

Early into the 2004 U.S. Open, it appeared that Shinnecock Hills Golf Club would be remembered as an enormous success. Superintendent Mark Michaud's recent in-house bunker renovation looked awesome. Course conditions seemed perfect. The layout was tough but fair, albeit too narrow for "links conditions."

After two rounds, the leader board was dominated by the world's best. One problem — the leaders were five-under par. They were hitting wedges into long par fours. The once unreachable par-five 16th was vulnerable to players reaching it in two. In USGA parlance, the Southampton, N.Y., sky was falling. Something had to be done.

The turning point came Friday evening of tournament week. Several hard-working volunteers and officials have confirmed that after leaders reached six-under par through 36-holes, the self-obsessed USGA, led by championship committee chairman Walter Driver and senior rules and competitions director Tom Meeks, attempted to restore order.

As of this printing, it still wasn't clear who OK'd the quadruple cut and double rolling of greens Friday evening. But the excessive preparation was done under USGA supervision.

When things went bad Saturday, Driver first pinned the par-three seventh hole debacle on an "inadvertent" rolling of the green. When no one believed him, Driver tried a new spin Sunday night.

"I'm sure someone was asked to roll it, but that instruction came from someone down the chain of command, and I don't know who," Driver said after Retief Goosen saved the USGA with his 24-putt final round. "I think it's just human error. I think somebody thought they were supposed to roll it and told the fellow who was on the rolling machine to go ahead. He didn't just make it up, but it didn't come from me."

Sunday, the entire course turned goofy, except to the same sadists who cheered when a car crashes into a wall. Those who love watching a demonstration of skill were horrified.

The cause of this madness? The USGA has lost control of the game. The excessive setup was employed to compensate for the USGA's inability to regulate equipment.

Pin Shinnecock's Shame on USGA

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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In the distorted USGA mentality, a high winning score might wake up a golf world reluctant to admit that the game is totally out of whack. Folks might realize that golf is working around the demands of equipment manufacturers who have no interest in anything but their own bottom lines.

At Shinnecock, we saw how desperate the USGA has become, resorting to reckless and revolting spin: Blame the superintendent, blame the crew, blame the old architecture, blame the wind.

We did good, it just went bad.

"I have no regrets," the USGA's Tom Meeks told *The Golf Channel*.

Others may take some heat, namely the USGA's Tim Moraghan and Mike Davis, or Shinnecock's Michaud. But it's clear that unless they secretly defied orders — which no one believes for a second — the blame begins and ends with Meeks, Driver and the USGA's warped U.S. Open approach.

Meeks has a track record of set-up follies, but he has been allowed to carry on because USGA Executive Committee egos need a high winning score so they can say, "See, we haven't blown this equipment regulation thing."

"Let's keep this in perspective," Driver said. "This is the third modern Open at Shinnecock. Retief [Goosen] shot four-under par. In 1986 [Raymond Floyd's] one-under won the tournament. And in 1995, [Corey Pavin's] even par won the tournament."

Driver added, "I would rather not have had the controversy, but we couldn't do anything about it."

Except dump the blame on someone else. Shame on the USGA for refusing to take responsibility for anything these days.

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