

**I**t's only autumn, but Paul Jett is already hearing the question, "Can it happen here?" The certified superintendent of Pinehurst No. 2, site of the 2005 U.S. Open, answers the inquiry straightforwardly. "It will not happen here," he says.

The "it" we're talking about, of course, is the unfortunate matter — or debacle, as some have called it — that occurred at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club in June during this year's U.S. Open. The course's extreme setup the last two days of the tournament caused enough wrangling among golfers, golf historians and golf fans that the USGA should re-examine its philosophy behind staging the tournament.

All of this, however, puts Jett in a precarious position when people, especially the media, ask him what he thinks about what happened at Shinnecock. Jett must think twice about his answers. He can't bash the USGA like superintendents less close to the matter can.

So on a recent late-summer day, Jett was understandably on guard when answering some of my questions as he whipped his tattered utility vehicle around the famed Donald Ross design. The well-tanned Jett, with his slicked-backed hair and dark wrap-around sunglasses, was also cool and composed when asking questions. (Memo to the GCSAA: Get Jett to speak at one of your seminars on "Dealing with the Media.")

"Let me put it this way," Jett said, elaborating on whether what happened at Shinnecock could happen at Pinehurst. "We're going to have a golf course on Sunday afternoon [the last day of the Open] that a resort guest will be able to play on Tuesday morning [after the Open] and be satisfied with the experience."

When asked if he thought the USGA needs to re-evaluate its set-up strategy, Jett's answer could be perceived as riding the fence. But if one reads between the lines, his answer could also be perceived as a challenge for everyone to get on board when crucial decisions are made during the tournament. Apparently, that didn't happen at Shinnecock.

## A Healthy Paul Jett Looks to Next June

BY LARRY AYLWARD



**BUT THE PINEHURST  
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SHINNECOCK HILLS**

"There are a lot of people involved in the setup — USGA people, the superintendent and others," Jett said. "Everybody has to come to some sort of agreement of what it's going to be."

A lot of superintendents might be shaking in their golf shoes to host next year's U.S. Open, especially after what happened at Shinnecock this year. But keep in mind that Jett has been there before. Pinehurst hosted the U.S. Open in 1999, and Jett has an idea of what to expect.

"We've already gone through one U.S. Open where the scoring conditions couldn't have been any better," Jett insists. "So why would we want to change a lot of things? I've had no conversations with Tom Meeks (USGA's senior director of rules and competitions) or Tim Moraghan (USGA's director of championship agronomy) to indicate that we're going to do things a far cry different than we did in '99."

While it's understandable that Jett didn't want to touch the what-did-you-think-of-what-happened-at-Shinnecock questions with a 10-foot bunker rake, he did offer some neutral insights regarding the matter. Jett was at Shinnecock early in the week of the tournament but left before the event transformed from a championship golf tournament into the Daytona 500. But Jett says he understands how the course could have dried up and begun playing as fast as a NASCAR track.

"Shinnecock sits right on the ocean and has probably even a more sandy soil than we have," he said. "You could hold the water off here until next June and the course wouldn't be that hard."

Jett also said he wasn't surprised that so many golfers slammed Shinnecock for its playability. "They're the ones that had





LARRY AYLWARD

A lot of superintendents might be shaking in their golf shoes to host next year's U.S. Open, considering what happened at Shinnecock Hills. But not Paul Jett, certified superintendent of Pinehurst No. 2, who expects to have the time of his life.

to play it, so I'm not surprised they voiced their displeasure."

If I were Jett, a part of me would be dreading the 2005 Open. It's the part that would have to deal with guys like me, as in the media. You know the media, we like to compare a present event with a past event and draw conclusions. It's inevitable that Jett will field a slew of questions asking him to compare Pinehurst with Shinnecock.

But I'm not Jett, and such questions might seem trivial to him after considering what he went through the last time the U.S. Open came to Pinehurst. Three months before the start of the tournament, Jett was diagnosed with testicular cancer. He finished radiation treatments three weeks before the tournament began. Obviously, Jett didn't get to enjoy that U.S. Open too much.

Things will be different this time around, however. The 40-year-old Jett received a clean bill of health from his doctor and plans to enjoy the week of the U.S. Open like no other.

It's several months away, but may I propose an early toast that Paul Jett has the time of his life during the 2005 U.S. Open. Here's to a great golf course, a great golf tournament and a great golf course maintenance team.

And, most importantly, here's to Jett's good health. ■

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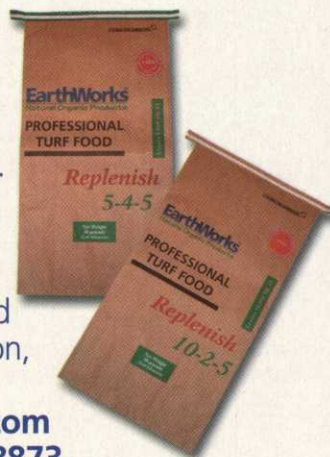
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