

SETTING UP A COURSE FOR A HICKORY EVENT.

There are a number of factors to be considered in setting up a course for the playing of a Hickory event. The main points are as follows.

- It must be understood that even the low markers in the field will lose at least 10% of their normal distance from the tee using modern balls, and a slightly higher percentage from the irons. This of course will depend a bit on conditions on the day but is a rough guide. The other consideration is that off centre shots will travel substantially less than this and as the hickory clubs have a very small sweet spot this occurs regularly for the average golfer. You can count on a low marker to average about 220m from the tee with a driver in conditions with an average amount of run on the course. However the ball doesn't fly as high off the hickories as it does off the modern clubs so any long carries over water or any other hazard without an alternate route should be avoided.

- In the context of the overall distance - or the individual distances of each hole - it is prudent to take at least 15% off the length of par 5's over 450 metres, par 4's over 360 metres and par 3's over 170 metres. Of course this can be adjusted to be even shorter in wet conditions, or lengthened on certain holes in dry conditions. A good guide is to look to the ladies tees on the longer holes or take the meterage number and use the yardage equivalent. Don't be afraid to really shorten 1 or 2 of the par 3's and a couple of the par 4's especially if the green is guarded by bunkers at the front.

- Again, when it comes to the approach or tee shots to greens it must be remembered that the ball doesn't fly as high, and there is a lot less spin generated on the modern balls by the old club heads. This means that holes shouldn't be cut tight over bunkers or too close to the front edges of the greens unless a ball can be landed short and bounced or chased onto a green. Greens shouldn't be rolled or too firm to help compensate for this lack of spin as well, which is even more of an issue when you are hitting less than a full shot with the wedges or short clubs.

- Bunker sand conditions should be firm if possible as most of the hickory clubs have very narrow soles with little bounce, and were designed for firmer conditions, so bunkers should have a good level of moisture if possible.

In setting up your course for a hickory event remember that the majority of players are there to have a fun, enjoyable day out, and they aren't playing for sheep stations.

The nature of the hickory clubs ensures the difficulty level is there anyway and when hickory clubs were around the nature of courses was a bit different with minimal water hazards and always a route to the putting surface along the ground.

Also, if possible green speeds should be reigned in to reflect the feel of the time when hickory shafted clubs were actually being used.

There is no better feeling than a ball struck from the middle of the small clubhead of a good hickory, and nothing more enjoyable in golf than seeing a well struck shot with a hickory fly straight and long, so try to compliment this with your course set up.

A last piece of advice for anyone setting up a course for use by hickories is to take a set out on the course and play a few holes to get the true feel of the differences between how the modern clubs play compared to the hickories.

Steven Jacobsen

Golf Course Manager
Carnarvon Golf Club
August 2014