

# What does it take to design a golf course?

I wish I could string together four great rounds, say on a Thursday to Sunday as I march to win any one of the PGA Tour's events. I'd win a nice chunk of cash and certainly pick up the momentum necessary to place second or fifth, or even first on another week during the rest of the PGA calendar.

That would appear to be all I need to do to launch my supplemental golf course architecture career — you know, in case my game starts to slip.

As I wade deeper into the knowledgebase of the golf business, I've repeatedly asked the top players in the design field what it takes to be a well-sought course architect. The answers are as varied as the designers themselves; yet the common piece of any response is that one must be able to look at a site, no matter how perfect or how raw and awful, and picture a layout, figure out how each hole should be framed in the context of a given piece of land.

That skill alone takes "an eye," the same eye that separates Irving Penn or Helmut Newton from the rest of us simple camera owners. Yes, I own a camera, but what I choose to frame is what separates me from one of the masters. That master frames the shot before the eye gazes into the viewfinder.

A good designer is not necessarily a great golfer (I've seen this fact proven on two occasions), but a person who has an eye for the layout, someone who has stepped on countless acres of undeveloped earth and has seen thousands of holes materialize in the minds eye.

Now this is where I remain somewhat mystified. PGA pros have walked thousands of fabulous holes, but how many raw spaces has a pro surveyed prior to the layout of 18 new holes? Is being a great golfer any help in being a great course designer? Are the two skills related in any way?

Just prior to The Masters, Tiger Woods was caught saying that he has, in fact, entertained the thought of hovering over some blueprints.

"I think it's going to happen a little bit later," Woods said in an Associated Press wire story prior to the big event. "I've got some things in my head of styles I like and things I want to incorporate into my own course designing." Woods went on to say he needed to play more courses around the world and learn more about drainage and slopes and development around the tract of land. "I'm very creative," he said. "I like to create that way."

International Management Group (IMG) is readying a few new "design products" in the forms of Jesper Parnevik and Annika Sorenstam, two excellent players who will have "design teams" put in place to support their new endeavors.

According to IMG, there are more new stars on the horizon, all with slick marketing packages and niche-oriented business plans. How Jesper and Annika will do is yet to be seen. However, as more and more marquee names enter the field, it will be the market that will eventually decide what it takes to be a golf course designer.



Michael Levans, editor

# This is the Official Typeface of a Mark Leslie editorial column

We've seen The Official Sneaker of the Boston Celtics, The Official Eye Wear of the U.S. Olympic Team and The Official Vehicle of the U.S. Ski Team. I wouldn't be surprised if there is an Official Underwear of the Jamaican Bobsled Team.

Now this Official hype has hit the golf industry. I'm not talking about Tiger wearing the Nike hat, or Norman wearing a Reebok sweatshirt, or Kite wearing Hogan paraphernalia, or Payne Stewart wearing ... well, let's not get into that.

No, that stuff has been around since the advent of television. What I'm referring to is that we've moved into the upper echelon of this marketing madness that makes the normal person ask, "What!? I mean, what!?"

The light went off when I received a press release in February announcing that Pepsi-Cola is the "Official Soft Drink of Golden Bear."

We all know that Golden Bear means Jack Nicklaus — he, who, by the way, wears Golden Bear golf shirts (and I'm all for self-promotion). As part of this agreement, Pepsi and other Pepsi-branded soft drinks will receive exclusivity and "pouring rights" at all Golden Bear-owned facilities including Golden Bear Golf Centers and Golden Bear Golf Clubs.

For Pepsi drinkers, this is no big deal. But for you poor Cocaholics, we feel so sorry for you. You'll have to go to Golden Bear Club's competition down the street to get your favorite drink. I only wonder if those facilities will be able to gauge the revenue lost because Coke drinkers went elsewhere.

And Golden Bear does not stand alone. American Golf Corp. is now in the hunt to sign on to Official Soft Drink, Official Greens Mower, Official Golf Club ... everything.

Can ClubCorp., Palmer Golf Management and the Golf Course Builders Association of America be far behind?

But all that unimportant stuff is beside the point. The important issue here is that we at *Golf Course News* need some Official thises and thats. You know, an Official Soft Drink of *Golf Course News*, an Official Golf Club of *Golf Course News*, an Official Golf Ball of *Golf Course News*, Official One-rider Golf Car of *Golf Course News* ... everything. Cobra and Titleist, are you listening? Dr. Pepper, Toro and Dragonfly?

I'll be waiting, with baited breath, at my phone for your calls.

Helping the environment also helps your image, golf facilities are discovering. It's a double effective sword. (See page 1 story.)

"We use our Audubon Signature status just like Proctor and



Mark Leslie, managing editor

Continued on page 70

## Letter

### WGA looks to work with industry

*Edit note: The following is a letter from Graham Whatley, executive director of the Walking Golf Association (WGA).*

Thank you for writing the article on the establishment of the Walking Golf Association (WGA) and including it in your recent issue of *Golf Course News* (GCN, March).

Everything in the article was a fair articulation of the statements we have made and our views so far. There is, however, an aspect of our goals for the association which was not strongly stated and which could allow golf courses to perceive that we are a threat to them.

Fundamentally, we do not intend for the Walking Golf Association to be adversarial with golf courses which prohibit or restrict walking. We, in fact, plan for golf courses to join the WGA and for us to be a partner which helps solve problems for the good of all — both walking golfers and golf courses. We know that some portion of players will

always want to use a cart. We respect that decision and don't want to impede these golfers in enjoying their rounds the way they choose.

Being trained as a lawyer, I was taught that lawyers who tell you what you can't do are a dime a dozen. But the lawyer who can tell you how you can legally and appropriately accomplish your goals are worth a million bucks. The WGA wants to be the organization that is worth a million bucks to golf courses.

How do we accomplish this? First, we truly do understand the revenue and economic pressures that golf courses face today and the reason many in the upscale golf course arena must rely upon cart revenues. Michael Hurdzan, my fellow Board member, works and deals with these issues every day. We are certainly not naive to the forces at work. And

we certainly don't have all the answers.

But we are in a unique position to work with golf courses to create answers which will allow them to maintain revenues while allowing walking. We want to be an organization which creates solutions and then tests their veracity in partnership with interested golf courses. If they succeed then we look forward to other golf courses utilizing the knowledge we have gained.

Rounds of golf at far too many courses are taking well over 5 hours, especially on weekends when the vast majority of rounds are played. If something could be done in a systematic way to increase the speed of a round to 4 hours, this would make a significant impact on the number of rounds possible on peak days and revenues.

Admittedly, far too many times golfers are their own worst enemies. Honestly, too many golfers who have played for years don't know the rules like they

should and aren't well educated on the speed-of-play issues. For example many of us have no clue even what the speed rating for a golf course is, let alone do something to moderate our speed of play!

Therefore, one of our first priorities is to help educate golfers on these issues and what they can do about them. We want to make golfers aware of their responsibilities to others on the course. Make them aware so that they know how to make adjustments to their speed without

Continued on page 65

### CORRECTION

The designer of the Indian Summer Golf and Country Club was incorrectly named in the story "Microsoft executive buys Puget Sound layout" on page 8 of GCN February. The designer was Peter L.H. Thompson.

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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