



CHAPTER 10

The Game of the Future? Let's Hope Not

I read an article the other day about a new championship golf course under construction in North Carolina that was being touted as “longer than 8,000 yards.” C'mon, why not 10,000 yards? And while we're at it, can't we make those pesky holes an inch smaller? Why make the game so damn easy?

It used to be that a “championship” course in this country was around 6,000 yards long. No more. With advancements in equipment technology and an emphasis on strength training among the current generation of touring pros, some of those older courses just don't pose much of a challenge to today's best players.

Of course, the rest of us 26 million hack dogs might slip into catatonic depression if designers made their new courses more difficult to play.

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All this got me thinking: What will the golf course of the future look like? How far will technology be allowed to push the game? What will the golf experience be in 5, 10, or 20 years? So I asked several well-respected pros and golf course architects these burning questions of our day. Since I did not hear back from anyone (I'm relieved that—unlike me—they are all too busy working to answer these kinds of ridiculous inquiries), here is a sampling of the ideas and predictions they might have come up with.

10,000-Yard Standard

Within 5 years, all new 18-hole courses will surpass 10,000 yards. The added length will be necessary because equipment currently being tested—we've heard rumors of a golf ball that produces a tiny nuclear reaction when struck and of hammer-headed drivers constructed with next-generation ballistic polyethylene fibers equipped with diamond-face inserts—will produce drives in excess of 400 yards by the average player. Duffers will feel like Superman, but courses will have to get longer, and 600-yard par 4s and 350-yard par 3s will be commonplace.

Six-Hole Courses

Concurrent with 10,000-yard courses—and the typical 7-hour rounds they will produce—a proliferation of six-hole courses will emerge, aimed at those among us who are too busy to devote an entire day to a round of golf. Catering to the hectic modern lifestyle of people who actually have to work for a living, the 6-hole loop will become the preferred style of play for many. “Get in, play fast, and get out” will be the USGA's new mantra, as they try anything and everything to increase the number of rounds played in the United States. It's even possible that someone will institute a program whereby a golfer has only to play one or two holes, after which a surrogate will step in to finish. “Aha!” you'll be able to announce when your pseudo-score is e-mailed to you during an important business meeting, “I just shot a 28 for six holes!”