



In Bounds: Subtle Differences

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North Oaks Golf Club

Recently I picked my son Tyler up from college after a triumphant second year. He is still a MacKenzie but now he sports a bit of facial hair and has a new variety of political views thanks to a very diverse course load and an opinionated roommate. He will always be the same great person, but with a few subtle changes. Not unlike the North Oaks Golf Club and its recent improvements.

The wonderful Stan Thompson layout still remains. Risk is rewarded and conservatism, while not penalized, continues to be a longer route around the golf course – typical Thompson craftsmanship. The changes Tom Lehman introduced last year are dramatic, but still in the theme of the original master architect. And the implementation of the plan by Duinick Bros. Inc. Golf was fun to watch and contribute to. The whole experience from architect selection to opening will be remarked as one of the most enjoyable projects of my career.

The process began eight years ago with the budgeting of money necessary to develop a long-range golf course improvement plan aggressive enough to accommodate the changes in today's technology (a longer ball and better clubs) yet adaptable to Stan Thompson's classic park-style golf design. In 2005, four firms were pursued for their architectural expertise and the Lehman Design Group selected. From that point forward the plan took up steam and I found myself in the driver's seat of a rather large project.

Land mapping, permit gathering, material selection and communication were key elements in my participation. True there was a significant amount of "committee" input, but the nuts and bolts were hammered out by the green staff, Tom Lehman and his senior designer Chris Brands, Judd Duinick and his project coordinator Ahren Habicht and me. Together we pulled off a huge coup even though Mother Nature challenged the group with a very, very wet fall.

Politics, politics and more politics. Before any soil was turned seven separate entities had to be contacted to gather permits. And it seemed that each had even more "sub-groups" to contend with and varying time tables for each step of the permit process. I cannot suggest strongly enough that the first step to any large project is to contact your local and the state governmental agencies who might have input into the design and finished product. Also be sure to budget plenty of money for this key step, not to grease any palms, but rather to address the ever-increasing costs of permitting. And you can't get a permit without good maps.

Course layout, irrigation systems current and future, drainage patterns, water volumes and flow, silt fence design, spoil stockpiling, material handling zones and expected traffic impacts had to be mapped out for many of the entities requiring permits. It is critical that the erosion control procedures and plans of implementation are in place well before construction commences to eliminate any delays. Also important is the procurement of each party's meeting dates and times as not every community or committee meets on a regular basis. And don't forget that town hall meetings are often required for public notification purposes and everyone has questions, some requiring answers at future meetings. In hindsight, I realize that every gathering had a purpose

and the detailed maps generated during the process facilitated the project greatly.

Perhaps the most important decision made for the sake of the game at North Oaks was the sand selection used in the bunkers. As a smart manager, after some small suggestions, I left the final choice up to the "committee." They chose Ohio's Best sand products for their consistency of play. And because the faces of the bunkers were to be steep, Kerry Glader of Plaisted Companies recommended the Signature 100 percent manufactured sand for its angular qualities which would limit movement down the sharp slopes. Sod was another important component to the project because the plan called for over 35 acres to be laid, "green side up!"

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of scouting your sod for quality and quantity early in the process. And once selected, be sure to maintain communication with the grower and have a Plan "B" or secondary field should the contracted plot crap out as ours did. Your contractor needs to be diligent in keeping apprised as to the condition of your future playing surfaces. Judd Duinick personally flew many miles to observe and eventually decline much of the sod specifically grown for our project. That is where our Plan "B" came into play.

Our change in sod provider did impact the project and informing the membership of the complications was critical to the success of the plan. This was made quite simple due to the early development of a networking "tree" used to disseminate news both good and bad. On a daily basis I would take my trusty Olympus Stylus 760 All Weather compact camera onto the course for a series of pictures capturing the ongoing progress. Every morning I would download the shots and create short eblasts with pictures and captions for distribution to the Board of Directors, Green Committee, Lehman Committee, Golf Committee, Lehman Design Group, Duinick Bros. Inc. Golf and the North Oaks Golf Club department heads and staff. The daily "message" and pictures were then posted on the club web site and the bulletin boards throughout the club house. Also included in the eblasts would be expanded detail as to the daily occurrences only necessary for committees, designers and contractor.

The electronic format was very well accepted and generated many opportunities for correspondence with my membership. The pictures told a million stories and eventually went into a Holiday CD distributed with music in a slide show format to all of the membership and the new member promotional material. The daily exchange of information with Tom and Duinick Brothers limited many potential issues and led to even more opportunities to send pictures and redesign portions of the course using "paint" tools on the computer. And I have over 2,000 pictures documenting the whole project complete with drain and irrigation lines.

The photo album on my computer details many of the changes that have taken place at North Oaks Golf Club over the last year. Through a cooperative effort the project went very well. The membership and their guests have welcomed the new and exciting facelift of a classic course graciously and with much appreciation for a job well done. With proper planning, material selection and communication the job was completed on time and on budget, despite a change in our sod and the ravages of a record wet fall.

Stan Thompson would be proud of the subtle differences necessary to keep the club a viable destination for today's "flat bellies." Beautiful sand, longer holes and many slight nuances are sure to challenge any level of play. Still North Oaks, only a bit different. Just as my son is still a great kid whom I love tremendously, he is just a little different now that he has broadened his horizons.