

Sitting in La Cumbre CC's makeshift ballroom during the American Society of Golf Course Architects Donald Ross Banquet in April, I began to wonder, "How did all of these bizarre men get so lucky and marry all of these classy, beautiful women?" I asked myself.

Then, during the hour between the salad and main-course arrival, I realized how fortunate I was to be sitting at the same table as Geoffrey Cornish, who charmed us with stories about A.W. Tillinghast, Stanley Thompson, Donald Ross and C.B. Macdonald. We learned that Cornish knew these famous architects and remembers them well. After some gentle tugging by Dana Fry, Cornish told the story of how snow forced him to make 50-mile trip by dogsled to get to a job at Cape Breton Highlands in Canada. I wondered if Cornish is the Ernest Shackleton of golf design.

My wondering continued when Eddie Merrins, the legendary "Little Pro" from Bel-Air CC, took the podium to accept the Ross Award for 2002 recipient Byron Nelson. As the Little Pro mentioned all of the George Thomas courses the ASGCA has visited in recent years, I wondered what "The Captain" would think of certain men in that room who touted about how they're restoring Thomas' courses, while they're doing just the opposite. (There I go again, loving only anything built prior to the Depression, as Rees Jones demanded I just admit. He didn't believe me when I said there were post-1930 courses I liked. Really, Rees — Bethpage Black is super.)

The Little Pro's remarks continued. I wondered if his acceptance speech would last longer than Nelson's 11-tournament winning streak. (Incidentally, Nelson's pal, Jay Morrish, pointed out it was actually 12 straight wins. One win was actually omitted because of a technicality.)

I continued wondering . . . how nice it is to see Bill Coore in a plaid coat. Then I dreamed about what Jack Nicklaus' renderings must have looked like when he joined the ASGCA. (If you don't know, to have the opportunity to pay your tailor to make you a plaid coat, you have to present your architectural renderings

Banquet Put Me in a Wondering Mood

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



WHO WOULD HAVE
BELIEVED THAT
THE ASGCA, AS
OPPOSED TO THE
USGA, WOULD BE
THE ORGANIZATION
STICKING UP FOR
TRADITION AND THE
FUTURE OF GOLF?

for deep analysis by the ASGCA's top-secret plans committee. I'm sure Jack's were very thorough.)

As the Little Pro embarked on an unusual tale about Robert Trent Jones Jr. (is that redundant?), he mentioned something about Russian engineers zigzagging "like ants" around Spanish Bay, all the while hitting it off with a Russian-speaking bagpiper.

Feeling assured that no end was in sight, I wondered about that architect at the next table. Apparently after receiving his spool of Ross tartan, he decided to break from tradition by making his plaid into a vest. (Do you think he gets handed valet-parking tickets when he goes to fancy gigs like this?)

While Merrins mentioned something about another feather in Nelson's multi-plumed hat, I wondered, "Isn't it interesting that this group of men and women, who dress like Scottish morticians, turned out to be golf's most unwavering organization in the technology debate? Who would have believed five years ago that the ASGCA, as opposed to the USGA, would be the organization sticking up for tradition and the future of golf? After all, designers could benefit from courses needing to expand. Instead, most architects are trying to push golf toward downsizing and developing fun-to-play alternative facilities."

As the Little Pro wound up 25 minutes of memories, some even relating to Nelson, I wondered how the USGA chaps in the room felt when the ever-diplomatic Merrins recommended a competition ball to save classic courses and the character of golf. At least one thing required no more wondering: the Little Pro and the ASGCA are taking a stand for the good of the game.

*Geoff Shackelford can be reached at
geoffshackelford@aol.com*