



We saw a lot of changes in 2012, from the belly putter ban to the remodeling of the revered Old Course at St. Andrews. I am confident that the motivation behind all changes is for "the good of the game." But, I do ponder the question of "where does golf draw the line with regard to change?"

Golf is a traditional game with a history of over four hundred years. Even the formalized game of golf can be traced back over two centuries when the rules

of golf were first created. In that year (1744), I presume there were debates about whether golf even needed rules or should it continue to be played informally as it had been since the sport's inception. And, there is clear evidence the introduced rules resulted in modifications to the ancient game, such as most golf courses standardizing to 18 holes, standardization of the hole size, and equipment regulation, among other things.

As the game progressed through the ages, there have been many changes to the sport. The ball controversy is not unique to the Pro VI. The feathery ball was replaced by the gutta-percha, which caused uproar at the same place that is now the center of change controversy, St. Andrews. The Haskell ball, which again caused outrage and created significant changes to the game, subsequently superseded the gutta-percha. Balata balls also created consequences to golf in the post WWII era. Argument and change is nothing new to golf.

The USGA and the R&A have both understood their role to protect the integrity of the game, and to this end have implemented rules to stem change from going too far. Decades ago the constraint on change was technology itself. Golf equipment makers could only do so much. Now, if desired, the golf ball could be made to fly distances once thought impossible. So, where do we draw the line when regulating change?

A common question is, "Why not make golf easier so more people will want to play the game?" This is a fair question, but a faulty assumption. People don't necessarily want to play games that are considered easy, even if they themselves cannot master the game. It is an odd thing, but many people are not attracted to a sport that seems "masterable". The recently retired USGA Senior Technical Advisor Dick Rugge described bowling as an example. Bowling over the years, due to changes in bowling lane and ball technology, had become easier for the professional. Perfect games of three hundred, which were once a rarity, had become more common. And, with this trend of perfection by the pro, came a decreased interest in bowling by regular folk. Even though most people could not bowl a perfect game, they felt the game had become more "masterable", and interest waned. As the USGA was dealing with the issues of ball flight in golf, they were aware of these type trends in other sports.

On the other side of the coin are people that believe nothing should change in golf, which is also a faulty strategy. All sports have evolved over time. Therefore, to keep golf relevant in modern society, it also must adjust. My previous article describes the changing family dynamic as an impetus toward the creation of unique and alternative golf facilities.

## CHANGE


basketball have all changed their rules in order to keep their sport entertaining and desirable to larger and modern audiences.

The tension over change in golf is now being stretched over the globe. The changes being proposed at St. Andrews have many traditionalists up in arms. At the same time, there is a proposed project in China, which would include mini-golf-style hazards, including a giant panda bear, replica Mayan ruins and man-made gale-force winds. My colleague and architect for the project, Brian Curley, assumes "traditionalists will probably hate it".

So, where is the balance between progress and tradition in golf? I don't have an answer, but I have opinions. (which I often share in other forums.) Both the traditional and the contemporary views on golf need to be understood and evaluated. No idea should be dismissed as being simply non-traditional or too historically deferential. For the good of the game, I believe we need to have impassioned people in both camps. The traditionalists will keep the game infused with the history and legacy of the sport. And, the modernists will continue to ensure golf stays relevant and entertaining to contemporary society. As long as there is a fair tussle between these divergent philosophies, golf will sustain.....at least through 2013.


Happy New Year.

*Paul Albanese, ASGCA is a principal with Albanese & Lutzke, Golf Course Architects/Construction Managers. They have an office in Plymouth, Michigan and are currently working in seven countries on small and large projects.*




SETTLE  
FOR PAR?  
NEVER.


GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE  
CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT



Plymouth, Michigan  
+1 734.667.5150

Edinburgh, Scotland  
+44 (0)7946.929334





ALBANESE