

Best 36 Golf Holes In Brunswick County Picked

Yeah, I know, I am not a golf course designer or architect. Nor am I a Golf Professional. I am not in any way expert in the analyzing of golf courses or golf holes. I am just a guy who loves the game of golf and thinks he recognizes a challenging golf course and a demanding golf hole.

Several years back Earl Heffner picked the best 18 holes in the area and was able to retain his scalp long enough to get his passport stamped. Back then there were less than half as many courses to choose from. My boss felt it was time for an update so the new courses could be included. So here goes.

Criteria For Selection

The degree of difficulty is the first hallmark of a great golf hole. That may seem obvious to most, but it is a characteristic that is not as easy to design into a hole as you may expect. It is easy to construct a tough or even a too-tough hole. Take two measures of yardage, add a cup of water, stir in a teaspoon of sand and add a dash of heavy rough. If you really want a spicy mixture, season with a wicked dogleg, fairway mounds, a large tree and a smallish green surrounded by railroad ties.

See what I mean? Anyone can design a hole that is too tough for even the best players to par. The U.S. Golf Association often takes a great golf hole in the U.S. Open and makes it almost unplayable by narrowing the fairways and letting the rough grow. These holes often make the best players in the world look like us ordinary golfers when we compete with a great golf hole. A golf hole that is too tough to par is not fun to play and will pile up golfers on the tee of a crowded golf course.

A really good golf hole places a premium on playing the drive in a desired location which will give the golfer an option of making an aggressive approach shot for a birdie or playing a more conservative approach shot for a par. Both drives and approach shots should require the golfer to give some thought to his shot.

Length A Variable

As I mentioned above, length is an ingredient not a necessity for a great golf hole. Length is an ingredient for toughening up a golf hole. Length is best used as a variable on a great

hole. That is the hole offers at least two distinctive routes to attack par or birdie. One route is relatively free of hazards and trouble, but will require a longer approach shot to get a par. A second route of play may require that the golfer flirt with a dogleg, drive over a fairway bunker, bite off a bit more carry over water or risk going out of bounds.

These more exacting shots will reward the golfer with the opportunity to make an easier approach shot for a possible birdie or a routine par.

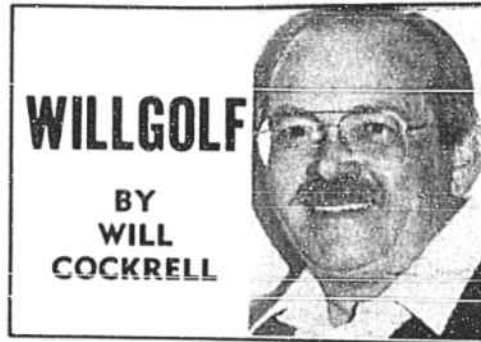
All of the Par 4s and most of the Par 5s on the Best 36 offer at least two such alternative routes to the green. A narrowed fairway, tactical bunkering or waste areas can provide the same kind of challenging options to a straight hole that are found on a dogleg hole. Careful use of water—lakes, streams or ponds—can make a straight away hole play like a dogleg.

Augusta National Golf Club is renowned for its wide rolling fairways and large undulating greens. At Augusta many holes can dictate your playing tactics on any given day by the location of the pins on the greens. The Par 5s on the back nine at The Masters tease the pros to cut corners in order to have a crack at an eagle or routine birdie. The shortest hole at Augusta may be the most difficult on a windy day. The shallow Par 3, 12th hole has been known to extract as many bogies as birdies with a good pin placement.

These are all examples of what I mean by variable length. Take the water and bunkers away from 12th hole at Augusta and you have just a short, very average Par 3. Take the island green of the 17 at the Tournament Players Club out of the lake and it is an easy birdie hole which no one will ever remember.

Fill in the ponds on the Par 3, 9th hole at Brierwood and double the size of the green. It won't seem like a tough hole at all. It will just require a long shot off the tee and a fairly easy scramble for a par if you do not hit the big green.

Replace the marsh with fairway at the Par 5, 17th at Marsh Harbor and you have a double dogleg hole which some big hitters would take a crack at in two shots. If they don't make it,



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they would still have a little flip shot for an easy birdie.

See what I mean about length. It is an ingredient and is best used as a variable on a great hole. As a sidebar to this exercise of selecting the Best 36 Holes, I assembled that longest holes in the area list and labeled it a mythical Monster 18. Only eight of those "longest holes" found their way on the "Best 36" list.

'Nuff said about length.

Elements Of Design

I have already mentioned the most common elements of design: water, bunkers, waste areas, trees, doglegs, rough, and out of bounds. Other elements of design are mounds, contouring of fairways, and green structure. Green structure includes size, speed, undulations and levels. In Brunswick County you can add marsh, marsh grass, oyster shells and prevailing winds.

This is considerable list of elements at the disposal of a course designer. He uses them as a mechanic uses his tool set. There are subsets of these elements which can be used alternately to serve the same purpose for a golf hole. Mounds, collection bunkers, and certain fairway contours may be used to channel an errant shot back toward the desired route of march. They can also be used to "save" really off line shots from unplayable or "unfindable" lies in the jungle.

A fairway which tilts from one side to the other serves to narrow the acceptable driving area. Fairway contouring can leave the golfer with sidehill or downhill lies that change a routine approach into the need for a finesse shot. These shots represent the "monkey wrench" in a designers tool set that put teeth in what otherwise may be a very routine hole. The uphill lie is less a challenge, but it does require that you consider the

loft as well as the length of the club you choose.

We all know that a putting green is a lesser or greater challenge primarily due to how fast it is. That is, how closely the grass is mowed. A green which is very fast does not need many contours to make putting difficult. A green which is large enough to contain several levels for pin placements need not be more than medium fast to present the possibility of three putting.

When course designers build holes that require long approach shots, they generally increase the size of the green to make them more receptive to the lower trajectory clubs needed to reach the green. A larger green allows pin placements which challenge the golfer to be very accurate with with the approach in order to get a birdie or will allow him to hit to a safer area of the green and take his chances with a three putt.

Pulling It All Together For A Great Hole

Course designers are rarely privileged to make all the decisions when laying out a golf course. They are almost always constrained by the amount of land they must use. As a rule today, they are also constrained by the necessity to leave a certain amount of property to be used as lots for homesites, villas, etc. Often the developer wants to select the location of the clubhouse and impose other restrictions on the designer. Natural contours of the land, drainage, and kinds of trees on the property may also serve to limit freedom of desing. Even environmental considerations must be considered in many places where certain wildlife and flora are found.

If these sound like a sifling set of restrictions, they are. Most good course designers turn down many (See BEST 36, Page 14)



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