

Adhering to design formulas isn't always the best idea, unless you're Seth Raynor building another unique Redan par 3. Or if you've decided to evaluate the forward tees at your course.

It was Alice Dye who pressed her husband Pete and other architects to design better forward tees. The men and women in plaid responded appropriately. Most courses built since the late 1980s feature better forward tee placement since Dye's formula became widely accepted as an industry norm.

But too many older courses have not gone along, and lesser players are paying the price at clubs and munis across the land.

The National Golf Foundation — for what its numbers are worth — says the average woman player drives the ball 140 yards. Fairways woods travel on average around 120 yards. That's about 75 percent of the average man's distance.

So in this day of 7,000 yards barely clinging to its place as a "championship standard," that would mean the better female players will play a course "as it was intended" if it clocks in at around 5,250 yards. The average man would probably like his golf in the 6,400 yard range. So the average woman or older male player or youngster should be teeing off from a cumulative 5,000 yards or much less, depending on the terrain or hole design.

Sadly, as older courses struggle to deal with modern equipment and debate back-tee yardages, too many haven't gotten around to rethinking their forward tees.

Oh, sure, a few throw an extra forward set out and paint them everything but red so the cranky geezers might consider playing where they should. And we call them "forward" tees now. But has this really addressed the issue?

Probably not.

As courses look for more yardage to extend back tees, a subset of golfers may be embarrassed to ask if their courses should play shorter for some. Granted, we all know of the clubs where a few committee types argue that the forward tee placement isn't the problem, it's the fairway contour that doesn't reach the forward tee. Or the hazard that's in their way.

Let's Get Back to the Forward Tees

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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(Even though it's much easier to shift a tee than to move bunkers and creeks or to maintain extra acres of fairway.)

Golfers do have an uncanny ability to let pride get in their way, whether it's talk of moving tees back or forward.

So it's up to the superintendents, golf professionals and managers to seek the help of architects and re-evaluate their courses' forward tees. As always, the key is to quietly steer committees or course management toward better-designed forward tees because they will address a sizeable percentage of your regular play. And never forget that you have to make it their idea.

Here's a recap of Alice Dye's formula, which still works for forward tee design:

- ▶ Par 3 — 60 yards to 150 yards.
- ▶ Par 4 — 230 to 340 yards.
- ▶ Par 5 — 401 to 430 yards.
- ▶ Par 6 — Avoid.

Dye says: "Shorter yardages are not meant to take the challenge out of the game. Instead, its goal should be to adapt the playing characteristics of the holes to the ability of the player."

In other words, don't hesitate to roll out the "play the course as it was intended" speech. Good players want back tees to play their courses as architects meant them to play, so why not use the same logic with forward tees?

Remind golfers that you're not trying to cheat them out of a certain experience by moving them up and around faster, or away from improper playing angles. Instead, you're trying to get them to play the design the way it was meant to be played. Even if we can never be sure what that is.

And if they don't believe your intentions are pure, just blame Alice Dye and her revolutionary thoughts on forward tee placement.

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