The Open: Youngsters Need Not Apply

By Larry Aylward, Managing Editor

You dream of hosting a U.S. Open, so you build the coolest and classiest championship-caliber course east and west of the Mississippi and invite the United States Golf Association there to hold its esteemed event. But the USGA rejects you like a maxed-out MasterCard.

Face it: The U.S. Open will only consider coming to your place if it was designed by Donald Ross during the silent-movie era. USGA chairman David Fay won't deny that — but with a little dance.

“We tend to go to courses that have had historic U.S. Opens and have a place in American golf,” Fay admits. “While we're on the lookout for new courses — and we're sincerely on the lookout — the record shows that we haven't gone to many of them. It has been a long time.”

Fay, who was speaking to a group of New Jersey superintendents late last year, also contends that USGA just doesn't go where it wants to go, such as Pebble Beach Golf Links this year. Fay didn't ring new Pebble Beach owners Clint Eastwood, Arnold Palmer and Peter Ueberroth last week to tell Dirty Harry and his entourage “to get the course ready because we're coming in June.”

“That's not the way it works,” Fay says. “We have to be invited.”

USGA receives several invitations each year from courses wanting to host a U.S. Open. “Most of them come from the usual suspects,” Fay says, adding that USGA tries to announce sites five years in advance.

There are exceptions, however. Even if the USGA hasn't yet been formally invited, you can bet your titanium driver the U.S. Open will be held at the Country Club at Brookline, Mass., in 2013. The Country Club was the site of Frances Ouimet's stunning U.S. Open win over Britain's Ted Ray and Harry Vardon in 1913. The upset victory helped put U.S. golf on the map.

Despite USGA's romance with tradition, there are parameters for hosting a U.S. Open. Fay explains what USGA looks for in an Open course. "It's similar to what former Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart said about pornography — 'I can't define it, but I know it when I see it.'"

Fay admits USGA prefers "mature" courses. It staged U.S. Opens at new courses such as Chaska, Minn.'s Hazeltine National GC in 1970 and Georgia's Atlanta Athletic Club in Atlanta in 1976.
Thy're still talking about John Philp. This time, though, the talk has nothing to do about the Carnoustie Golf Links superintendent allegedly tricking up his Scottish course for the 1999 Open Championship.

They're talking about Philp because he was recently named a Member of the Order of the British Empire in Great Britain.

Think back to the summer of 1999 and the Open Championship at Carnoustie. If you didn't hear the cries from the players as they faced what Gary Player once called "the toughest golf course in the world," you weren't listening.

Rain in the early summer in eastern Scotland had produced a bumper crop of deep rough at Carnoustie. In the middle of it all was Philp, whose task was to condition the course and defend it because some had said it had lost its moxie.

But the players complained about the course and accused Philp of fertilizing the rough. Philp, who denied the charges, gave an impassioned speech about the virtues of links golf and invited players who couldn't handle the course to head home where the work is easier. Philp became the most quoted individual of the 1999 event.

"You can't often go off-line and expect to be rewarded for the effort," he said.

Philp recounted the rains and the density of the rough, but related that "had they played three weeks later, the rough would have died back and there wouldn't have been such bleating from the players."

In her last official duties of 1999, Her Majesty the Queen of England selects a list of honors, including more than 1,500 awards in the Order of the British Empire, called MBEs. The honors included Philp for service to golf in Great Britain. He will have his official audience with Her Majesty later in 2000.

"I got the letter in November and had to be quiet about the thing until year's end," Philp chuckled.

Two other head greenkeepers in the United Kingdom have been recognized in the past. Walter Woods received the British Empire Medal, a medal of the same Order, for his service to St. Andrews Golf Links as links supervisor for 22 years. Jimmy MacDonald, head greenkeeper at Royal Latham & St. Anne's, was awarded the MBE in 1996 after preparing for the Open Championship.

Philp is taking it all in stride, much like he did the summer's criticism.

"Carnoustie is links golf, and it wouldn't be right to make it artificial," he said. "I don't think it was too tough, and the nice people that nominated me for the MBE must have liked it fine enough."
PGA moves tournament site
The PGA of America has moved the 2004 PGA Championship from Valhalla GC in Louisville, Ky., to Whistling Straits in Kohler, Wis., a Pete Dye course that runs along the Lake Michigan shore.

Only a site for the 2007 PGA Championship has yet to be determined for the events in this decade. After the 2000 event scheduled for Valhalla in August, the tournaments will be held at: Atlanta Athletic Club in Duluth, Ga., in 2001; Hazeltine National GC in Chaska, Minn., in 2002; Oak Hill CC in Rochester, N.Y., in 2003; The Country Club in Brookline, Mass., in 2005; Medinah CC in suburban Chicago in 2006; Oakland Hills CC in suburban Detroit in 2008; Hazeltine again in 2009; and Sahalee CC in Redmond, Wash., in 2010.

In related news, Pinehurst Resort and CC’s No. 2 will host the U.S. Open again in 2005.

Presidio goes bentgrass
Arnold Palmer Golf Management says it successfully completed its transition to bentgrass greens at its flagship course, Presidio GC in Presidio, Calif. The three-month project is the latest renovation to the facility which also recently included the addition of a $5 million clubhouse.

ClubCorp building Texas course
Dallas-based ClubCorp will develop Traditions Golf and CC in Bryan, Texas. The club will cater to the alumni membership at Texas A&M University, as well as serve the home fairways to the school men’s and women’s golf team.

Doh!
In our story “Land of Hope and Dreams” (January, pg. 46), we misidentified the course where Kevin Tansey did his final internship as a student. It was the Black Course at Bethpage State Park in Farmingdale, N.Y. Also, in our story, “Budding Futures” (January, pg. 32), we misidentified the school that Anthony Girardi attended to earn his degree in turfgrass management. Girardi attended the University of Rhode Island in Kingston, not Providence. Golfdom apologizes for the errors.

Scotts Sells Turf Businesses
The Scotts Co. sold its U.S. professional turf business to the The Andersons and its Canadian professional turf business to The Nu-Gro Corp. for an undisclosed amount in February.

Marysville, Ohio-based Scotts sold the businesses “to focus resources on markets where consumer brands and consumer marketing expertise have the greatest potential to create value for the company’s shareholders,” according to James Hagedorn, president of Scotts North America.

The transaction includes a long-term supply agreement under which Scotts will use its manufacturing processes to produce value-added products for Maumee, Ohio-based Andersons and Brantford, Ontario-based Nu-Gro.

The acquisition includes ProTurf, Contec and other brand names, the distribution network, customer lists and all trademarks and copyrights. The transaction does not include use of the Scotts brand or any of Scotts’ consumer, professional grass seed or professional horticultural businesses. The agreement should be finalized by May.

Rick Anderson, president of The Andersons processing group, promises “a comprehensive product line” and “superior solutions” for golf course superintendents as part of the deal.
**Scanning the Web**

As a guy who nearly failed mechanical drawing, the idea of completing architectural plans for a golf course not only intimidates me, it frightens me. For those equally architecturally impaired, these sites give some insight into creating a golf course (all addresses start with http:// unless otherwise noted):

**** - Bookmark it and return frequently; * - Look at only if absolutely necessary

>>>> www.tillinghast.net - The Tillinghast Association wanted to create an elegant and charming site dedicated to architect A.W. Tillinghast. It succeeded. Not only does it list well-organized biographical information on the architect and his courses, it includes his original sketches of some holes. Perhaps the most intriguing part of the site is a fabulous archive of golf photos, including one of Bobby Jones and his mother. It's a fascinating glimpse into the mind of a well-known golf course architect.

** www.golfclubatlas.com - It kills me not to rank this site higher (especially since a couple of Golfdom writers lurk there), but its occasional pomposity punctures its brush with greatness. It's a nice-looking site packed with information, but its two administrators, who admit they have "no knowledge of what is required to build a golf course," do nothing to alleviate golf's prevailing image as a snobbish sport. The site profiles 70 courses from around the world, with more being added daily. It also has an intelligent (though occasionally pretentious) discussion group.

INCOMPLETE www.traditionalgolf.com - This site, in its infancy, intrigues me. It consists of a collection of informal discussion groups, some of which are not terribly professional and have little to do with architecture. A couple of high-profile architects (and architectural critics) have posted notes, however, thereby elevating the entire site. The lack of postings leaves this site hard to evaluate, but its potential is endless.

Scanning the Web is compiled by Golfdom's associate editor Frank H. Andorka Jr., who couldn't even draw a straight line with a T-square. Reach him at 440-891-2708 or fandorka@advanstar.com with future column ideas or sites you think he should visit.