

Nathan Crace's

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Protecting Golf Courses Against Technology on the PGA Tour

By: Nathan Crace Date: August 20, 2001

For years, technology has been assaulting the designs of the classic golf courses of the world. It has been a topic of discussion among golf course architects since the early 1900's and new technology continues to expedite their concerns. Recently, the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) issued a call to "draw a line in the sand—at least for tournament golf" to protect the older courses. Some believe the answer is to put into place a "tournament ball" for the pros that would limit the distance the ball would fly through the air and thus preserve the integrity of the design of older tournament courses. This is nothing new either, as both Jack Nicklaus and Pete Dye (to name two) have advocated the "tournament ball" for years.

Still don't think technology is hurting the integrity of the game at the competitive level? Consider this: at the 83rd PGA Championship held this past weekend at the Atlanta Athletic Club, the course played to a par of 70 and over 7,200 yards. After three rounds, 54-hole leader (and eventual champion) David Toms was 14 under par! Fourteen under par! After only three rounds! Sure he had a hole-in-one on the 15th hole on Saturday—but that was the hardest hole on the course (a 243 yard par 3) and Toms hit a 5-wood! And he wasn't the only player to go low throughout the week. A ton of other players were close behind!

However, trying to convince the Tour guys to all play with the same restrictive ball would be about as successful as getting them to all wear spikeless shoes. Not to mention, a lot of people nowadays go to Tour events to see Tiger and the other long-knockers hit booming drives that render fairway bunkers defenseless and leave them with flip wedges into lengthy par fours. So if there can be no ball consensus among the players and the spectators want to see the long ball anyway, what can be done?

Here's an idea I have been advocating for quite some time: make the pros carry their own bags! And I don't mean they can switch to some light-weight carry bag either. I mean the world-traveler-steamer-trunk-sized-staff-bag-full-of-everything-but-the-kitchen-sink bags that they force their caddies to lug around week to week! Granted Woods, Duval and a handful of others are probably in good enough physical condition to handle it, but I would venture to guess that as each round grew older, the drives would grow shorter. I don't want to seem too radical about this idea, so we'll let them have their caddies to read putts and coach them on club selection—but that's all. No physical labor will be allowed by the caddies. No fetching divots. No raking bunkers. No tending pins. And no running to the cooler for bottled water for the players.

I can hear the outcry already and to some extent you're right. I can't remember the last time I carried my bag when I played golf. Like most of you, I have become dependent on motorized golf carts. After all, where would I stow the cooler, my cell phone, and the club sandwich from the turn? Then again, I don't hit the ball nearly as long as the Tour guys who are dancing around these grand old courses as if there were no hazards, I can't score like they do, and—consequently—I don't make nearly the money they make. On the other hand, maybe they could pick up additional endorsement deals for backache medicine and arch support inserts if my policy were put into effect!

Seriously, though, my idea really isn't that radical when you give it some serious thought. After all, these guys are already playing in 95° temperatures wearing long pants—the PGA thinks it gives its members a more "professional appearance." That's miserable enough and they all do it. So I guess if they have to carry their own bags, they should at least be allowed to wear Bermuda-length shorts (hemmed of course—no cut-offs). Besides, the LPGA gets to wear shorts, so we'll allow it too.

Stand up and rally behind my idea—it is one worth at least trying out. It requires no change in technology or sweeping rules modifications. Simply let the players loop for themselves and I guarantee the days of the long ball will be short-lived. Hopefully, someone will at least consider my idea (maybe for a charity event to begin with) and use it to help protect the integrity of not only the older courses, but also the game of golf itself. Just remember where you heard it first!

Nathan Crace is the Senior Design Associate at Maxwell Golf Group in Jackson, Mississippi. His freelance "Lipouts" column is based on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed, log on to www.maxwellgolf.com/lipouts and let him know. Copyright 2001.