In the last year, the debate over technology in golf has intensified, with the American Society of Golf Course Architects calling for more regulation of golf equipment in order to keep golf course length, and by extension costs, from spiraling out of control.

Pete Dye has seen a lot of changes in his more than 40 years designing courses, including technology. Never one to temper his opinions, during a panel discussion at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America conference in Atlanta, Dye appealed to the USGA and other organizations to take a more hands-on approach to regulating technologies.

"[The industry] needs to get together and try to stop the golf ball for the great players," Dye said. "This hitting a golf ball 400 yards is ridiculous. You can't make golf courses 8,000 yards long, with the environment and the costs — it's crazy."

Dye said one solution would be having two sets of rules — one for professional golfers and another for the average golfer who makes up the vast majority of the golfing population.

"The ball's going farther for the good player, but they're not going any farther for Mabel Smith, who tees off on Tuesday morning and hits the ball 135 yards. Not one ball today goes in one inch farther than the ball they made 50 years ago," he said. "So Martha Burk ought to be yelling at the golf ball manufacturers. They're discriminating."

Weathering the construction slowdown

GUEST COMMENTARY

Augusta uncrowned

Ronald W. Fream

The history of Augusta National has always been recorded. Masters by Masters, since 1934, as a sacred ritual, the continuation of a serious tradition. The mystique has been magnified each year after year as TV coverage projected the world's great players — their names turned into legend — putting on the green jacket, after a usually breathtaking final round before a huge gallery.

Augusta National Golf Club has long been considered the Masters as an "inherence to posterity." The origins of the course, inspired by Robert Tyre Jones Jr.

Sunday River, Harris Golf close land, sales deal

NEWRY, Maine — As expected, Sunday River Ski Resort and Harris Golf finalized their purchase and sales agreement last month, paving the way for construction on the planned 18-hole Robert Trent Jones Jr. golf course to begin.

At press time, closing on the deal was expected to take place in early May.

The only thing standing in the way now is the weather, which continued to be unseasonably cold well into March. However, that shouldn't delay the course, as construction is slated to begin this summer with a summer 2004 opening date planned.

Harris Golf currently owns and operates two golf courses, Bath Country Club and Boothbay Harbor Country Club, as well as Harris Golf Shop in South Portland.

The group includes brothers Jeff and Jason Harris, as well as their father, Dick Harris, a Maine golf icon who was principal in the development of Falmouth Country Club nearly 20 years ago.

Jeff Harris said the company is looking forward to building the course because of both the designer and the scenic location.

"The opportunity to build a Robert Trent Jones Jr. course at Sunday River is one that we couldn't pass up," he said.

The course will become the second Jones course in Maine, giving the state a distinction among the best in the country.

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Augusta uncrowned
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and co-designed by Dr. Alistair MacKenzie were, as Horton Smith said, "a cause of character, individuality and personality." Over the years, modest changes were inserted into the original design. In recent years, cosmetic changes became common but remained modest. The most significant changes evolved as the standards of maintenance improved. The growth of agronomic knowledge and equipment sophistication led to the recent years' "immaculate perfection" standards — not a blade of grass unkempt.

Of the four recognized major golf tournaments of the year, only the Masters is played year after year at the same venue. This continuity of site helped enhance the legend of famous players, famous holes, famous shots and famous victories. Past shots and past scores could fairly be compared and certainly were. These past glories are obsolete now.

Throughout the years, the basic playing character was more or less true to the original design and the founders' original intent. The continuum was in place. Now, in an effort to counter or defend against recent technological advances by club manufacturers, as well as the unique ability of Tiger Woods, Augusta is undergoing a vigorous redesign that has dramatically changed many of the holes. Where now are the continuum, the tradition and the playing link to the course Jones and MacKenzie produced? In fact, if Jones or MacKenzie were alive today, they would not recognize the Augusta National of 2003. Whatever great shots, superb light-fnmg-ast putts or grand Sunday afternoon final nine charges were the stuff of legends and so faithfully documented will not now be a continuum and link to past performances. The new course may well look like another Tom Fazio course, one of many, but not one of one. Lengthening and moving tees, busters and approach shots bring new golf not distinctly comparable with Masters tournaments of 2001 or before. Growing a "second cut" or semi-rough to hinder slightly wayward tee shots removes the long and proud distinction of not having rough at the Masters. Adding instant trees surely has altered how some of the holes were previously played. It is different now.

Will Augusta National still be automatically ranked as one of America's truly great courses or is it now actually one of several long, demanding courses set into surrounding woodlands? Augusta was never a course of unique natural setting or spectacular and memorable vistas. The pine forest actually became more claustrophobic as trees grew taller and wider and were joined by new additions of trees. The glory was in the link to a historic source of original design and a masterful management of the early legends. While the "splendor, splendor, splendor everywhere" will return, it will surely be difficult now to claim the legacy or compare the scoring traditions of earlier Masters. From 2003, it is a new course, a new tournament and a new record to establish. Will Augusta National again warrant its lofty stature based upon its illustrious heritage? Perhaps not. Perhaps now Augusta National will be another rolling, long, pine tree-lined course with nice spring flowers that merely hosts a prominent tournament and still provides enviable immaculate perfection in turfgrass management. While modern technological advances are helping the individual golfer's length of play, technology is doing nothing for the memories, traditions of golf, which are too few as it is.

Ronald W. Fream is the founder of Santa Rosa, Calif.-based Golfplan, which he founded in 1972.

Construction slowdown
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"You always like to have that unfair advantage. People get aggravated about it, but that's just business and that's the way these things get done sometimes. You just have to accept it and move on."

With course openings declining in 2002 (GCN, March 2003), the picture looks to get worse before it improves. Financing is often tough to come by, so builders have to get creative and competitive with their bidding. "Financing has been difficult for our clients," said Quality Grassing general manager Robert Price. "As a result, there has been an increase in joint ventures and partnerships for private investment."

To combat rising insurance premiums, Quality Grassing has also had to get creative, relying on some of those business relationships and staying on top of the situation, Price said.

"Insurance rates continue to rise while our bonding costs have stayed the same, so we have established close relationships with our insurance and bonding agents," he said. "We continue to compare their performance and rates with competitors."

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Black Hills find green
Continued from page 1
Club scheduled to open this year in Agar.
"Sutton Bay is just a beautiful golf course," Farris said. "It sits on what used to be a 30,000-acre ranch, so they won't have any development anywhere around them."

The development of quality golf courses in South Dakota may lead to a greater influx of tourists, Farris said, but there is no formal plan underway to draw them. He said he hopes golf will complement two of the state's already strong tourist attractions: Mount Rushmore and pheasant hunting.

"I was always surprised that golf was not as promoted. Granted, people don't look at South Dakota and think, 'What a weather Mecca,'" Farris said. "We have a tremendous amount of pheasant hunting that takes place here. People fly in from all over just to come pheasant hunting here, so Sutton Bay will have a hand in that."

"There's also three million people who come out here to visit Mount Rushmore every year," he added. "Red Rock is about 15 minutes away. I just don't think people have really marketed it."

While the private Sutton Bay will offer hunting, fishing and a sporting clay course based out of its lodge accommodations, Red Rock will offer $27 green fees, which Farris described as a steal.

"There's something for everybody here," he said.

Dye blasts changes in design, technology
Continued from page 10
against all those women who play the golf courses every Tuesday morning.

Dye also said many golf course developers start off on the wrong foot when building golf courses. According to Dye, too many owners and developers try to cut costs by not hiring a superintendent until after construction and sometimes grow-in are complete. Dye said ideally, a superintendent should be on-site long before groundbreaking.

"Hell, they should be there before I get there," he said. "The developers who start these things, they don't have any knowledge about what they're doing. They always think they can save $3,750 by letting the contractor run around out there, screwing up the golf course. Then they wait until after we're gone and bring the poor guy in there blind and he's trying to fix all the mistakes. You can sympathize with them a little bit because they don't know."

However, Dye said he wouldn't refuse a job simply because the developer hadn't yet hired a superintendent.

"I go in and say, 'Look, you should have a golf course superintendent,'" Dye said. "He can fire me anytime he wants to, and a lot of them have."

When it comes to bunker placement in his designs, Dye said his philosophy has changed over the years, mainly because he has designed so many TPC and other tournament courses. Today's players, he said, have more or less perfected their bunker play.

"I used to put all my bunkers real tight to the greens, but they can get in there and kick it no problem," he said. "So now I'm trying to make the bunkers where the ball will kick farther away and make a longer bunker shot to the green."

Sunday River course
Continued from page 10
its neighboring New England states. Jones designed the course at Sugarloaf/USA, which is also owned by Sunday River's parent company, American Skiing Co. In a statement, Jones expressed his pleasure that the course would go forward.

"I am so pleased to hear that the terrain was terrific and well-suited for a great golf course with fairways that are a little wider, more forgiving and player-friendly. We think it's a great venue and look forward to the first round."

Harris Golf will oversee construction at the course, while Ty Butler in Jones' Charlotte, N.C., office will make occasional visits to the course during the development. Golf Course News will continue to follow this project as it progresses in the future issues.