

Super Tips

Whistling While You Rake - at the Straits

By Darren J. Davis

Whistling Straits, located one-hour north of Milwaukee in the village of Kohler, Wis., was host to the 86th PGA Championship this past August. While Vijay Singh was crowned the tournament champion, in my eyes Golf Course Superintendent David Swift and Director of Golf Course Operations Mike Lee were the true champions of the event.

If you have the opportunity to visit Kohler, I would strongly urge you to do so. The area

is home to world-class accommodations, dining, shopping and four of my favorite golf courses, all owned by Herb Kohler, Jr., chairman of the board and president of Kohler Company. Kohler is a company that undoubtedly many of our clubs do a significant amount of business with.

Of the four courses at Kohler, 36 holes are located at Blackwolf Run. Blackwolf Run, designed by legendary architect Pete Dye, opened for play in June 1988. The remaining 36 holes are located at Whistling Straits. Whistling Straits opened in 1998, and was also designed by Pete Dye.



The open, rugged and windswept terrain at Whistling Straits translates into often deep, steep-faced challenging bunkers to maintain. Photo by Darren Davis.

At Whistling Straits, Dye sculpted a bit of Ireland and a touch of Scotland on the 560-acre parcel of flat land along two miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. "Open, rugged and windswept terrain" are words often used to define the courses at Whistling Straits. This translates to deep, steep-faced bunkers.

Steep bunker faces that are a challenge to maintain, are not unique to Whistling Straits. I can vividly recall the same challenge while employed as a crew member at the Augusta National Golf Club. The strategy employed at Augusta is similar to that at Whistling Straits. The employee starts the process outside of the bunker, reaching as far down as possible with the rake, so once inside the bunker, they know how far up the slope to climb in order to rake every inch of the sand face. The challenge once inside the bunker is to rake the entire slope without digging your feet into the sand on the slope, creating indentations. This is the same problem that Lee and Swift faced at Whistling Straits.

Lee and Swift used some old-fashioned ingenuity to solve the problem on their course. To add length to the leaf rake without drastically increasing the weight of the tool, a 20-foot section of 1-inch PVC was bolted to the existing handle of a leaf rake. To create the tool, 1-inch PVC is slid over the rake handle and two holes are drilled through the PVC and the rake handle. The pipe is then secured to the rake handle with a nut and bolt. The result is a lightweight, inexpensive, easy-to-store and transport tool that decreases the time and effort involved in raking steep bunker slopes. If a 20-foot rake is slightly larger than what you desire, the PVC pipe can be cut to fit the needs at your golf course.



Whistling Straits Superintendent David Swift shows a standard bunker rake and one of the long-handled hybrids he developed to maintain the bunkers. Photo by Darren Davis.