

**U**pon the U.S. Open's return to Oakmont next month, excitement builds with this grand design taking center stage. Many in the golf course industry anticipate numerous stories detailing the club's extensive tree removal program.

Some are even hoping that this spotlight on deforestation will help to convince course leadership to take down a few more of those shade-creating woody plants.

Be careful what you wish for.

There is the possibility that Oakmont's virtual clear-cutting may make your sales pitch tougher, not easier.

Not because Oakmont's work was poor or wrong. Quite the contrary.

No, just remember that no matter how much sense tree removal makes for turf or design considerations, most golfers become delusional when the emotions of tree removal kick in.

Here's the back story: Oakmont's early-20th century design was an open but rugged test that lasted for nearly 60 years until a club president took umbrage when golf writer Herbert Warren Wind coined Oakmont "that ugly, old brute."

So with the help of Robert Trent Jones, Oakmont was "beautified" with at least 3,500 trees.

Starting in the late 1990s, the club embarked on a multi-year program to return the course to its original look. Oakmont not only remains beautiful because of its ferocious architecture, but also because turfgrass growing conditions have improved.

Being able to point that out this June to your course leaders should be a good thing. But be prepared for an overreaction.

"You want to clear cut our property, don't you?"

Or, "We're not a links course and never want to be one, so don't even think of cutting down that blue spruce we planted in memory of the club's favorite squirrel, Delores."

Still, Oakmont should serve as a positive conversation starter. So be prepared to make your case. Here are a few of the latest suggestions from the battle lines:

**Commission studies.** Groups like Arborcom (arborcom.ca) can provide detailed studies that explain how trees impact turf conditions. And there

## Up a Tree? Here's How to Get Down

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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are plenty of architects willing to take the heat off of superintendents when it comes time to making recommendations for tree removal. It's money well spent.

**Numbers.** Often, those commissioned can give you a general or detailed count of the trees on your property. Don't hesitate to use that number. Count every bloody twig-like thing that looks or smells like a tree. Then add up the number you need to take out. Generally you are going to surprise people with the percentage, which I suspect would never be worse than 30 percent. Well, in Oakmont's case it was higher, but even the members there didn't know the removal would go as far as it did.

**You love trees, too.** Spackler may get the blame for giving members the impression that you love to kill living things. We know that most people don't enjoy cutting down a tree unless you must. Do not hesitate to mention that you would prefer not to do this, but common sense says there is no other choice.

**Photoshop.** With the advent of this cool Adobe photo-altering program, talented people all over the country are helping courses and architects make strong "before" and "after" tree-removal presentations. Tom Naccarato (tommynac@sbc-global.net) does some fine work on this front.

**Name drop.** If everything else fails to convince them, do not hesitate to pull out the rankings and note that virtually every elite club — with the exception of Augusta National — has removed trees in the last decade. Each has been pleased with the results architecturally and agronomically.

Those courses are still great, still beautiful and still the same special places they've always been.

Just with better turf and architecture. Just the way it should be.

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