hero who will always be blamed if anything goes wrong. Could one not make the course a little maintenance friendlier? In fact this person (usually the treasurer) is not really defending the interests of the greenkeeper but is trying to save some money on the maintenance and wonders if two men would not be enough to maintain the course and collect the balls on the driving range.

There are of course always the specialists and scientific zealots who want to show that they are great experts in horticultural matters so they raise the following question: what about the root zone? This subject is very fashionable and they proclaim their knowledge regarding the intricate paths of the roots travelling through the cavernous webs of the root zone, meeting all sorts of nasty sharp edges, horrible animals, waterfalls, suspended water tables, diseases, fungus, solids, masses, rocks (rocks? who accepted that mix?), gravel (only rounded please). It is absolutely incredible what happens in that root zone! Complicated and wonderful words are used such as bio-mass, infiltration, percolation, density, porosity, granulometry, ringing, retention, nutritional, biological, natural, and of course ecological!! Most members nod their head in unanimous approval as they do not want to show that they have no clue whatsoever of such important matters and hide their ignorance by re-confirming that it must be a 72!

Anyway, if the grass is not good, they can always blame the architect and the greenkeeper!

The golf course architect and his various representatives are frantically taking notes as and when precious instructions and utterings are spoken, and crossing them out as and when they are overruled by the committee chairman.

By the time the golf course architect returns to his office and reads his notes, he realizes that they are illegible as they are corrected and re-corrected resulting in an incredible and intricate set of instructions and contradictions. He therefore tries to recollect what was said and ends up writing what should have been said anyway.

One actually wonders why did they employ a golf course architect? After all they are all "experts" and think they know all about design, construction, re-modelling and up-grading. Actually, if the course turns out to be a success, it will all be thanks to the committee and if it is a flop, blame the architect (and of course the greenkeeper)!

So, if anyone is thinking of joining our great profession, please think twice because you will have to contend with all kind of "experts" who think that designing a course is an absolute cinch! These "experts" usually consist of every member of future and existing clubs, civil servants, politicians, ecologists, environmentalists, greens and reds. But most of all you will have to contend with the awesome, fearsome and most intimidating organization of them all: the greens committee!

Actually, there are three things that ruin a golf course: too much fertilizer, too much water and the greens committee!

Peter Harradine