

## Medinah baked, pros half-baked

It was so hot on Aug. 13 — the Friday of the PGA Championship at Medinah (Ill.) Country Club No. 3 course — that the pavement “popped” on Chicago’s Lakeshore Drive. A lady actually baked cookies in her parked car outside Wrigley Field. Two weeks of 95-degree weather were capped as temperatures soared to 104 degrees and the heat index hit 120.

Set against this backdrop, it is especially deplorable that PGA Tour pros, who ought to know better, lashed out at the turfgrass conditions at Medinah.

Tiger Woods, who won the Championship at 10-under-par, Fred Couples and Lee Janzen were among them. Janzen even said: “I don’t care about the heat. There’s no excuse for not having perfect greens.”

Thank God for evenhanded South African Nick Price, who said: “When you’re 10 or so under par, you have no right to be complaining. The greens can’t be that bad.”

“Everyone’s been a little harsh on the greenskeeper,” Price added. “This course in June [when there wouldn’t have been so much cumulative heat stress], with the greens hard and fast, would be a monster. The winner would have finished 1 or 2 under par.”

When the heat index reached 120, said Medinah head superintendent Danny Quast: “That’s when we really started to suffer turf loss. We had been out hand-watering and trying to cool down the grass, and in most cases it was very successful. But the sand bentgrass greens couldn’t hold up to it [especially under championship conditions] and consequently thinned out.”

To compound the heat problem, Chicago was in the midst of a drought which, in turn, exacerbated the condition of Medinah’s irrigation water. Quast has discovered that the lake’s salt index had been exceptionally high this summer and salt in the root zone of the greens got worse and worse.

“Flushing is one way to combat that, but we couldn’t flush during the heat spell; that would only compound the problem,” Quast said. “The corrective measures will be to find a different water source.”

Asked if he were surprised by the comments of some of the Tour pros, Quast said: “Yes, it surprised me in that this was not a condition confined to Chicago. This was a problem from the Midwest all the way to the East Coast. The best you could say is that they weren’t too well informed.”

Yes, that is the best someone can say.

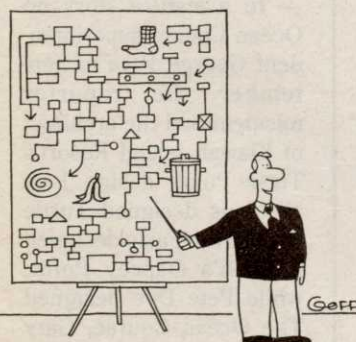
“I don’t want to be critical of them,” Quast added. “I don’t know their job, either.”

“We felt we did a good job — the best we could in those conditions,” he added. “We were trying to cool the greens and I think we did real well. We could have lost them all. The crew worked very hard and deserved credit, which they will probably never get.”

No, they probably won’t — least of all from some of the Tour players.

I have two questions for the complainers:

- 1) If there’s no excuse for not having perfect greens, what is your excuse for not shooting a perfect round?
- 2) Because you drive a car, do you think of yourself as an automotive engineer?



“And those are this month’s new environmental regulations. Any questions?”



Mark Leslie  
editor

## We’re better for knowing them

I had the pleasure of having dinner with Phil Friel (see obituary, page 9) a few years ago. Seated at the table that warm-ish West Palm Beach winter evening were my nephew (an aspiring young assistant pro who worked summers at one of Friel’s courses) and an older gentleman, whose name escapes me, but who apparently enjoyed considerable success on the New England golf scene some 30 years earlier.

I knew Mister Friel was battling cancer, but he was still an energetic and delightful dinner companion. He was a man who owned a dozen courses, had played in the PGA Championship, and won a number of professional tournaments throughout New England. By all accounts, he was still shooting several strokes under his age.

Yet as I directed questions at him, giving him every opportunity to pat himself on the back regarding his golfing and entrepreneurial accomplishments, he continually deflected the attention toward the older gentleman across the table. “You should have seen him play,” Friel said on several occasions.

That told me a lot about the man.

My nephew and I delighted in the older gentlemen’s company, in their stories, in their camaraderie. By the end of the evening I found myself calling him “Mister Friel,” just as my nephew had been doing from the outset; just as the people in the pro shop at White Mountain Golf Club in Ashland, N.H., called him on the second occasion Mister Friel and I met; just as Souhegan Woods superintendent Jeff Brown (see story on next page) continually referred to him during our phone interviews.

Mister Friel attracted the kind of respect and admiration from those around him that just a few seem to draw these days — Mister Jones, Mister Williams, Mister Jemsek, Mister Wadsworth. Those who have had the pleasure of

meeting these gentlemen are the richer for it.

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The 5.4 million avid golfers (25-plus rounds per year) spent an average \$3,339 on their chosen sport in 1998, while golfers as a whole spent \$30 billion, according to National Golf Foundation figures (see story page 3).

The average superintendent earns \$53,205 annually (see story page 1). Wykagyl Golf Club Director of Golf Steven Rinzetti said he doesn’t know a superintendent in the Metropolitan New York area making under \$60,000.

Pebble Beach Co. recently sold for more than \$800 million and green fees at Pebble Beach Golf Links are running \$325 a round.

Kind of hard to believe those who claim the “golf industry is in trouble, the bubble has burst, the boom is over, etc., etc., etc.”

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Talk about your hard-working guys.

Robbie Hellstrom, president of RJH Golf Course Management Services (see story page 27), is currently working three to five days a week as course consultant at Sugarloaf Golf Club in Carrabassett Valley, Maine. Every week he makes the 10-hour round-trip drive from there to his home outside Montreal, where he consults two days a week for ski industry giant Intrawest on its two courses at Mt. Tremblant and two more days a week at another Montreal course, Vallee des Fort, which is building a second 18 holes.

In his spare time he is raising four children aged 1 to 7.

His philosophy. “We’re here for a short time, so let’s have a good time.” I kind of like that.



Peter Blais  
managing editor

## Pinehurst — before and after... truly



### THE REAL DEAL

Unfortunately an error in our last issue resulted in the same “before” photograph being placed twice. We want to show our readers what we really wanted to impress them with in the September issue. The inset shows the gallery area between the 14th green and 15th tee at Pinehurst No. 2 following the U.S. Open on June 23. The larger photo shows how superintendent Paul Jett and his crew had the area looking just two weeks later, on July 6. We apologize to Mr. Jett and the Pinehurst staff.

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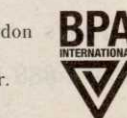
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