

The Last of the Western Open



Its time to say goodbye to another tradition. The Western Open, widely acknowledged as the oldest PGA golf championship is no more. Along with persimmon drivers and balata balls the Western has become a historical footnote.



Last July the Western Golf Association (WGA), appropriately headquartered in Golf, Illinois, successfully presented its 107th, and last, Western Open at the Cog Hill Golf and Country Club in Lemont, Illinois.

The PGA tour, in an effort to breathe new life into the world of televised golf, has axed the Western Open. Years of declining ratings and the lack of “notable” participation in its late season events motivated the tour honchos to attempt to heat things up with a point system and a late season series of tournaments patterned after NASCAR’s “Chase for the Nextel Cup.” Details of the points system and final series of tournaments leading up to the Tour Championship are better explained elsewhere. In fact, ask the guy in your shop who’s driving the pick-up with all the decals on it. Suffice it to say that in exchange for the Western Open, Chicago will share the third and final qualifier with St. Louis and Minneapolis, (Cardinals or Twins – pick your poison). The good news is that the new BMW Championship still “belongs” to the Western Golf Association. They will continue to run it and use the proceeds to underwrite the Evans Scholars Foundation. Sharing the tourney with other cities is no new thing either. Back in the day the Western was played all over the place before it settled in Chicago in 1962.

The list of Western champions is second to none, and, like Cher, they need no last names: Arnie, Sam, Jack, Byron, Walter, Bobby, Tiger and of course Chicago’s own Charles “Chick” Evans. In 1916, Chick Evans came into some money from recording golf instruction records (imagine getting golf tips by listening to a record). In order to protect his amateur standing he decided to use the money to establish a scholarship fund for deserving caddies. In 1929 the WGA agreed to administer the scholarship program and the Evans Scholars Foundation was born. The WGA really ran with this one and today over 8,000 deserving caddies have benefited from Evans scholarships. All of the proceeds from the Western Open Tournament go to underwrite the Evans Scholars Foundation. It remains the largest privately funded scholarship pro-

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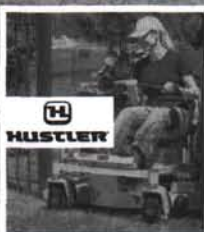
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The Western Open, inaugurated in 1899, was preceded only by the USGA's Men's Open Championship, first played in 1895. The tournament was well traveled in its early days, making stops around the Chicago area at many of the fabulous venues that make our area such a golf paradise. Then, just before and after the three year hiatus caused by WWII, the WGA decided to take the show on the road. The '40s and '50s were all over the place: east as far as New York, west to San Francisco, north to St. Paul and south to Houston. Except for that blip in New York, it truly was a Western Open.

Later the left coast appeared and made us Mid-western. The tournament rattled around until settling in the Chicago area again in 1962 at Medinah Country Club.

If we take a ride in Sherman and Mr. Peabody's Way-Back Machine we find ourselves in the middle of America's empire-building era. Golf was still a rich man's game, and golf professionals were viewed in much the same way as tradesmen. The WGA was established to protect the game in the wild, wild west, when getting from here to anywhere was a week-long rail journey. The Western was a chance for the local money to roll out the red carpet for the nation and welcome the eastern elite to the heartland.

The early years of Chicago area Western venues reads like a list from "Lavender and Old Lace:"

| | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Glen View Club |1899 |
| Midlothian CC |1901 |
| Homewood CC |1906 |
| Hinsdale GC |1907 |
| Skokie CC |1909 |
| Beverly CC |1910 |
| Idlewild CC |1912 |
| Glen Oak GC |1915 |
| Westmoreland CC |1917 |
| Olympia Fields CC | ..1920 -27 -33 |
| Calumet CC |1924 |
| North Shore CC |1928 |
| Medinah CC |1939 |

The war years put things on hold and the event packed up and moved around until 1962 when it returned to Medinah. It was during

this time that the game began to attract a wider audience. Champions like Ben Hogan, Sam Snead, Chi Chi Rodriguez, and Arnold Palmer (of course) brought golf to the masses and public golf began its boom.

| | |
|--------------------|----------------|
| Medinah CC |1962 - 66 |
| Beverly CC |1963 - 67 |
| Tam O' Shanter | ...1964 - 65 |
| Olympia Fields CC | ..1968 - 71 |
| Sunset Ridge CC |1972 |
| Midlothian CC |1973 |
| Butler National CC | ..1974 - 1989 |

From 1974 through 1989 the WGA made Butler National CC, in Oakbrook, the permanent home of the Western Open. Everybody loved Butler National, but golf was no longer just a rich man's game. It had been co-opted by the middle class and with them came women and minorities – well. The PGA tour had had its scrapes with discrimination and had successfully dodged the bullet until the Shoal Creek episode in 1990. Shoal Creek was an exclusive all-white country club located in Birmingham, Alabama, and slated to host the PGA Championship that year. Anti-discrimination groups voiced protest, boycotts were threatened and two million dollars of sponsorship money was lost. Bowing to the pressure, Shoal Creek opened its membership to minorities (one black) and was able to host the PGA Championship. Butler National, on the other hand, wasn't going to let anyone tell them who they had to admit to their membership. Consequently, they told the PGA and WGA to buzz off.

| | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Cog Hill Golf and CC |1990 - 2006 |
|----------------------|------------------|

For many years part of the allure of the Western Open was the requirement that the competitors use local caddies many of whom were recipients of scholarships from the Evans Scholars Foundation. The golf world crossed a line when contestants were allowed to bring their own caddies. The players had become bigger than

The fabled Joe Jemsek brought the event to a place anyone with a greens fee (and a lot of balls) could play.

the tournaments. The Western Open adapted to the growth of the game. The WGA managed to shepherd the event around the rocks and shoals. It remained an attractive stop for touring professionals who had by now become a bit more than tradesmen, unless you call counting money a trade. Symbolic of the evolution of the game the Western – I mean the Beatrice Western Open – no... Centel Western – no... Sprint – no... Motorola – no... Advil – no... 100th Western Open Presented by Golf Digest – no... Cialis – anyway, symbolic of the evolution of the game, the "fill in the blank" Western Open was being contested at a public golf course. The fabled Joe Jemsek brought the event to a place anyone with a greens fee (and a lot of balls) could play.

Over the years the Western Open developed a "big shoulders," working class kind of reputation that distinguished it from the run of the mill. Who can forget Lee Trevino being struck by lightning and laughing it off by vowing to carry a 1- iron

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for protection because "Even God can't hit a 1-iron."


Scott Verplank won in 1985 as an amateur, the last person to accomplish that feat in a PGA tour event.

1987 saw the area inundated with flooding and, then superintendent, Oscar Miles attained semi-celebrity status by bringing in the water hogs and helicopters to dry the golf course. He showed the world that we can roll up our sleeves and get the job done.

The 1997 Motorola Western Open was the site of Tiger Woods being catapulted onto the celebrity A-List when hundreds in the gallery broke through the ropes to escort him to the eighteenth green at Cog Hill to capture the championship.

Perhaps you noticed the extraordinary number of acronyms and corporate tags in this piece. Professional golf has joined the entertainment business. We see the Sox at U.S. Cellular Field and the Bulls or Blackhawks at the United Center. We all wear logos and watch

shows presented by... Heck, even instant replay has a sponsor's tag line. If it can be sold it will be sold. I really don't mean to pick sides here — change happens and if it means more people have access to the game and jobs are created, kids get a chance to go to college, green space is created and preserved in the name of golf then we need to embrace this evolution.

Maybe it's best that we say goodbye to the Western Open now. It really never was the Advil Western or the Cialis Western — it was too old and distinguished to be tagged that way. Like your grandfather in baggies and a hoodie — it just never fit. Perhaps that, in itself, contributed to its demise. There was too much baggage to repackage. If so, then its best that it settle comfortably in history with a measure of its dignity intact. So long Western Open you had a good run. 

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Reel and Bedknife Extremes

One of a technician's many goals is to save money by maintaining the equipment in order to help increase its longevity. Getting the most bang for your company's buck on reels, without diminishing the quality of cut, raises the question of when enough is enough? My example comes from a set of greens cutting units that are used only after top dressing. My result was some serious scalping that did not occur the previous day. Specifically, I'm referring to the Toro four-bolt adjust cutting units mounted on GM3100s. After opening up a set of new reels and comparing them to the old ones there was an obvious difference in diameters. According to the factory specs, the smaller diameter on the old reels showed they were still serviceable by at least .200". According to the factory specs this was true, but in this situation it wasn't. The following were my findings after further measurements: The old reels were at 4.750", 4.780", and 4.690". Manufacture's serviceable limits are 4.500".

With the set up I was using, at .125" H.O.C., a 5.00" diameter 11 blade reel is only usable up to 4.750". Another hint of problems came into play when on final assembly the height adjuster had little to give beyond the required H.O.C.

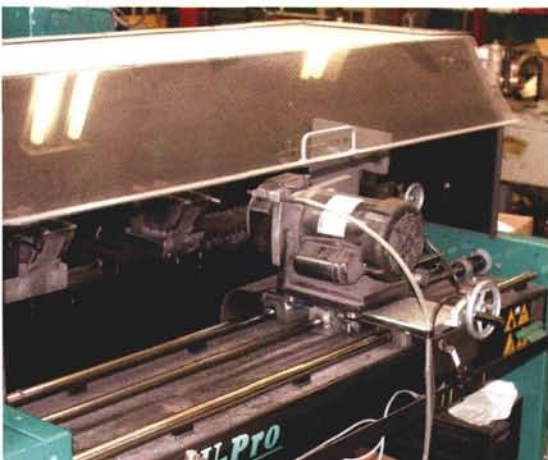
Naturally after cutting, or I should really say shoveling sand off, the greens, the cutting units are ground and bed knives are resurfaced. This time around what wasn't figured in was the extremely low height of cut we were using. Normally we're at .135", but in this case the H.O.C. was .125".

In the process of re-sharpening the reels and front facing the bed knives, the geometric relationship of the two components in the cutting unit became overly aggressive. An overly aggressive cutting unit means the reel blade is out in front of the bed knife beyond factory specifications. Also the front face angle of the bed knife is automatically changing every time it is front faced. This of course changes the attitude of the bed knife. Over time the front to back measurement of the bed knife should be taken after front facing. Compare the findings to the dimensions of a new bed knife and also compare to the other bed knives that are in place on the same traction unit if a tri-plex is used. By doing this comparison you will factor in: 1) the aggressiveness of the cutting units, 2) the uniformity of appearance of all three, and 3) how it affects the H.O.C. I have found that if ground much beyond .040" from original, it is time to replace the bed knife (this pertains to a greens cutting unit only).

Cutting through the long and short of all this, it is important to understand that as the reel diameter gets smaller and the bed knife shortens from front to back, the behavior of the cutting unit changes. To what extreme can you go? Well this time I found out the hard way.

I hope this prevents some of you from going to extremes to save the almighty buck.

From my bench to yours I hope you all are having a great summer.



A commonly used bed knife grinder. After grinding, the aggressiveness of the reel needs to be measured.

the Bull Sheet

John Gurke, CGCS, Associate Editor

DATES TO REMEMBER

September 4 – Deadline for submissions for *Golfweek's SuperNEWS* 2007 Best Friend Calendar.

September 14 – Turfgrass Research Field Day at Midwest Golf House in Lemont, Illinois. Visit www.illinois-turfgrassfoundation.org for registration information.

September 25 – MAGCS monthly meeting and Annual Golf Championship at Makray Memorial Golf Club in Barrington, Illinois, **Chris Blake** host.

October 1 – Deadline for submissions for the James Watson Fellowship Awards funded by Toro.

October 2-December 12 – The Rutgers University Professional Golf Turf Management School Two-Year Certificate Fall Session at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

October 3 – Member registration opens for the 2007 Golf Industry Show (February 19-24) in

Anaheim, California. By the way, housing registration is officially open, and has been since August 1st. Visit golfindustryshow.com for details.

October 10 – 26th Southern Illinois Turfgrass Field Day at the SIUC Horticulture Research Center in Carbondale, Illinois.

October 15 – Deadline for nominations for the GCSAA's Excellence in Government Relations Awards.

October 21 – Deadline for the GCSAA/Golf Digest magazine Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards in partnership with Rainbird and Syngenta.

November 1 – 54th Annual Midwest Turf Clinic at Medinah Country Club, **Tom Lively**, CGCS host.

November 28-30 Illinois Professional Turf Conference, St. Charles, Illinois.

Welcome to the following new MAGCS members:

Joseph A. Vocke, Class A, Carrillon North of Grayslake.

Scott DeYoung, Class E, Municipal Well and Pump.

Logan B. Orr, Class DS, Makray Memorial.

Marshall D. Hill, Class DS, Makray Memorial.

Brett P. Ziegler, Class C, Knollwood Club.

Mark Kosbab, Class C, Cantigny Golf and Tennis.

Again, MAGCS welcomes you all and hopes that your membership provides you with all you expect.

Happy 10th anniversary to GCSAA's web site, gcsaa.org. It's come a long way in a short time.

Now (or in the near future) would be a good time to check out www.golfindustryshow.com to book your accommodations for the 2007 conference and show in Anaheim (Feb. 19-24). Housing registration has been open since August 1, and you KNOW they book fast. Also, as of October 3rd you can register for the show itself at this same convenient site. See you there. Oh, and the MAGCS reception is tentatively

scheduled for February 22nd, so mark it down.

On September 23rd, the Bull Valley Golf Club is holding a fundraiser for superintendent **Sig Kolano** and his family in order to offset the high costs of medical treatments and expenses for Sig's and Susan's 10-month-old daughter Ella. On July 1st, Ella was diagnosed with Acute Myelogenous Leukemia (AML), and has been receiving treatment ever since. Bull Valley Golf Club and Membership Director Mark Salomone are seeking donations from area golf course superintendents (in the form of foursomes at their courses) to auction off at the fundraiser. Mark can be contacted at (815)337-4411 if you are able to contribute. You can read all about Ella's story and progress by going to www.caring-bridge.org and typing in ellakolano in the "visit site" box. Our prayers and good wishes go out to Sig, Susan, Anya and Ella Kolano and the entire Kolano family during this time.

The MAGCS monthly meeting in July was the Kane County Cougars Family Night Picnic at Phillip B. Elfstrom Stadium in Geneva, Illinois. For the second straight year, it was a scorching-hot afternoon, but that didn't seem to affect the turnout (with the exception of your author). A plethora of activities kept the kids going all night long, with games, face painting, baseball, food, drink, fireworks, and base running among the highlights. This evening of family fun could not be possible without the generosity of the day's sponsors—**Burris Equipment Company**, **Nadler Golf Car Sales**, **Nels J. Johnson Tree Experts**, **Palatine Oil Company**, and **Turf Professionals Equipment Company** and the Women's Center for Health who sponsored the face painter. Thank you to these great companies and to everyone who had a part in organizing the event. A special thank you to Jennifer Cella for all the treats for the kids.

If you didn't receive an e-mail about the family picnic (or any other MAGCS events for that matter), you can by contacting **Luke Cella** at MAGCS at (630) 243-7900.

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Just because MAGCS didn't have a golf event for July didn't mean there was no golf to be played—oh, there was golf, and plenty of it. One of the month's more popular events was the John Deere World Championship Qualifying Tournament held at Foxford Hills Golf Club (**Tom Jauch, CGCS** and **Ernest Johnson**) in Cary, Illinois on July 24th. The event pairs golf course superintendents with club managers in a two-person scramble. The prize for qualifying (first or second place) is a trip to the World Championships at the beautiful Reynolds Plantation Resort in Georgia on November 8 through 12. Taking 3rd, 4th, 5th, or 6th didn't hurt either, paying \$400, \$300, \$200, and \$100 in pro shop merchandise. It was a beautiful day with a testy breeze, ensuring the survival of only the strongest.

“Yada yada yada beautiful day with a testy breeze, ensuring the survival of only the strongest.” In the end, the strongest turned out to be the team from Glen Oak Country Club featuring **Andy Dauksas**. The second and final spot on the roster for a trip to Georgia was determined in a playoff, pitting the team from the Highlands of Elgin (**Brad Legnaioli**) against the Willowhill Golf Club (**Dave Arden**). The playoff lasted but 1 hole, and the Highlands of Elgin prevailed. Congratulations to all of the day's winners, and best of luck in the finals in Georgia.

What I love most about the joys of summer:

I love explaining to golfers that the dead semi-circles and circles of turf in their greens, tees, and fairways are actually caused by fairy rings, and then watching their reactions as they conjure up visions of little winged fairies flitting around the golf course in the wee hours of darkness, spreading their magic death dust with their little wands, frolicking and giggling along the way. I love that.

Having a college-bound kid just got a little more lucrative—the MAGCS Board of Directors has voted to increase the value of its 4 scholarships from \$1,000 to \$2,000 for 2007. Be it known, though, that if sufficient

funds are not available to raise all 4 awards the scholarships would increase in this order: MAGCS, George Minnis Memorial, John Buck Memorial, and Paul Burdett Memorial. Funds for these scholarships are currently being generated through several venues, including line-item budget amount, raffles and hospitality suite, hole sponsorships at the August event, the numerous “betting holes” or proximity events at our monthly meetings and donations from JW Turf and Master of the Links. If you have a young adult on his or her way to college, you definitely want to check into these opportunities at magcs.org. A scholarship application can be downloaded from the Members Area.

Congratulations and best wishes to **Justin Wheeler** (Prairie Landing Golf Club) on his big move to South Carolina to further pursue his career. Justin has been an active member of several committees, and a contributor to this magazine with his computer acumen. We will miss his presence in our association.



Justin Wheeler

One of the committees Justin was involved with was the Class C Advisory Committee, where his vacancy has opened the door for **Adam Pierce** (Biltmore Country Club) to step in and fill Justin's big shoes. Congratulations to Adam, and good luck with your new responsibilities.

Another news item from the Class C Advisory Committee is that it is famous! Chairman **John Ekstrom** (Hinsdale Golf Club) has been invited to share his experiences with his committee's efforts at the Iowa Turfgrass Show in Des Moines on January 30th. Congrats on this honor, John!



John Ekstrom

In case you haven't heard, our 2-year run as GCSAA's “Best in Class” chapter publication is officially over. This is not because we now suck, but simply because GCSSA has opted to do away with its Editorial Contest for the future. The reasons cited: Declining entries due to the intimidation of going up against *On Course* (and other really good pubs), too many repeat winners, and an overall feeling that the feedback from the editors session was the important thing, and not the tiny little statue of a pyramid. Thus, for the future GCSAA will continue to offer its chapter publications people a critique and support service without the award. That's OK.

Congratulations to **Peter Leuzinger, CGCS** on being named Instructor of Turfgrass at Kishwaukee College. Peter, a natural teacher throughout his career, takes over the turf program from recently-departed **Rusty Stachlewitz** (who isn't REALLY going to Antarctica to grow sod—duh), and is a perfect fit. We wish you all the good fortune in the world with your new position, Pete!



Peter Leuzinger

(continued on page 30)

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Dr. William Meyer has again been nominated for the GCSAA Distinguished Service Award to be presented in Anaheim in February, 2007. Dr. Meyer is a familiar face to all of us in MAGCS—his father Tony Meyer and brother **Dave Meyer** (both deceased) are legends in the area. Dr. Meyer has made significant contributions to the golf industry in the turfgrass breeding field, and is a driving force at Rutgers University in their program, making a valuable and permanent impact to the turf research program their since his arrival ten years ago. Letters of support for Dr. Meyer can be sent to Pat Payne, CMP, GCSAA, 1421 Research Park Drive, Lawrence, KS 66049 or faxed to (785) 832-4471. Good Luck, Dr. Meyer!

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If you buy any of the new Scott's Memorial creeping bentgrass seed, you'll be doing Wayne Otto a favor. The Scott's/Landmark Seed company will donate \$5.00 to the Wee One Foundation for every 25-pound bucket of Memorial it sells. As you know, the Wee One Foundation was established in memory of Wayne Otto to provide financial assistance to families of golf course management professionals who incur extensive medical expenses due to an injury or illness.
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