



## **Golf Course Re-design and Renovation**

**An Interview by Colin Goehring, director of Golf Lessons Online,  
with Golf Course Designer Kevin Norby      February 19, 2007**

***I'm here today with Kevin Norby, a golf course designer who is based in Chaska, Minnesota and does re-design work for courses all over North America and now into the Caribbean.***

***Kevin, tell us - what are the most important considerations for a developer when they are thinking about doing renovations to their golf course?***

A lot of the older courses that have been around for a while are looking to improve their courses either to attract new membership or to reduce maintenance costs.

Generally what we suggest is to do a hole by hole analysis and then a long range master plan. We look at things like safety, drainage, bunker placement, course conditioning, playability, tree removal and shade and overall course conditioning.

Once that plan is complete, then we work with the course to develop a phasing plan and a budget for improvements. We want to work together to prioritize the changes.

***What can you tell us about creating holes that play fairly?***

This is an important issue because we want to create holes that are challenging to all levels of play, yet not so difficult that beginning golfers are punished for their lack of ability. For example, if the greens are large enough and the hole is relatively short, we will sometimes create a more difficult green. This makes for a challenge for all levels of golfers.

One of the things we take into consideration is the type of golf course we are designing – who will typically be playing on it. Certainly on the public courses we want to make them play a little easier and more forgiving. If we don't accommodate for the weaker players, the courses will end up playing dreadfully slow and become frustrating for everybody. We want to make it so that people will go out and have fun and enjoy the course.

One of the problems that I see happening is that some of the courses opt for faster greens and this can make some of their holes very difficult because the beginning player doesn't typically have the ability to spin the ball as well, so having their shots stick on the green becomes more challenging on these fast greens.

***Are you seeing a lot of courses that want to extend the length of their courses these days because of all the advances in equipment and the ability for people to hit the ball farther?***

I think technology has certainly impacted the game. I think we're finding that people are contacting us because they are faced with a variety of problems. It may be that they are looking to add some additional length or simply eliminating obsolete bunkers. With people driving the ball further, some bunkers simply don't come into play as they were once intended to do.

We're also seeing a lot of interest in improving course conditioning and playability. People are starting to recognize that they are not competing as well with some of the other new courses that have come into their area. Sometimes they simply feel that they need to improve their course in order to compete with the course down the road that is longer and in better condition.

***When a golf course is considering doing a renovation, what are the things that can give them the greatest returns for their investment?***

If you talk to the golf course owner or the golf board, they are typically more focused on visual elements of golf course design... things like the color of the sand, the shape and contour of the greens, the treatment of the pond edges,

However, if you talk to the golf course superintendent, they're typically most interested in maintenance issues, things like bunker drainage, trees, cart traffic, irrigation systems, etc.

So part of the process for us is to bring these groups together to educate them and help them understand the problems involved. If we can improve the overall playability, minimize the maintenance and improve the visual look of the hole, everybody is happy. What we do is walk the course with all parties involved. Then we go back to the drawing board and address all the concerns as best as we can.

Then we present our recommendations to the membership so people have a better understanding of what we can be accomplished by improving the course.

### ***What kinds of problems can arise when a golf course takes on a renovation project?***

One of the primary concerns for people is that they don't want to shut down the entire course for several months. We spend quite a bit of time considering how we can do this effectively.

One of the big issues is hiring an architect that can help you look at all these kinds of issues, including how to prevent taking the entire course out of play. Oftentimes, we can do these projects in phases in order to minimize the impact on play.

### ***How do you design or re-design a green?***

In part, when it comes to designing a green, it is important for us to have an understanding of who will be playing the golf course. We look at how different players of varying ability will play the hole and what type of contour will penalize or reward them for a particular angle of approach.

For daily-fee courses which maintain their cutting heights at a slower speed, we generally put a little more slope in the greens and try to make them fun. For private courses and courses which might keep their greens a bit faster, we flatten the greens a little and try to divide the putting surface into different zones. We also like to provide for a preferred angle of approach and to vary the design of the green depending on whether we want to encourage an aerial or bump and run approach

Finally, we always try to design a green to will allow for water to run off in several different directions. This insures that the green will drain quickly and wont have maintenance issues caused by standing water.. These contours will make for some very interesting breaks in the green.

### ***How fast should a golf course developer set their greens?***

The speed of the greens should be determined by the type of play: Public, private or resort course. Again, a developer must consider who their market is.

The grass species is also a determining factor that a course must consider because this will have a direct bearing on the maintenance costs.

***How can people reach you for a consultation about their golf course or if they are considering hiring a golf course designer?***



Kevin Norby  
Golf Course Designer

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