

It's Nothing But a Large Hole That's Full of Sand

BY RON FURLONG

Isn't there a song about bunkers? It goes something like: Bunkers, what are they good for? Absolutely nothin' ...

The funny thing about bunkers (although no one's laughing) is that what might be a great bunker for one golfer may be an absolute rat hole for the next guy.

Some like it fluffy. Some like it firm. Some actually want the fried-egg effect. Others don't. Some like it brown, some like it white. Give me white and firm. No, I'll take white, but fluffy.

It's enough to drive those of us in the business of maintaining these bunkers a little batty. I think the thing many golfers forget about bunkers is that they are quite literally hazards.

In the Rules of Golf, the United States Golf Association describes a bunker as "a hazard consisting of a prepared area of ground, often a hollow, from which turf or soil has been removed and replaced with sand or the like."

"Or the like," that's the best part. Doesn't say firm sand. Doesn't say fluffy sand. It says "sand or the like."

I think my favorite definition of a bunker comes from the Macmillan Dictionary: "A large hole full of sand."

Can't get any simpler than that.

What we as managers of these nasty hazards want is something that looks fairly attractive and, above all else, drains well. Easy maintainability. Sand (as well as the design of the bunker) that can put up a fight against washout and foreign matter intrusion. That's all we want.

Golfers, although they often don't realize it, probably want the same things. They don't want bunkers holding water. They don't want bunker faces washed of sand. What they really want is a hazard throughout the course that is, first and foremost, playable.



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What they often think they want is wherein the problem lies. This false desire for specifics. An assumed need for a particular color or a particular texture. How exactly they want their ball to lie on top of or in the sand. How steep the face should be, and how thick the distance between the sand and the turfgrass (the lip).

The only thing that should matter on any given golf course is what makes the bunkers easy to maintain, as well as their ability to withstand (to a certain degree) Mother Nature and foreign intrusion.

You may wonder why I didn't throw the word consistency into the things that should matter. Although you can make an

argument for having a general consistency to a course's bunkers throughout, another argument can be made that the two terms — consistency and hazard — really don't go together.

Bunkers are hazards. Bunkers are meant to be avoided. That's the idea. Removing the penalty from hitting into the bunker kind of defeats the purpose of the bunker. One of my biggest pet peeves when watching professional golf on television is when the best golfers in the world actually aim for a bunker on a particularly difficult green surround. What exactly is the point of having that bunker if it's easier to play out of than the short turf that surrounds it?

Is it really unfair to have bunkers that play differently throughout the golf course? Wouldn't that feature alone make it more interesting, and actually make golfers think even more about how to avoid hitting into these things?

If a bunker is not there to add difficulty to a golf shot, it has no business being there in the first place. Consistency may very well take away from that desired difficulty.

Having said that, I must admit that I don't really care if they are consistent or not (which might very well mean I prefer inconsistency). Again, my biggest thing, from a managerial aspect, is the desire to have bunkers that drain well and look good. And let's throw in not costing a small fortune to maintain either.

Next time you're in a bunker and you want to complain about the lie or the steepness of the face, or the texture or color of the sand, think about that Macmillan definition again:

"A large hole full of sand."

That's all they are.

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