

Are sponsorships missing the mark?

When I arrived at Golf Course News in 1992, there were relatively few companies shelling out the major bucks to financially support golf industry events. Nowadays, you can't swing a dead cat without hitting a corporate sponsorship.

Witness Yamaha's backing of the 1997 Energizer Senior Tour Championship (story page 59). Of course, the pink rabbit people will maintain their "title" sponsorship while Yamaha will become the "sponsored by" sponsor, meaning TV guys will say, "Welcome to the Energizer Senior Tour Championship, sponsored by Yamaha Golf Cars."

In any case, Yamaha's move is no doubt an expensive one and follows hard on John Deere's April decision to sponsor/prop up/salvage the perennially ailing Quad City Classic — which followed not quite so hard on the heels of The Scott Company's determination to sponsor the Senior Tour's Tradition.

You can rest assured a battery of demographic whiz kids has guaranteed these corporations that this sort of exposure is the stuff of sales legend. Nonetheless, I believe central questions remain: Do these sponsorships actually help sales? Are superintendents or course owners actually swayed by these high-profile image grabs?

I'm not convinced.

There are several levels of sponsorships now at play on the

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Hal Phillips,
editor

So, we've got a Tiger by the tail — let's just enjoy the ride

Not since Arnold Palmer jumped off the television screens to charm America and win an army of followers has a golfer burst onto the American scene with the impact of Tiger Woods. Just as Arnold awakened the masses to the slumbering game of golf so, apparently, has Tiger.

While surveys had reported that growth in number of golfers had flat-lined the last two years, look for a jump when the 1997 figures roll around. One anecdote that could be repeated nationwide following Woods' victory at the Masters:

"The amount of interest is amazing," said Del Ratcliffe of Ratcliffe Golf Services in Charlotte, N.C. "It's all anyone is talking about. The interest in the game of golf is at an all-time high. It might be bigger than when Arnold came out. There is a huge contingent of younger people enthralled with Tiger. But older adults are wanting to play golf, too. Tiger is already great for the industry."

People who before had shown absolutely no interest in golf, are now talking about how to get started, what they need to do, where to buy clubs, etc., Ratcliffe added.

The interest is broad-based, crossing the lines of skin color, age and income. Yes, the press is taking the racial angle here. But why not just let it happen ... As the revolution came with Arnold Palmer, let it happen with Tiger Woods, and leave the philosophy, the greater-good-to-mankind thing alone. The press and others seem to think this very young man must step forward and shoulder a Jack Robinson-like burden that shouldn't be demanded of anyone, let alone a 21-year-old.

Indeed, those race battles are a thing of the past, according to James Black. It was Black, not Tiger, who was the first black man to shoot 67 in a PGA event at age 21. Black, who heads up the Right Moves for Youths program for at-risk kids in Charlotte, N.C., fired a 67 at the L.A. Open in 1964 and was the first-day leader.

"I think what he [Tiger] is doing is more a positive thing for golf and being an ambassador of golf," Black said. "I don't think he has Jackie Robinson pressure. Those roads have been paved. All he has to do is step in and play."

It was John Shipman who was the first American black man to play in the U.S. Open in the North. That was in 1896 at Shinnecock. It was Black, who played the Tour throughout the '60s, who was the first black golfer to qualify for the U.S. Open in the South. That was in 1964 at Congressional, when Ken Venturi won it and Black received the medal as most improved player, following an 84 with a round of 72.

It was Raiff Botts, Pete Brown and Black who were the first black golfers allowed to use the locker room and snack shop facilities at a tournament course. That was in 1965 in New Orleans. Later it was Charlie Sifford who was the first black man to get a tournament player's card.



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

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Letters

SPIKELESS ADDENDUM

To the editor:

I read with great interest the article by Hal Phillips in your April 1997 edition titled, "Alternative spike industry getting complicated." In particular, I reviewed the U.S. map you published purporting to show "how many courses have banned metal spikes in each state."

On the map you show 28 Colorado golf courses banning metal spikes. You are only off by a factor of four! During March 1997, the Colorado Golf Association contacted all the golf facilities in Colorado and asked what their policy would be for the 1997 season (we started posting scores for handicap purposes on March 13; thus our "season" has begun). There are 105 facilities (representing 114 regulation or executive-length courses) that told us their policy for this season is "spikeless" (67 public facilities, 29 private clubs, 5 resorts and 2 military installations) out of a total of 194 golf facilities in the state (representing 207 courses).

So far as I know, Colorado is one of the states leading the "spikeless" revolution, certainly in terms of the percentage of courses that have banned traditional spikes. Any way you add up the numbers, more than half of the courses in Colorado are spikeless for 1997!

Warren Simmons
Executive Director
Colorado Golf Association

Ed. — As was indicated in the April issue, the source which provided the number of spikeless courses nationwide was Softspikes, Inc. of Bethesda, Md.

ATTENTION READERS!

The mailing address here at Golf Course News has changed slightly. Letters and all manner of correspondence should be addressed to:

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It's extremely important readers acknowledge this change, as automation at the Post Office will no longer handle mail that doesn't use our P.O. box or our new street address. As they say at the phone company: "Please make a note of it."

Sleeping Bear reissues Thomas masterpiece

By MARK LESLIE

CHELSEA, Mich. — He may have died 65 years ago, but my hat's still off to George C. Thomas Jr., and to Sleeping Bear Press, who had the grit and determination to pursue, and then reprint, the "original parts" of Thomas' famous 1927 classic, *Golf Architecture in America — Its Strategy and Construction*. From the dust jacket through the 342 pages of this gem of a replication is as like the original as possible. And it is worth the buying for anyone interested in golf and course design (see GCN Bookshelf on pages 54-55).

No doubt Thomas, a multimillionaire, subsidized this book.

BOOK REVIEW

Color plates, double-stamped front cover, high-gloss paper for perfect reproduction of more than 80 photographs and 60 sketches... it must have been a labor of love.

Here was a golf course design genius who, before writing this book, humbly pursued input from the other pioneers of his time — a stable that included Alister Mackenzie, Donald Ross, H. Chandler Egan, A.W. Tillinghast, Hugh Wilson, George Crump and William Bell.

"He dropped his ego and the book is a culmination of all the

other architects' thoughts, though it is Thomas' genius that makes it," said publisher Brian Lewis. "It clearly is the best golf course architecture book ever done and it is incredibly relevant today."

Here we have this master's feelings on the craft of course design. Here he shares his canny understanding of wind, water, grass, drainage, types of soil, seed-bed preparation, all of the factors in golf course design and construction we may think are only modern pieces of knowledge.

There are many jewels in this crown. Yet, with all the fascinating talk of smooth, fading lines and of flowing, graceful curves, etc., my favorite Thomas Tidbit is

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Leslie comment

Continued from page 14

"I had death threats. I had to change my clothes in the car. I had to drive my automobile during the day and couldn't find a place to stay at night," Black said.

Tiger doesn't have those problems. "His pressure," Black said, "is staying in good health and standing up under the pressure

to step in and play. He's got to be Tiger Woods, not Jackie Robinson. Everybody has their own time zone. This is a different time zone."

If we were all truly "color-blind" in our thinking, the whole debate of Tiger's "responsibilities to his race" would be moot. And, yes, it should be. As Black pointed out, the enthusiasm, loyalty and dedication Tiger has to the game make it possible for

anyone of any age to respect him. The golf industry? Let's just watch and enjoy the ride that is stirring the American public.

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Tradition, from whence comest thee?

Do you think having all greens roll at the same speed is an idea favored by inimitable golf course architect George C. Thomas Jr., whose book *Golf Architecture in America* (see review, page 14) is

considered a classic? Think again. Thomas viewed green speed in a way that flies in the face of today's demand for consistency.

"Yes, the greens should, undoubtedly, have great variety," Thomas wrote. "What interest or sport if they were all flat — all of the same speed; what chance for the real putting touch, and, more important, the ability to judge their speed, their rolls and

slopes, so as properly to apply the skillful touch?"

Referring to "an old authority" who favored different greens having different grasses in order to change the speed as the golfer went from hole to hole, Thomas said: "The thought of the old writer is not ill-timed at this late date."

Meanwhile, was Thomas ahead of his time concerning tree-thinning? "While it is expensive to take out woods and build the course where the forest stood, nevertheless it has been done successfully many times," he wrote. "The greatest danger in such work is that of the shade given to the green, which often secures little sun; but this may be overcome by additional tree thinning nearby, which must be done before seeding, by the use of grasses suitable to shade, and by under drainage to the green, because shaded greens hold moisture too long in all but somewhat sandy soils."

Who knows Thomas' favorite course, but... "If one could have a course with sand dunes, with water hazards both as streams and as lakes, with fairways through virgin forests, with long, rolling contours, high plateaus, lovely little valleys to play through and to cross as hazards, one would have the superlative and almost ideal golf country. Such is Pine Valley, laid out by the master hand of that sterling sportsman, George Crump. Every true golfer loves Pine Valley."

And in defense of course architects, Thomas warned land planners that one very common error is to place the clubhouse on the highest point of the property. This, he said, "is often at a corner, making it very difficult to start and finish the course... Much criticism aimed at finishing holes is the fault of the clubhouse location rather than that of the golf architect."

•••

Alice Dye shed interesting light on the success of her husband in the world of golf course design [see story, page 39]. We asked her what it has been like to team up with Pete all these years.

"We started the business together. But I had other duties and couldn't travel as much with two small children. For very personal financial reasons — like being sued or insured — it was better to go under one name and to promote Pete, which I did. I did become a member of the ASGCA [American Society of Golf Course Architects] and play in a lot of tournaments — a lot of promotional work besides working with him on sites.

"The LPGA didn't even get formed until 1950... But amateur golf was big, big, big, and every time I won a city or state title the

Continued on next page

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Blais comment

Continued from page 15

those where many architectural, building, management and supplier contracts had yet to be signed — during the 14-month period. Michigan was second in the five-state region with 19 followed by Indiana, 14, Ohio, 11, and Wisconsin, 10. An indication of things to come? We think so.

Other states that should be among the leaders in new course openings over the next few years — based on the number of planned projects reported in the *GCN Development Letter* during the 14-month span — include California (45), Massachusetts (19), New York (18), Florida (18) Texas (14), New Jersey (12) and Arizona (11).

If knowing about new course development and yet-to-be-signed contracts is important to your business, then take a good look at the *GCN Development Letter* subscription offer many of you will receive in May. If the offer doesn't show up in your mailbox, then call us at 207-846-0600 and we'll gladly mail or fax along a copy for you to review.

•••

Listen, I'm really not trying to rain on this Tiger Woods' parade. But, it's been four days now since Tiger's march through Augusta. I've hung around a lot of youth hockey players and Little Leaguers since then. And I can honestly say I haven't heard a single one of them mention Tiger's name.

The only time I've heard this year's Masters champ discussed by anyone born after 1979 has been on television, when a microphone has been placed before the youth and a reporter asked, "So what do you think of Tiger?"

Now granted, I live in Maine where golf isn't exactly a statewide passion. The mud is flowing and golf is still just a gleam in most Mainer's eyes this drizzly April 17 morning. Our family doesn't belong to a golf club, so we're not spending a lot of time around the clubhouse waiting for the ground to dry out and talking with other golfing families.

But still.

Leslie comment

Continued from previous page

headlines were 2 inches tall in the papers. The publicity was really something, and that's how we got our name in golf. Then, of course, I was named to the women's executive committee and played in the national tournaments, on the Curtis Cup team and was captain of the World Cup team.

"It's been a wonderful trip," she added. "And we've shared so much. Pete does maybe 75 or 80 percent of the architecture. Pete's an artist. He's very, very creative and has wonderful ideas. They change and evolve, as we all do and as we see the type of people playing golf being different today than when we started.

"I'm the other side. I'm the side that comes up to him and says, 'Pete, you can't do that. That bunker wall is too steep. Somebody's going to get hurt.' Or, 'You've got to put rock around the edge of this green so when they back up to line up a putt they feel they are on sort of a warning track.'

"When the original green at Sawgrass sloped toward the water, I said, 'You can't do that. If there is a wind behind them, they'll never finish the tournament.'"

Is this Tiger Mania for real? Is his name being yelled out at recess or discussed in the high school cafeteria the way students talk about Michael Jordan, Brett Favre, Ken Griffey and Mario Lemieux? Are kids lining up putts or driving imaginary golf balls 330 yards in front of their bedroom mirrors? Or are they still nailing 10-footers into their laundry baskets with rolled up socks and screaming "Jordan from the corner!"

I hope Tiger's in there somewhere. It could mean a lot for the game, not to mention those who want to build courses, fill tee sheets and sell golf equipment.

But I wonder: Is Tiger Mania a golf industry/media creation, or is it really the start of a junior golf boom? Time will tell.

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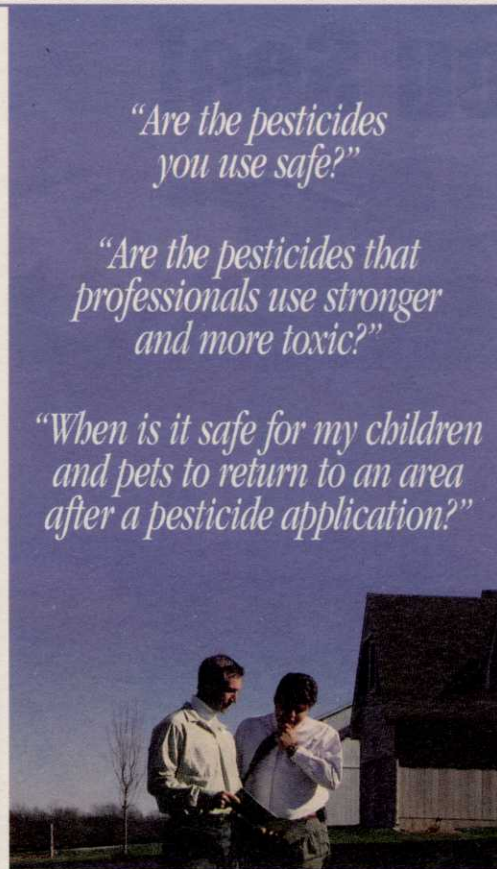
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