

Interview | Jan Bel Jan, ASGCA

# Scoring for all

*By Design* speaks with the newest member of the ASGCA Executive Committee, Jan Bel Jan, ASGCA, to find out more about her scoring tees concept and how it can benefit all golfers—from novice to professional

In 2011, golf course architect Jan Bel Jan, ASGCA, inaugurated the concept of ‘scoring tees’ for Green Valley Country Club in Greenville, South Carolina. The concept opens the game to a much wider group of participants by creating age, gender and skill neutral tees. In 2015, Bel Jan expanded the concept at Pelican’s Nest Golf Club in Bonita Springs, Florida, by using on-site fill generated during the renovation of the club’s Hurricane Course to add scoring tees. She now finds herself with a growing list of golf club clients wanting to adopt this successful concept. We spoke with Jan to find out more.

## Tell us about ‘scoring tees’

Everybody wants to score better—that’s how I came up with the name ‘scoring tees.’

When a new golf course is designed, it’s usually done with the excellent player in mind, players who have faster swing speed and thus can hit the ball farther. Such designs begin with the back or tournament tees and continue with other tees farther forward to accommodate golfers with



moderate to average swing speeds, including men and women.

In addition to designing better courses for these traditional classes of golfers, I wondered why we couldn’t do something more for players with slower clubhead speeds. There have been calls for the usual modified golf courses—whether they be three holes, six holes, nine holes, etc.—to keep people in the game and as a way to introduce new players. Few clubs have the resources to build such stand-alone courses; however, many clubs can afford to introduce ‘scoring tees’ to give themselves a more playable ‘course within a course.’

## What are the principle purposes of scoring tees?

First, to provide golf holes and a golf course that golfers with slower swing speeds can play and enjoy. To accomplish this, we locate scoring tees forward of existing tees and in such a way that penal hazards are either eliminated or can be managed more easily. Immediate advantages of using scoring tees are that golfers will have more fun and enjoy faster play. If we can make it possible for players with slower clubhead speeds to have more success getting on greens in regulation,

we have the opportunity to keep them in the game, and this, in turn, will keep members and memberships healthy.

Chris Sheehan, director of golf at Pelican’s Nest, tells a story about when he worked with Craig Harmon, son of the legendary Claude Harmon. His sons all teed up at the tips and then Claude marched farther forward. They protested “What are you doing, Dad? We’re all playing from back here,” and he said: “Boys, I’ve hit fairways and greens my whole life. *This is my tee.* This is where I play from today.” Claude Harmon won the Masters Tournament in 1948 and his short game was still world-class. He was not too proud, however, to advance to a forward tee when playing against his long-hitting sons. Neither should you be.

Second, scoring tees can also be used profitably by even the best players in the club. If you look at collegiate golf, many coaches have their teams play from the most forward set of markers at least once a week. Why? Because it helps team members learn better course management and how to hone a better short game as well as to gain confidence in scoring low. On a shorter hole where low handicappers will not need to hit a driver, they must think about which club to use from the

“If we can make it possible for players with slower clubhead speeds to have more success getting on greens in regulation, we have the opportunity to keep them in the game



The scoring tee on the ninth hole of the Hurricane course at Pelican's Nest sits behind a fairway bunker, 230 yards from the center of the green. The hole plays 443 yards from the tips.



tee. They must also plan where to land their tee shots so as to give themselves the best approach into the green.

### Is the name 'scoring tees' important?

Yes, because the label 'scoring tees' is all-inclusive. There are many golf courses that already have a set of formal tees between 4,000 and 4,400 yards, but they're titled 'speed tees,' 'fast tees,' 'forward tees,' 'short tees,' 'ladies' tees,' 'fun tees,' etc. All those labels tend to exclude certain golfers. If somebody says 'let's play the fast tees,' you might feel that you must play fast. That puts a lot of pressure on a short hitter or less skilled player.

Colored tee markers are a traditional feature of most golf courses, but this can present difficulties, too. Twenty years ago I did a presentation for the USGA about the stigma of the red tees or short tees for women, and the stigma still exists. Some clubs have moved away from using colored tee markers and use unique names for their teeing grounds based on topographic features or

different kinds of trees or historical names associated with the golf course.

At Pelican's Nest there are seven different sets of tee markers. Roman numerals are used. The Scoring Tees have their own designation, the 'S' tee, with their own scorecard and ratings for men and women. The fact that the club honors the Scoring Course with its own name and scorecard emphasizes that this is an official 'course within a course,' that it provides an alternative challenge, and that it is age-, gender- and skill-neutral. By creating these formal teeing grounds, the club proclaims 'we want you here' whether you are a junior, super-senior or scratch player.

### How would clubs go about introducing scoring tees on their course?

Every golf course is different—in the past year, I've played eight courses in Ireland, four in England and a variety of

courses in the U.S. All but one course had forward tees of 5,100 to 5,800 yards—those long courses are not fun for players who have slow clubhead speeds, whether juniors, novice adults or distance-challenged experienced golfers. So the first thing I would do is to look at the scorecard and see if the total yardage from the forward tees is more than 5,000 yards. If it is, it is too long for 'scoring tees.' The ideal scorecard for the shorter hitter will be somewhere between 4,000 and 4,400 yards. If more than 50 percent of the female golfers at your club have handicaps over 25, the length of the course they commonly play is too long.

It's also important to put yourself in the shoes of shorter hitters and observe how



At the par-four 13th, the scoring tee placement means players can avoid a forced carry over sand

they really hit the ball. Take into account the trajectory of their shots. Consider the number and length of forced carries and the locations of cross-hazards. As for everyone, wind conditions and firmness of ground impact playability.

Try to make the size of scoring tees similar to the others on the course—at Pelican’s Nest, the scoring tees are at least 25 by 25 feet (to match the turning radius of a triplex) so the golf

course superintendent can manage them cost-effectively and time-effectively. The scoring tees should blend seamlessly with the existing contours so they appear to have been part of the original design. Scoring tees allow more players to follow the USGA/PGA’s encouragement to ‘tee it forward.’ We’ve seen that once players experience better scores because they can more often reach the greens in regulation, they are less interested in going back to a longer course. Enthusiastic participation will almost surely result in increased pace of play and rounds played as well as in greater satisfaction by the members.

**What else would a club need to consider?**

It’s important to have club leaders who believe in the concept because they want members and guests to have fun, and who have the passion to implement the idea. If finances do not permit creating scoring tees for every hole, the club can begin with a loop of a few holes that return

to the clubhouse or some such convenient arrangement. Once you’ve built scoring tees you need to have programs and cheerleaders who will use and promote the use of the tees. With enthusiastic encouragement by the club’s leadership, particularly the golf pro, results can come quickly.

Clubs can adapt or devise their own events for these tees and provide added entertainment and enjoyment for the members. At Pelican’s Nest they schedule and promote events from the scoring tees that include all players such as ‘Five-iron Fridays.’ And on ‘Three-club Thursdays’ you and your chums go out with whatever three clubs you want. How much fun is that?! ●

*For more on scoring tees, download the PGA of America’s guidebook Setting Up Golf Courses for Success from [www.pga.org](http://www.pga.org). And for good advice on introducing scoring tees at your club, find an ASGCA member at [www.asgca.org/members](http://www.asgca.org/members).*



The Scoring Course at Pelican’s Nest has its own scorecard, emphasizing its status