



WIDTH OF FAIRWAY FOR NORMAL PLAY?

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It is surprising how many Green Committees consider their members to be more accurate drivers than the Tour Professionals, and narrow their fairways to 20 metres or below. Bearing in mind that the average handicap of a male club member is about 16, are they expecting rather too much of him? Recent research has shown that the time taken to play a round of golf (home to the Club, 18 holes, perhaps a drink and home again) is one of the major disincentives for people who might wish to take up the game. Having fairways at a sensible width, with associated semi-rough gives the Club golfer a more pleasant and faster game, as less time is spent looking for errant shots

The PGA Tournament Professional specification for fairway width is 22-32 metres depending on the difficulty of the hole. There may be limitations imposed by the terrain that may prevent this width being available for the full length of the hole, and the modern approach to the “shaping” of a fairway may also produce deliberate restrictions. It should be remembered that if any testing of skill is implemented, it should be directed towards the lower handicap player, with narrowing taking place at 220-260 metres.

The good golfer will always prefer the firm fairway surface that a lower height of cut produces, enabling the generation of backspin and hence control. It is a regular complaint of the higher handicap player that “the fairways are cut too short” (and that “the semi-is too long”!), but the Tour would expect a maximum height of 12mm for fairways. With hydraulically powered fairway cutting machines with staggered lift, now the norm at most Clubs, it is possible to cut a fairway safely in almost any direction, some Course Managers taking a pleasure in producing “diamond” or other distinctive patterns. This is not simply a cosmetic effect. Regular changes of direction prevent “nap” building up on the fairways, always a problem with the old-fashioned trail gangs. Another advantage of having wider fairways is that they help to spread the wear, an increasing problem with more all-year-round golf.

The Tour also specify a strip of semi-rough 3-4 metres wide on either side of each fairway, cut at a height of 25-35 mm. It is interesting to note that they expect this semi- on both sides of every fairway to be cut in the same direction. Current practice at most Clubs will be to cut down one side and back up the other, reversing each, the next time the semi- is cut.

All Clubs will raise their fairway cutting heights in winter, to increase the insulation properties of the grass, and improve its resistance to ground compaction. As the third most important course area after Greens and Tees, it should be standard practice during the growing season to "divot" fairways to maintain or improve on grass quality. The golfer whose drive hits the fairway is invariably aggrieved if the lie is below the quality expected.

If the specifications for fairway width and semi- are combined then the combined parameters for fairway plus semi- lie between 28 and 40 metres for that width "between the rough".

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