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COMPACT and HYBRID

Small-footprint facilities allow “unstructured” golf experiences as well as serious skill-building



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Emerging Trend Addresses Time Restraints of the Modern Golfer, Offers Opportunity to Hone the Short Game

We live in an age, and an industry, where time is at a premium and everyone's perpetually on the go. We work long hours and weekends, check voicemails and send text messages between family obligations. We generally find ourselves wishing we had a few extra hours in the day.

This is a description that likely blankets a large segment of the golfing population. Even the most avid of players are enduring the time crunch of life and are beginning to seek alternative golf experiences that satisfy their fix and fit into their schedule. Ranges and other practice amenities are terrific platforms for these golfers. Furthermore, the emerging trend of small-footprint facilities that are, in many cases, part golf course and part practice facility are taking it to another level.

These are exactly the type of facilities we're profiling in this month's cover story (page 34). We explore new offerings from Trilogy Golf Club at Ocala Preserve, The Proving Grounds at Long Cove and The Playgrounds at Bluejack National. They are meant to reward a time investment much shorter than the four-hour round, while moving the time-compressed golfer out of his or her hitting bay on the range into a free-form environment in which creativity and short-game improvement can blossom.

The second part of this story (page 38) highlights several premium American golf destinations that have successfully supplemented their practice range with unique short-game and short-course offerings.

Furthermore, be sure to read this month's edition of Tour Talk (page 46), where we highlight the inspiring story of PGA Tour stalwart Erik Compton, a two-time heart transplant recipient who has overcome tremendous obstacles on his way to competing on the PGA Tour full time.

As always, we want to hear from you! Your feedback helps make the GRAA and *Golf Range Magazine* better. So please let us know if you decide to implement an idea or strategy you've read in either our best practice emails or in *Golf Range Magazine*.

Thanks much,

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Golf Ranges: Where the Fun Starts

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A GENERATION AGO GOLF HAD A shortage of courses. Then came two decades of ambitious construction, which led to oversupply. Now comes an experimental phase – clubs and developers are hoping to create facilities that better address today’s patterns of living. That means shorter, more catered golf experiences that fit modern time and financial limitations. An auxiliary impact: Golfers are provided an opportunity to sharpen their short game and have meaningful skill-building experiences that take less time.

This month’s issue addresses this emerging trend with a two-part cover story that firstly describes the inspiration behind it and how it’s impacting several high-profile facilities including the Tom Lehman-designed Trilogy Golf Club at Ocala Preserve and the Tiger Woods-designed Bluejack National. Secondly, we highlight some of the premier American golf properties that have supplemented their practice ranges with alternative short-game facilities. >>



Trilogy Golf Club at Ocala Preserve

Part Golf Course, Part Practice Ground

BY DAVID GOULD

These unconventional projects can often be part golf course and part practice grounds, depending on need and preference, even switchable between the two functions. The design trend is seen in facilities like The Proving Grounds outside of Dallas, The Playgrounds in Houston and the 50-acre, walking-only Trilogy Golf Club at Ocala Preserve in central Florida.

They are meant to reward a time investment much shorter than the four-hour round, while moving the time-compressed golfer out of his or her hitting bay on the range into a free-form environment in which creativity – so vital to good golf from inside 150 yards – can blossom. And while such an environment is alluring to score-conscious low-handicappers, these compact hybrid golfscapes are particularly ideal for family golf experiences. And that’s important for player development.

Course architect Tripp Davis has been an early exponent of this new approach, helping to convince leaders of Long Cove, an upscale golf community north of Dallas, to try something different. Davis was sure that golfers wouldn’t miss having 7,000 yards of golf if they could hustle over to The Proving Grounds and either practice in a round-simulating manner or have a bit of fun playing the loop of short holes that zig-zag around this 17-acre property. The development has been highly successful with its homesites – nearly \$40 million in sales in under two years – which is a bright sign for this alternative golf concept.

“At one end of the spectrum, we drew inspiration from professional practice facilities where players are able to re-create every shot they might encounter on a full course,” comments Long Cove’s developer, Don McNamara. “At the other end, we wanted a low-pressure environment where a father could actually enjoy teaching a daughter to play, or a whole family could enjoy the game on a summer evening in bare feet.” And yes, we do recall that shoeless golf dates back to Sam Snead in his West Virginia boyhood.

Davis found the right balance of the two needs with The Proving Grounds, and probably inspired

another Texas high-end development to the south. Bluejack National, 45 minutes northwest of Houston, does have a Tiger Woods-designed championship 18-hole course, but the heart of the Bluejack golf amenity its smaller-footprint facility called The Playgrounds, also designed by Woods. True to its whimsical name, The Playgrounds provides “an unstructured golf experience” that makes it easy for family and friends to get in the flow of some ball-striking fun – typically with a half-set of clubs that rests easy on the shoulder. On the same course at the same time, an improvement-minded core golfer could be creating his or her customized scoring-shot challenge. That’s an approach to skill-building that dovetails perfectly with the “complete-game” philosophy of such leading golf academies as Arizona-based Vision54, home base of famed coaches Pia Nilsson and Lynn Marriott.

In tandem with design partner Tom Lehman, Davis took things a step further in conceptualizing the Trilogy facility at Ocala Preserve. That design includes an 18-hole par-3 routing, a “Short Loop” within it that provides a six-hole round playable in 60 minutes, plus a “Skills Course” concept within the Short Loop, complete with designated drop-your-ball-here locations about 100 yards out.

If someone wants to stretch their tee-to-green journeys toward a more traditional scale, there is a six-hole course with four par-4s that range from 320 to 440 yards, plus a par-3 with many tees that plays from 90 to 175 yards and a par-5 with a top yardage of 530 yards. Go around that once and you’ve covered 2,200 yards of golf in about an hour – three times around is an old-fashioned dose of golf, at 6,600 yards.

Facilities and experiences from this new playbook sweep aside the game’s intimidation factor. The time issue is also elegantly solved, and meanwhile the latest data on skill acquisition tells us that practicing and experimenting on layouts like these offers the straightest road to improvement. More such projects, with extra twists and wrinkles to increase the appeal, are likely in golf’s future. ●



Golf course architect Tripp Davis is an early proponent of compact and hybrid facilities, helping design both Long Cove and Trilogy Golf Club.



Co-designer Tom Lehman, the 2006 U.S. Ryder Cup Captain, walked with residents of Trilogy Golf Club at Ocala Preserve during the facility's grand opening in February of this year.

