

## Jack Nicklaus and Pete Dye revisited

A wide-ranging question & answer session with 2 legends

PINEHURST, N.C. — There has been a hue and cry for more of the conversation Jack Nicklaus and Pete Dye had with their audience here during the 50th anniversary meeting of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. So we defer:

**Question from Jeffrey Brauer:** Can you give us any examples of things you have copied exactly [from Pinehurst #2], or is it more of a general influence that you have alluded to?

**Nicklaus:** I don't think I have ever copied a hole anywhere. I've copied concepts. And obviously, since I grew up on Sciota [Country Club in Columbus, Ohio] and like Pinehurst very much, I think a lot of the influences from that is there [in my designs]. It's pretty difficult, I think, to take some of these green areas and try to copy them or use the same philosophy. Sure, you can probably get it done. So, conceptwise, yes. Shot values, yes. The idea that bunkering might play off different things, yes. But I never copied anything exactly. I don't think I've even copied any of my own stuff. Every green you do should be original. It may turn out to be close, but never a copy.

**Dye (laughing):** I copy everything, I guess. No, not really. The thing that influenced me most about Mr. Ross [Pinehurst No. 2 architect Donald] was his routing. Typical of Pinehurst, he would start the first hole and dogleg or angle it either slightly left or right; and the next hole was angled the opposite direction; then he's absolutely just boggle your mind by making one dead straight ahead, like the 4th at Pinehurst No. 2.

When you're on rock base or clay, it's pretty hard to create something like Pinehurst No. 2, which is one of the exceptional areas in golf in our country. It is characteristic of areas you find in the British Isles, or to some extent on Long Island.

There is not enough drain tile in the world to copy the greens at Pinehurst. I'd like to have a sand pile like that some day.

**Audience question:** What should be done about the severity of the greens and the low scores in tournaments?

**Dye:** The greens are severe enough... When they were built in 1930 and were ryegrass and common Bermudagrass, they putted entirely different than they will now. Plus they have been crowned so over the years, it makes that target area pretty tight. They'll stand up, I'm sure... because they [pros] can hit it a long way, but they can't chip or putt, that's for sure.

**Nicklaus:** I'm not so sure about that, Pete. I don't think it's important whether the Open score is 99, or low or not... I think it's time we either change golf balls or stop

worrying about the score. We all face the problem of building a golf course and five years from now the golf balls will go 20 yards further and your course is obsolete. The golf ball is making the golf course semi-obsolete. And it shouldn't be. Can you imagine taking that golf ball down 5 percent and playing Pinehurst No. 2? It's a wonderful golf course. The only problem here, to try to get high scores in the Open, is that you don't have any water hazards. You grow rough, and I

don't think Pinehurst should have rough. It wasn't meant to have it. You have fairway, then you have scrub, then the ball runs off into the trees and that's what makes it difficult. Trees are not part of the strategy of the golf course...

**Question from Tom Fazio:** Back in the 1950s or early '60s were golfers discussing the quality or caliber of Pinehurst, and other golf courses?

**Dye:** Coming to Pinehurst No. 2 during and right after the war, this was a golf mecca, and that No.

2 was mentioned as a great golf course in the same tone Pine Valley was mentioned. And so was Baltusrol, Winged Foot and others... So, yes, in the eyes of golfers, Pinehurst was recognized as a great golf mecca and No. 2 was talked about even among the pros and avid golfers... They didn't talk about Mr. Ross like they do today.

**Nicklaus:** I think Pete may look at it more that way. I don't know. When I started playing, we looked at maybe a dozen as being the golf courses — Pinehurst, Augusta, Sciota, Pine Valley... Since that time, you all [architects] have built so many good golf courses [that]

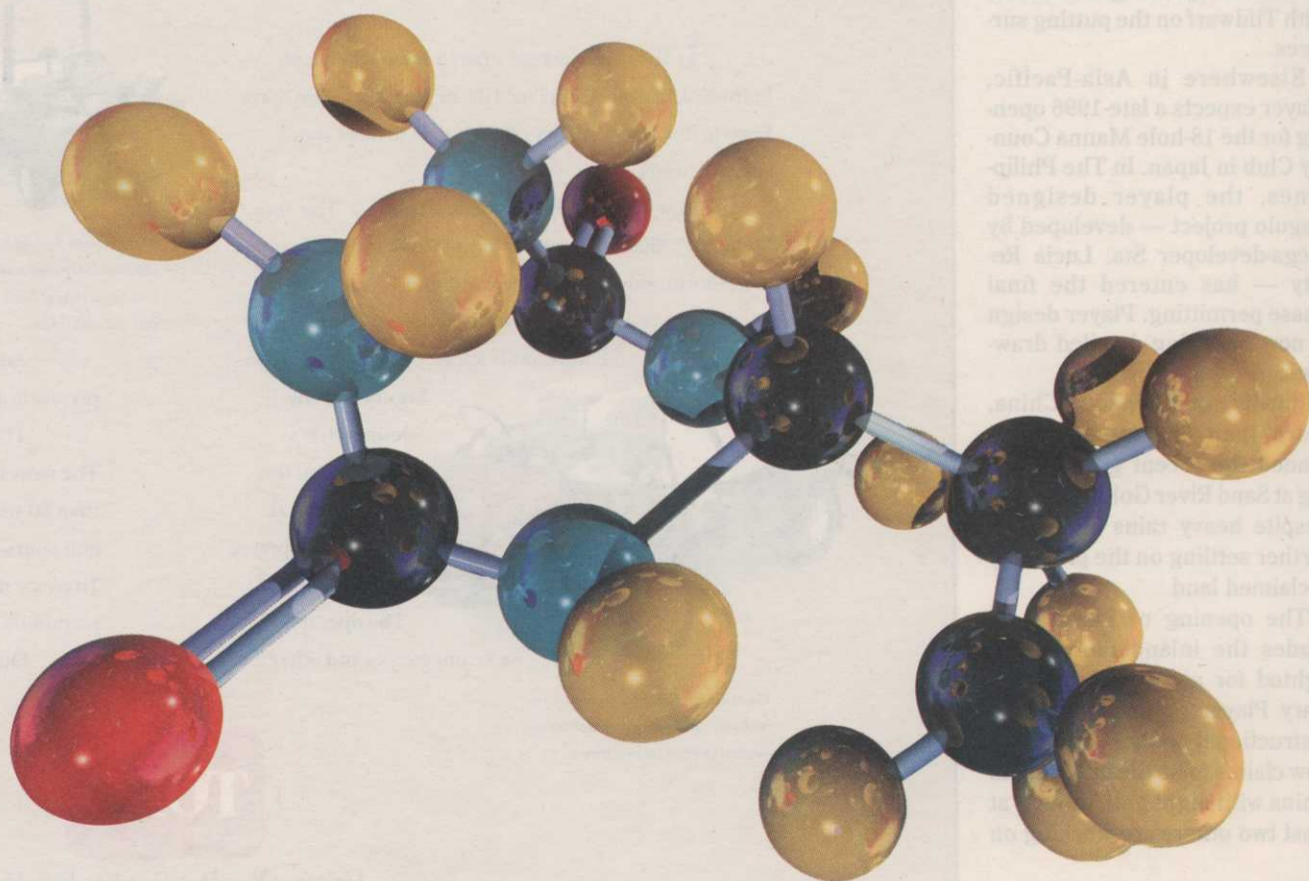
it's very difficult to try to figure out [which are best]. Back in the '60s travel was not there, television was not there, publicity for these places was not there. Back then you made a trip and said, 'I traveled to Pinehurst once and got to play No. 2.' Today it's 'I made a trip and played the top 100.'

**Audience question:** Do Tour players impact course designs?

**Nicklaus:** Yes, to a large degree... When a golf course hosts a tournament, it doesn't do the owner any good to have the pros bellyaching about this and that.

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## Nicklaus &amp; Dye

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You try to give them a good test of golf, and how they feel about the course depends on how they shot that day. If they shot 75 it was the worst golf course they ever saw, and if they shot 65, 'My, what a wonderful trip.'

We can all work hard doing a good golf course today that is acceptable from the tournament standpoint and from the average golfer's standpoint. My feeling is that Augusta National has always been a wonderful members' golf course. I got in real trouble one

time when I called Royal Melbourne a wonderful members' golf course. They didn't like that down there at all. But what I meant by it is, it's a golf course that the members can play on a daily basis and all you have to do is move the tees back and hide the pins and you have a championship golf course. I think that's what we've tried to be able to do. We have so many new people coming into the game.

And yet you don't want pros playing it and bellyaching. I think they do influence [design] — at least the top 30 because those are the ones the press talks to.

**Question from Robert Trent Jones Jr.:** Jack, you're concerned about the length of the golf ball. Aren't there really a lot of variables taken into account [to make] an older course really show itself?

**Nicklaus:** It's tough. I feel the USGA, by and large, has done a pretty darn good job. I was disappointed at Pebble Beach the last time. I worked a couple of years with them trying to get the golf course where we wanted it. They came in and made big deep ryegrass bunkers in straight lines, and I didn't think that was the character of Pebble Beach. I hope they don't do the same thing here

at Pinehurst. Again, I don't think score is important. If you want to protect it, protect it with equipment, not with the golf course. Don't ruin the golf course. I like fast greens, hard greens. I think that's the only way, if you wish to change a golf course. Often, you can make the rough a little higher and the greens a little quicker, and that's all you have to do for a tournament.

Every single year at Muirfield our greens go up to 13 [Stimpmeter reading] for the tournament. One year it was at 17 and I said to [Nicklaus agronomist] Ed Etchells: 'Ed, this is

insane.' I shot a 79 that day and wasn't real happy.

Our greens do not have that much pitch at Muirfield. If you do have a lot of pitch like these [at Pinehurst] you can't go to 12. You take Pinehurst greens to 9, 9-1/2 and you have plenty of speed. Put speed at Cypress Point and you don't have any pin placements.

I think you have to stay with the character of the golf course.

**Question from Gary Panks:** We've all seen golf courses that, under perfect weather conditions, are very difficult to play. Are we, as architects, thinking enough about [the common player]?

**Nicklaus:** I feel Pebble Beach is the perfect example of your question. If you get a golf course that won't yield under perfect conditions, then I don't think you have a very good golf course. Pebble Beach with no wind is not a very difficult golf course. But you put Pebble Beach on the ocean with some weather and you've got a tough golf course. I see that same situation right here at Pinehurst No. 2. It's not a particularly tough course without much wind. But you get it ... coming out of winter with hard turf and wind, and it is a tough place to play.

You have to design to the [weather] conditions.

**Dye:** Not many people play Augusta National in July. I don't think Augusta would even be mentioned if you had a tournament there in July. The wind makes it a great golf course when they do play the tournament and a great course with all the vegetation. I think wind is the greatest ally any designer has. Yes, you have to account for normal wind conditions in your design.

**Audience question:** How about controlling the game through the equipment?

**Nicklaus:** I think we're beyond that. The only thing that we can control is the golf ball. I think the ball designed for the average golfer, giving him the benefits if he doesn't have the skills to play better, is fine. But in the showcase of golf, if we drop the golf ball that 5 percent... What's wrong with a 6,700-yard golf course? That's what you've got if you take 5 percent from 7,000 yards.

The kids will say you're not playing the same golf ball. But they're not playing the same golf ball anyway. Ninety-nine percent of the people who play golf play a surly ball. The 1 percent who play a balata ball, that's tournament golf.

Leave the equipment alone... There is no reason why we can't design a 7,000-yard golf course and play it at 6,600. You can get a lot of variety within that course.

**Dye:** Do everything possible for the amateurs and just kill the professionals.

**Question from Mike Hurdzan:** What about a competition ball that the USGA issues?

**Nicklaus:** That's basically what I'm saying. I don't think the manufacturers would stand for issuing a particular ball to play. But manufacturers used to stand on the quality of the way they made the golf ball, not the structure of it.

The USGA could set the parameters for the balls...



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