



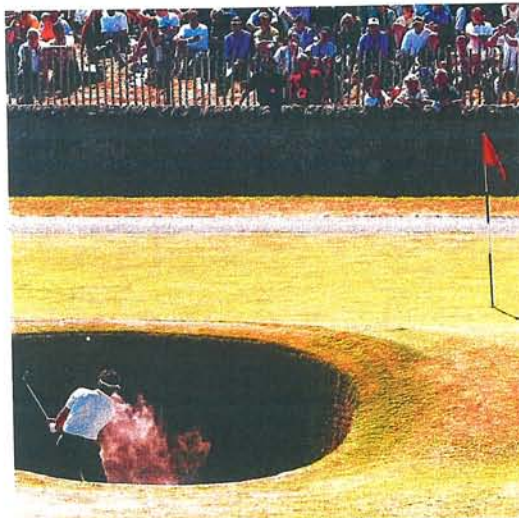
from the designer's desk

robert trent jones II

site + setting = course rating?

That seems to be the modern formula for the flurry of ratings featured in golf magazines today. It all started in the 60's. That "ranking by merit" was taken over by publications using a variety of methods by which they arrived at so-called equitable lists published by editors who knew which courses were worthy because they played them. Then came the "jury system" who had hundreds of raters using a mathematical formula based upon strict categories and a difficult to challenge numerical methodology. Then another notable magazine invited a few knowledgeable people to join a smaller but serious rating panel exchanging their views throughout the year.

But what about rating courses by the golfing cultures in which they are set? The Australians have their own view but playing from the back tees. Asia has a variety of cultural experiences, stopping at a tea house every fourth or fifth hole. Europe thinks courses in the British Isles are only good if in dunesland or on sandy soils, creating tight turf and good drainage. In the late 1980's, when Europeans played the Links at Spanish Bay, they loved it because of the linksland character, while Asians enjoyed Poppy Hills because of the parkland character. They came back to play the course they loved and the other one, from their cultural perspective, was a "play it once" course. Some of these golfing gypsies were raters in their various home countries...



My view of the various rating systems is they are made up of an unworthy and somewhat imperial formula based on a predominantly U.S. point of view where tradition and walking the old courses built before golf carts have disproportionate effect on the ratings. But we all know balls and equipment have improved from the "golden era" of the 20's of wonderful golf architecture in America. We are now in the platinum era of great new golf courses, tougher, longer and very different from those of the past.

The raters should have no pre-conceptions of what is a good or bad golf course. They should mainly be concerned with playability, conditioning and shot values. The setting should be clearly secondary much like the great gold frames around paintings in the Vatican whose value is less revered than, say, Michelangelo's work on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. ■

(to be continued)

à quoi tient un classement?

Les magazines de golf classent les parcours à tour de bras. En 1960, les journalistes jouaient et les classaient « au mérite » avant qu'un magazine de renom ne crée un jury et des paramètres stricts, suivi par un autre et son panel compact échangeant des infos toute l'année. Mais tous, ils font l'impasse sur d'importantes valeurs. En Australie, on juge depuis le tee arrière. Au Japon, on s'arrête pour une tasse de thé après quatre trous. En Europe, on pense que le parcours britannique doit d'abord être un links... A Pebble Beach, l'europpéen préfère « mon » Spanish Bay (ambiance links) à « mon » Poppy Hills dans les arbres, adoré par l'asiatique. Et la cotation peut devenir très subjective quand on fait appel à des juges américains habitués aux parcours bâtis avant les voitures. Aujourd'hui, balles et clubs ont changé. Les nouveaux longs parcours se défendent becs et ongles. Aussi les juges, sans idée préconçue, devraient d'abord s'occuper de leur « jouabilité » avant de s'intéresser à la valeur de leur implantation.