

Off The Fringe

Jack and Tom — or Oscar and Felix?

NICKLAUS, DOAK ARE AN ODD COUPLE FOR NEW DESIGN, AS PRESS CONFERENCE REVEALS

By Anthony Pioppi, Contributing Editor

There they were, Jack Nicklaus and Tom Doak, the oddest of golf course architecture pairings, sitting side by side under the glare of television lights and the watchful eye of nearly 75 media types and hangers-on with Long Island Sound and a shocking blue sky serving as a backdrop. The two were together June 16 in Southampton, N.Y., a day before the start of the U.S. Open, to discuss a joint project with the press.

Nicklaus was his usual public self: smooth, charming, humorously self-



Jack Nicklaus (second from left) and Tom Doak (third from left) break ground.

effacing, at ease with the cameras and the questions.

Doak was Doak — uncomfortable as ever in the spotlight, looking like a piano student at his first recital. It was if he would have preferred to be anywhere else in the world except there, one of the greatest spots on the Eastern Seaboard on which to build a golf course.

That is exactly what brought the two together — well, that and owner

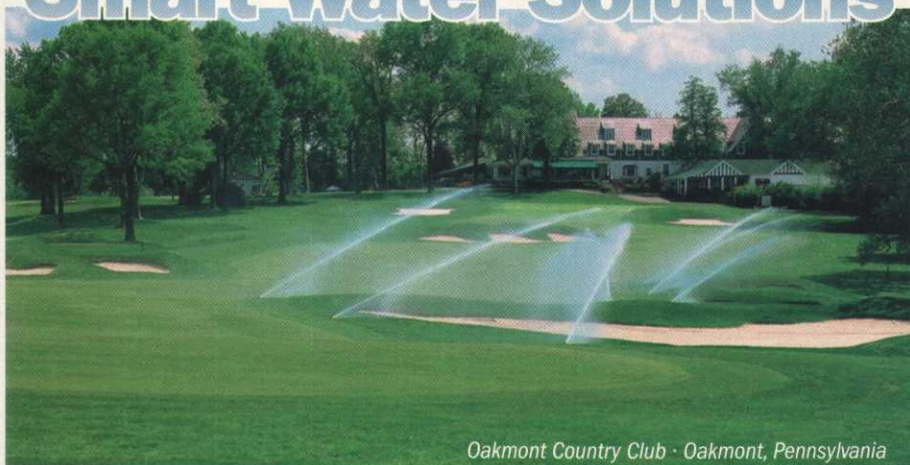
Michael Pascucci's money. It was Pascucci's dream of building a golf course on land that abuts National Golf Links of America, Shinnecock Hills Golf Club and the Great Peconic Bay. The dream will be realized with the completion of the ultraprivate Sebonack Golf Club, a Doak-Nicklaus collaboration, scheduled to open in the fall of 2005.

Whether the first-time pairing will work remains to be seen, but both architects — noted for their healthy egos — say the collaboration will be no problem.

"Doing a golf course with Jack Nicklaus is an honor for me," Doak said, deflecting any thought of the two butting heads. "All golf courses are collaborations."

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Nicklaus, too, said the pairing would work well, and the plan for collaborating would be simple.

"We'll try to do it together," he said. "(We'll) put our heads together and we'll go through every hole, work every hole. Some holes Tom is going to get the call, because we'll like what

Tom did better. Sometimes I'll get the call because we'll like what I do better. That's fine."

Pascucci paid a reported \$45 million for the property he purchased from the Electrical Workers Union pension fund.

Pascucci, who belongs to the Nicklaus-designed Muirfield Village Golf

Club and Golden Bear Club, first hired Nicklaus for the project, then added Doak after seeing his stunning Pacific Dunes layout.

"I want to put the most IQ in the golf course that we can," he said.

But the brain trust already appears to be one-sided. Nicklaus admitted he has not seen one of Doak's courses to familiarize himself with Doak's style, while Doak has seen dozens of Nicklaus projects. Nicklaus walked the site for the first time the morning of the press conference. Doak had been there nearly a half-dozen times. The routing is primarily Doak's with input from Nicklaus's staff.

"We took some runs at routing to start with and Tom took some runs at routing, and frankly routing is more Tom's than it is ours," Nicklaus said.

Both Doak and Nicklaus said the finished product might little resemble the current routing.

"What you put on a piece of paper is what you'd like to say the golf course is going to look like, Nicklaus said. "But generally speaking, it bears no resemblance to what you put on paper and what you finish with. We'll end up with letting the golf course evolve."

Doak's take is the effort will produce an outstanding result if all the sides work together.

"If we take the best ideas everybody has and put them together and get ourselves out of the way and find the common ground between us as far as what is a great golf course ... we're not far apart on that," he said.

Although Sebonack will be smack up against two of the greatest golf courses in the world, Nicklaus and Doak said they do not feel added pressure to come up with a great design.

"I think National and Shinnecock are great courses because they have their own personalities," Doak said. "That's what we're searching for out here as we build the golf course. We can't sit here and tell you exactly what that personality will be — that's the part that has to evolve. That's the fun part."



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Pascucci also talked about Sebonack being an organic golf course. What that means precisely has not been determined.

"The town is working with us. They understand that we're doing an organic golf course and the naturalness of what we're trying to do," he said.

Following the press conference, even Doak was hard-pressed to define "organic."

Apparently, the greens will be built to recycle irrigation water. The preliminary grassing plan includes the use of fescues throughout in-play areas. A pesticide and fertilizer regimen, however, has not been determined.

One prominent superintendent in town for the U.S. Open, who requested his name not be used, was baffled at the description of the course as "organic."

"Organic? What does that mean?" he asked.

As with any golf course in its infancy, there are still many questions, but one was most likely answered well after the press conference was over — that of who will play a greater role in the design.

Doak and his people huddled around a map of the course, discussing a possible green site change with the Nicklaus people. Jack? He wasn't involved in the decision. He had left the property 20 minutes earlier.

Quotable

"It's going to be a bunch of car wrecks. It's going to be like there's oil on the track at Daytona."

— Pro golfer Fred Funk, BEFORE the final round of the U.S. Open. He was right. (Associated Press)

"Most of the pesticides we use today are safer than aspirin. I'm not talking about 20 years ago, I'm talking about today. I'm not talking about all of them, I'm talking about most of them."

— Tim Hiers, certified superintendent of the Old Collier Golf Club.



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