

Every Good Boy Deserves Footing

Bob and Dave were playing doubles together when Bob's 20-foot putt hit right chains and dropped by the basket. Dave hit left chains and dropped three feet away. "Those were two of the worst shots I've ever seen," said Bob. "I'm appalled," said Dave. On the next hole, a 300-foot par three, Jared stepped up and threw a laser that hit chains on the right side and dropped next to the basket. His partner, Kyle, threw another laser that hit the left side and dropped nearby. "Those were two of the most incredible shots I've ever seen!" Bob excitedly whispered to Dave. Dave whispered back, "I'm amazed!"

The moral of the story, of course, is to pick a partner who putts better than you do whenever you play doubles. But there are two more lessons. First, hitting the middle of the basket from 20 feet is relatively easy, while even getting close to the basket from 300 feet demonstrates great skill. Second, from 20 feet, missing right and missing left are two different shots; from 100 yards, they are two virtually identical shots.

SAME DIFFERENCE

Last time we talked about how shots that barely miss the fairway don't deserve harsh punishments (actually, they deserve the opportunity to redeem themselves). This time I'm arguing that virtually identical good shots should be equally rewarded.

When presidential polls say that 34 percent of those asked favor Larry Lyington, and 32 percent like Don DeSeever, and that the margin of error is 5 points, we say that those two candidates are essentially tied. Similarly, when Larry and Don throw 350-foot drives on the same line that land side by side, we can say that they threw pretty much the same drive. The following week, when poll numbers show support of 39 percent and 25 percent, the candidates are clearly not tied (Don should have just apologized instead of defending his brother). And when our boys' drives land 30 feet apart, they clearly threw different shots.

When the difference between two good drives is negligible, the difference in rewards should be negligible. If that's not the case, then something's wrong. Let's say that the guy ahead of you threw a drive that you thought was great, so you throw the same line and nail it, coming to rest just a yard to the left. But he's on a flat, smooth patch of grass, and you're in a hole that looks like

it was dug by a giant armadillo. That's not fair to you. Or, maybe even more common, you both have good footing, but he's got a clean line to the basket, and you're stuck behind a random tree with no shot. Random trees don't belong in the fairway, so again, the result is not fair to you. It's random, unlucky, arbitrary.

LIVING IN THE PASSED

Back in school, there really wasn't much difference between getting a 93 or a 92 on a test. One little point—who really cares? What's interesting is that the tiny difference between a 93 and a 92 is the same as the tiny difference between a 65 and a 64—except that the 65 passes, and the 64 fails. We just have to draw the line somewhere. Someone might complain (and some do), "It's not fair—how can one point be the difference between passing and failing?" It's a reasonable question, and here's one reasonable response: "You both did so poorly, you're lucky we didn't fail you both."

Most sports have lines that give us some leeway but ultimately define the difference between success and failure. A kick between the uprights is a field goal or a PAT. A pitch over the plate and between the knees and mid-torso is a strike. A ball that hits either side of the pin hard enough



gets the spare. We don't have to be perfect; we just aim for perfection and succeed by being close enough. But as we get further from perfection, "close enough" can suddenly turn into "no good at all." Field goal attempt squeaks inside the upright? Three points. Just outside? Zippo.

When you're trying to split a 20 foot gap, there's very little difference between a throw that's perfect and a throw that's twelve inches to the right of perfect. There's also very little difference between a throw that's nine feet from perfect and a throw that's ten feet from perfect, except that the former passes through, and the latter hits a tree.

Some people will say, "It doesn't seem fair that the shot just barely in the water takes a stroke, and that the one mere inches from the edge gets off scot-free." Again, that's not an unreasonable observation. And again, here's a not unreasonable piece of advice: since the guy who's just in-bounds clearly wasn't aiming to land a disc's width from the lake, he must not have executed properly; maybe he should just start worrying about his next shot be grateful that he's not OB. There has to be a point where we say "close, but no cigar." We'll cut you some slack, but we won't cut you unlim-ited slack.

TURNING STRAWN INTO GOLD

The City of Columbia, Missouri, wanted a course that could host major tournaments and attract disc golfers throughout the year. Strawn Road Park has tall trees, big hills, and two wide, meandering creeks that make it ideal for disc golf. From the Blue tees it'll be an epic par 68 at about 9,000 feet, and when the touring pros come to town, moving the baskets to the gold pin locations will stretch it out to about 10,000 feet. In line with the goal of making sure that virtually identical good shots get equally good results, we used two techniques I'd never seen before.

Hole 5 is a par four that climbs the first steep hill on the course. Most players won't be able to reach the top with their drives, so we used rock walls to create flat landing areas on the hillside. These landing areas will ensure that everyone who hits one of the three tiers will have good footing and a good, fair route to the basket. The higher the tier, the easier

the approach shot will be. (See photo.) I've seen hillside greens and tees that were built up to some extent, but never hillside landing areas; this feature will substantially reduce erosion concerns on this hole and will allow us to incorporate a hillside that would otherwise have been too steep to throw from.

Hole 18 is a spectacular par five that is my new favorite finishing hole. From the tee, you can see the first bend in Harmony Creek 60 feet below. A well-placed 480-foot drive will land just short of the water and will leave you looking at the pin through big trees and across more bends in the creek. For eagle, all you'll need to do is thread a 450-footer that will

cross the creek three times before settling by the basket, just 30 feet from OB. Of course, if that game plan exceeds your skill set, you can play for birdie by playing your second shot along the creek or through the woods to the base of the next hill. From either of those landing areas, you can approach over the creek and tap in for four.

The problem came on the drive of the eagle route. The landing area is generously wide and offers a straight look from the right side or a left-to-right look from the left side. Drives that land toward the middle may have a righty or lefty hyzer route to the green. But there is a massive tree on the creek bank that creates a small strip in that xxxxx-foot-wide landing area where you have no shot at all. If it were a small tree, we'd take it out, as we did whenever necessary throughout the course. But removing this beauty was out of the question. We needed another solution.

From 480 feet away, nobody deserves to lose an eagle opportunity because his shot landed behind this tree, instead of landing two feet to the right or left. That kind of arbitrary punishment results from lack of luck, not lack of skill, and we needed to rectify the situation. We needed a **Solution To Reduce Arbitrariness When Necessary**. This **STRAWN** defines an area where players get a tiny bit of relief, just enough to give them the same kind of shot their neighbor gets. (Incredibly, my friends, it seems that it has happened again: the answer we required somehow acronymically spells the name of the park where it was first used.)

If you make a good shot—in this case, a great shot—you have earned

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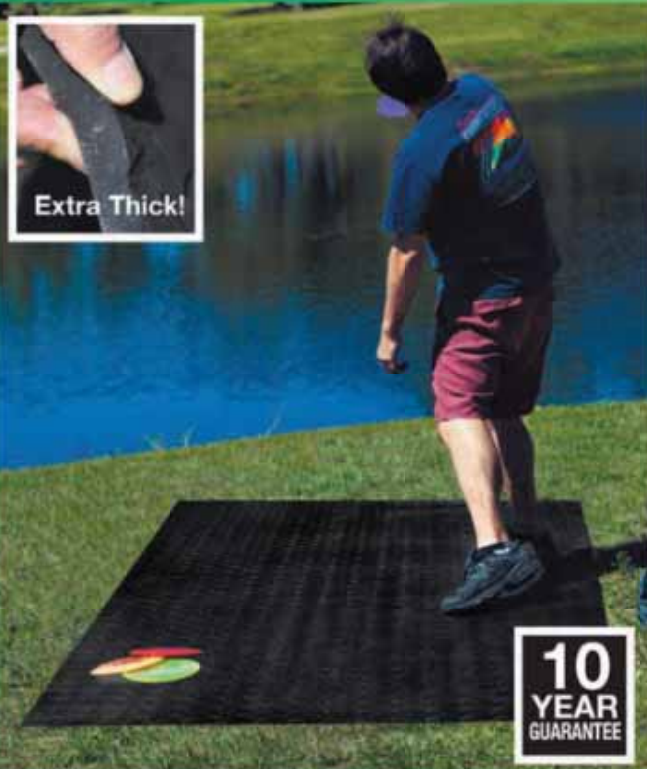
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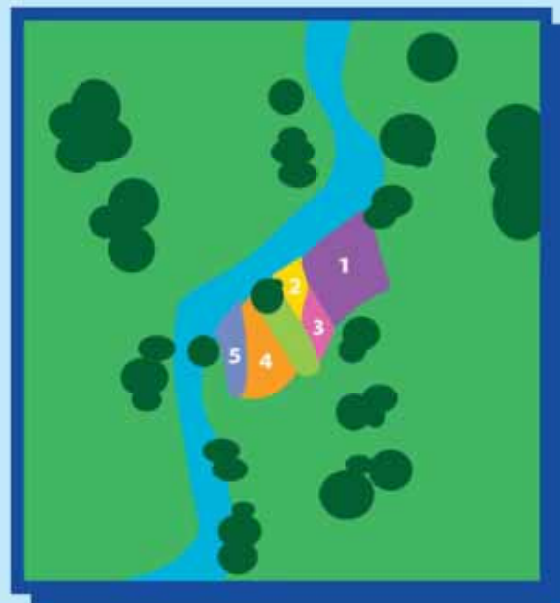
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|  Approach right side |  Approach left side |
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|  Approach right or middle |  STRAWN |

your reward, and one of the designer's top responsibilities is to make sure you get that reward. As I've said many times, I'm not a fan of designer-created features that force you to move your lie. I prefer to use features created by God, or at least features that look they were created by God. I always hope to use mandatories only when necessary, and to use "artificial" OB (sidewalks, cart paths, rope, and so on, as opposed to creeks and ponds) only when necessary. But in this case, moving your lie two feet gives you a better shot and promotes fairness, so I'd rather break my rule than make you suffer. Please note that the name **STRAWN** includes the words "when necessary." I hope to only use them as a last resort, and I hope that all **STRAWNS** will have as natural a look as possible.

Let's remember that these features are meant to help good shots. If you're stuck behind a tree somewhere off the fairway, please don't be asking "Dude, where's my **STRAWN**?" If you didn't throw a good shot, this solution isn't for you. I encourage all designers to work hard to make sure players who miss the fairway (within reason) have an opportunity to recover. If we removed every tree that could cause a problem, we wouldn't have super-fair courses; we'd have open fields. It's not possible to eliminate all luck from the game, and I doubt we'd enjoy it quite as much if we did; but when designers have a chance to help players get the reward they deserve, we have the obligation to try.

—John Houck #1688 has solo-designed more than 90 courses, including 15 for PDGA national and world championships. He has also written extensively about course design, and many of his articles are available at HouckDesign.com.

Just because you don't have a lot of power, doesn't mean you don't deserve more distance.

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