

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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