Two very strong voices at PFG

How many times do things work out just the way you planned?

In approaching the development of this year's Public Golf Forum, we had two key-note slots — both just happened to work out just the way we planned.

We couldn't help but notice that Greg Norman and Dr. Michael Hurzdan will be this year's dynamic duo at Public Golf Forum, the Golf Course News-sponsored business conference and expo for superintendents, owners, managers and developers of public-access golf facilities on October 26 & 27 at Rancho Las Palmas Marriott Resort in Palm Springs, California (see cover story).

The idea is to open an exchange of ideas on how the industry can continue to move public-access golf ahead and help it remain the hottest trend in golf. To do this, the promotion of affordable, sustainable course design, smarter management and innovative maintenance techniques are absolutely paramount. We feel we have two of the strongest voices in the industry to kick off two days of conference sessions covering these three critical fields.

What can I say about The Shark that hasn't already been said? His designs are in play around the world, and with Greg Norman Turf up and running, he has moved into the realm of specialty warm season grasses to augment his design business.

Norman's Tour resume is hard to believe: PGA Tour all-time money winner; 83 career victories through May '98; two-time British Open winner; three-time Vardon Trophy winner; held the No. 1 world ranking for a record 351 weeks. Even with the bad shoulder his current world ranking is No. 4.

Dr. Michael Hurzdan, president of Columbus, Ohio-based Hurzdan-Fry Golf Course Design Inc. has become the guru of the environmentally sensitive public golf design.

Hurzdan's environmentally sound projects are gaining worldwide recognition. Golf World Magazine's 1997 Architect of the Year, Hurzdan's most recent accolade includes Golf Digest's Environmental Leaders in Golf Award for his work at Widow's Walk Golf Course in Scituate, Mass., America's first environmental demonstration course. With our move to sunny Palm Springs, I would expect it's going to be standing room only.

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Golf historians help me out. The USGA contends that today's technology, combined with a higher skill level, is slowly, but surely, pushing golf's historic venues into the far reaches of obscurity. Let's take a look at the winning scores of U.S. Opens held at Baltusrol GC. The winning score of the Open held at Baltusrol in 1903 was 307. The 1915 winning score was 297, a drop of 10 strokes. In 1936 it was 282, a drop of 25 strokes. What happened over the next 35 years to bring about such a change?

In 1967 the winner shot 275. In '80 it was 272. In '93 it was 272. That's only a 3-shot difference in 26 years. One other note: The one other note: The change in the winning Master's score since 1934, the first year of the tournament, has dropped about 2 strokes around that first tourney.

GUEST COMMENTARY

Appraisal is the only prudent first step for any golf development

This guest commentary follows the recent lecture given by Bryan Griffiths, a consulting golf architect and chairman of Golfduinnternational, at Fairway 96 in Munich.

By Bryan Griffiths

I n European Union (EU) countries, the fallout from the unprecedented golf growth in recent years has yielded valuable lessons which are the basis of this article, taken from the EU's most mature golf market - Britain, but also from personal experience with over 200 golf developer and investment clients in 44 other countries.

All of us are concerned and involved with the growth and prosperity of our Royal & Ancient game. In any SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of golf development today, one of the threats would be a widely accepted mythology generated over the years — much of which is simply not valid.

Take location: which the pundits tell us is the triple secret of golf success. Golf developers in particular should beware of such sloppy thinking. Of course, location is one key factor but many a course in a good location has suffered problems thanks to other important reasons, recent experiences alone should show us this.

My favourite list of success factors would be: compatibility (between the demand and product profile), appraisal, location and finance. As it happens, the acronym CALF is a reminder that location is not all: any golf appraisal must surely confirm this.

Although television has changed the face of golf and led to phenomenal recent growth, the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews (R&A) also played its part with a supply study in 1989. This study forecast that 700 more courses were required by AD 2000: but it did not warn of pitfalls.

Feverish course building followed — 600 or so courses since then. Many were ill-conceived and many are still in financial difficulties. More recently rounds per annum (rpa) have
dropped 50%. Refute, resist and refuse to double under.

May more of us refute, resist and refuse to double under.