



“Scoring Tees” Provide a Course for Everyone

Pelican’s Nest Golf Club builds 4,000-yard course within a course at minimal expense to appeal to golfers of all ages and abilities

By Roger Graves, Senior Writer

One of the greatest challenges facing PGA Professionals and golf facilities nationally is providing a fair, equitable and enjoyable golf experience for players of all ages and abilities. At Pelican’s Nest Golf Club in Bonita Springs, Florida, PGA Director of Golf Chris Sheehan and the club’s board of directors teamed with golf course architect Jan Bel Jan to create “an equal playing field” for all golfers as part of its Greens and Bunker Restoration Project.

After conducting extensive research and analyses, Pelican’s Nest and Bel Jan constructed “Scoring Tees” on the Hurricane Course — a golf course within a golf course — to allow players with club-head speeds between 55 and 65 mph to reach greens in regulation, record far more pars and birdies, and

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generally enjoy a golf experience similar to the facility’s long hitters. Even more impressive, Pelican’s Nest completed construction of the Scoring Tees cost-effectively by using the excavated greens mix from their recent greens and bunker restoration project to build new forward tees on 17 of the Hurricane Course’s 18 holes.

The entire project began on April 20 and was completed on Sept. 25, with Sheehan, Bel Jan, Pelican’s



Nest Superintendent Jason Zimmerman, General Manager Dave Gillespie, Sam Morrow at Sanders Golf and the club’s board of directors all pitching in to create a 4,000-yard stand-alone golf course within the footprint of the 7,000-yard Hurricane Course. Now, players young and old have a comfortable course to play.

Sheehan notes that Pelican’s Nest began exploring ways to make its two 18-hole courses more user-friendly to golfers of all abilities in 2010. The timing of the greens and bunkers restoration project gave the club a golden opportunity to build a system of forward tees (*pictured above*) at minimal expense while also solving its problem of providing a challenging, albeit shorter, course for its members.

“Obviously, the Scoring Tee concept would have been a tougher sell if we didn’t have this major reconstruction scheduled,” acknowledges Sheehan. “The creation of the tees became possible during the preliminary discussions in a room full of passionate professionals including golf, golf maintenance, course construction, course design, and an excellent general manager and board of governors.

“My recommendation to any club is to always find ways to promote the game. The industry went a long time promoting mammoth courses with expensive budgets and sky-high fees. That model didn’t work. In the end, golf is golf, whether you’re nine years old or 90.”

Bel Jan, a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, specializes in solutions for making golf courses more enjoyable while maintaining fundamental challenges associated with playing the game. When Pelican’s Nest entertained the option of incorporating construction of Scoring

Tees with its greens and bunkers restoration project, Bel Jan was quick to deploy, meet with the club's board of governors, and begin identifying possible locations for Scoring Tees on each hole.

"I believe anyone who is doing a renovation should consider adding Scoring Tees," says Bel Jan. "Although some clubs may have a set of formal tees at a shorter distance (4,000-4,250 yards), they are called Junior Tees, Family Tees, Speed Tees, etc. This is subtly exclusionary language.

"Scoring Tees allow a focus on fun while attaining basic golf skills and etiquette. For many players, winning means less than having fun."

The evolution of the Scoring Tees at Pelican's Nest was an interesting process, with the club embracing a something-for-everyone philosophy while looking for ways to retain members and attract new members following the recession.

"In the summer of 2011, we provided a combination of the blue and white tees for the 6,500-yard player, and we instituted a Black Tee course for the men, a course nearly 700 yards shorter than the traditional men's tee, the white," recalls Sheehan. "After a few trials, the feedback was that the Black course was too short.

"In the summer of 2012, instead of moving the Black tees back, we instituted a combo tee between the Black and White, and called it the Grey. This allowed playing opportunities at 6,100 yards, 5,700 yards, and 5,400 yards. The Black Tee course at 5,400 also provided a test for our better women golfers. At this point, we had taken the course from the standard Gold, Blue, White and Red, to seven choices. And in the process, we decided to change the names of the tees from colors to roman numerals. This would solve the gender bias with color-coded tee markers."

Sheehan notes that during the past two seasons, Pelican's Nest has seen 50 percent of its men's rounds played from the V and VI tees. But finding a course suitable for super seniors, beginners and nine-holers remained a challenge.

Once the concept of constructing Scoring Tees in conjunction with the greens and bunker restoration project was approved, Bel Jan evaluated each

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hole on the Hurricane Course for length and developed a scorecard that would allow golfers with a 55-65 mph clubhead speed to hit approaches into the green with a club similar to that of golfers with higher swing speeds. Bel Jan then located those distances on the course, adjusted the yardages based on lines of flight, doglegs, hazards and carries, existing mounds that could serve as the foundation for new tees, existing irrigation heads, drainage patterns and basins, and proximity to cart paths.

And the modest additional cost of adding Scoring Tees to the restoration project?

"In 2013-14, during the budgeting process of the two-year reconstruction and restoration project, it became apparent that excavating the greens and trucking the material off site was more expensive than repurposing the material into a few additional tees in our V and VI tee courses, as well as 17 brand new tees for the Scoring Course," notes Sheehan. "The only cost of creating the new tees was the cost of the Celebration sod to grass them."

The development of Scoring Tees at Pelican's Nest and many other success stories designed to help PGA Professionals retain current golfers and attract new ones are featured in the "Setting Up Golf Courses for Success" guidebook recently published by the PGA of America (and available on PGA.org). The Pelican's Nest story demonstrates how seamlessly facilities can incorporate shorter courses into their current layouts at minimal expense.

"I can't imagine any facility that reads the success story of Pelican's Nest would turn a deaf ear to a similar proposition if the opportunity and the resources were available," says Sheehan.

The early response by members at Pelican's Nest to the new Scoring Tees has been overwhelmingly positive. And why not? It gives them a course that is fair, equitable and enjoyable for golfers of all ages and abilities. A course with a significant "fun factor" that yields more pars and birdies. ■

Newly constructed forward tees have increased yardage choices at Pelican's Nest Golf Club, increasing playability for a wider range of golfers.

