

**B**ack at work after a week of vacation, Mark Michaud sounded refreshed and re-energized while speaking on the phone. Lord knows Michaud, the superintendent of Shinnecock Hills Golf Club, needed some time to chill. After all, people were still talking about what happened at the U.S. Open when Michaud left for vacation — nearly a month after the controversial tournament ended. In fact, they're still talking about it.

Michaud, who's divorced, traveled to his hometown of Rochester, N.Y., to spend time with his two sons, Mark and Jordan.

"We had a great time," Michaud said. "They loved the Open. They said, 'Dad, you made the ball roll *really* far.'"

Michaud laughed his distinctive raspy cackle after repeating what his sons had said. Yes, the golf balls were brakeless at Shinnecock. Michaud's crew rolled and cut the greens to the point that putting on them was akin to driving on the Ohio Turnpike in February after a few inches of wet snow.

Many players moaned and groaned about the conditions. Hence, all of the hoopla surrounding the lickety-split greens ended up overshadowing the tournament — which was a shame.

"I think they're ruining the game," said golfer Jerry Kelly, blasting the USGA after the tournament.

Indeed, Shinnecock's greens (and fairways) were as stony and inflexible as some of the nuns that taught me in grade school 30 years ago. The critics who said the greens had a negative impact on the tournament had a point. But it could also be argued that the people who said, "Well, that's the U.S. Open for you," had a point, too.

In light of all the problems facing professional sports today, however, the USGA's obsession to stage the most grueling golf tournament of the year may be misguided — but it's not a crime.

Nobody was injured at the U.S. Open, except Tiger Woods' ego. Nobody was infringed upon. All of the players who made the cut walked away with pretty pennies in their pockets.

Professional sports has far-worse troubles than ridiculously fast greens at the U.S. Open.

## Fast Greens and Felonious Assault

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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Turn the TV channel to SportsCenter on any given night and you'll see a pitcher throwing a baseball at a batter's head because the batter smacked a home run off the pitcher two months before. Or you'll see a 250-pound hockey goon barreling down the ice with the sole intention of blindsiding and injuring a smaller and faster center who has scored two goals on the night.

Someday, somebody is going to die on the baseball field or the ice rink.

Who's worse? A baseball manager that instructs a pitcher to throw a 90-mph heater at a batter, or a USGA official who instructs the golf course maintenance staff to roll the already-fast greens the evening before the final round of the U.S. Open?

This is not to say that something shouldn't be done in regard to course setup for future U.S. Opens, but let's just keep things in perspective. The USGA is not ruining professional golf. But baseball pitchers who throw at hitters with the intent to intimidate or hurt them are helping to ruin professional baseball.

After returning from his vacation, Michaud said he didn't want to talk about the U.S. Open anymore. The tone of his voice revealed he was sick and tired of discussing it. Understandable. Michaud also agrees there are more vital problems in sports to talk about.

I'll gladly get that conversation started: I propose that all hockey goons be arrested and charged with felonious assault for causing bodily harm through cheap shots inflicted on opposing players. If convicted, they should spend time in jail and be banned from the league.

Once you take care of the more serious problems in the wide world of sports, then you can come back and talk to me about the fast and furious greens at the U.S. Open.

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