

Last month's wildly successful PGA Championship at Southern Hills taught us that, A) August is not the time to book a Tulsa vacation, B) Tiger Woods is really, really good, and C) Short grass is making a big comeback.

Braving 100-degree plus temperatures each day, Southern Hills superintendent Russ Myers and his army of 50 staff members and many more volunteers not only held the Perry Maxwell course together, but showed us that U3 bermudagrass could produce compelling golf — especially when it was cut nice and tight around the greens.

Southern Hills basked in the glory of a Keith Foster-led architectural fine-tuning and a refreshing setup crafted by Kerry Haigh, the PGA of America's managing director of tournaments.

Even though four days of excessive heat prevented Myers from being able to dry out the course as much as everyone would have liked, Southern Hills was still plenty fast and firm.

Of even greater significance was the club's installation of short grass leading up to its fairway bunkers and around many of its greens.

As rough has crept around our golf courses to offset the advances of unregulated technology, even the most casual observer can see that 3 inches to 4 inches of grass only adds time and lost ball searches to a round while failing to make matters more difficult for the world's best.

Now our friends at the United States Golf Association believe rough has become less significant because today's players have armed themselves with perfectly legal, USGA-approved U-grooves. So to protect the integrity of rough, which is nothing more than a cancer on the game spreading to offset rapid and unregulated distance advances, the USGA wants to make every competitive golfer replace his or her U-grooved clubs by the start of 2009.

But as Southern Hills proved, it would be a lot easier to just install more short grass.

Architects and green chairmen across the land have struggled to sell the restoration of short grass as a way to add interest, fun and yes, difficulty to their courses, but Southern Hills exposed just what a difference tightly cut turf can make.

Longing For More Short Grass

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



SOUTHERN HILLS
SHOWCASED A
SETUP THAT COULD
BE THE MODEL FOR
A REVOLUTION IN
TOURNAMENT
PREPARATION

A claustrophobic mess of shade and rough just five years ago during the 2002 U.S. Open opened minds, and short grass returned to all of its fairway bunker and green approaches, as well as in strategic areas feeding into trouble.

It's no coincidence that 20 double bogies and six others were recorded at the second hole, where a new tight turf fall-off sent aggressive approach shots down a bank and into a creek, making it the third-toughest hole during PGA Championship play.

At the par-3 sixth hole, where trees were removed and a creek bank shaved ala Augusta National, the hole averaged a healthy 3.268 for the week, producing nine doubles and six others.

Best of all, the club's epic par-4 12th, playing a very short 458 yards due to the heat and technological advances of the last six years, still managed to play to a 4.45 average while logging 19 doubles and three others.

By no means do these numbers confirm the brilliance of these holes. They were fine before producing such train wrecks. But the numbers confirm that the new short grass areas added around the greens made the holes more difficult — not easier, as proponents of rough like to claim.

So next time skeptics question your desire to re-introduce the tight stuff to accent architectural features and make your course more fun, interesting and difficult for the scratch player, just point them to Southern Hills.

However, based on the overwhelmingly positive reaction to PGA Championship week, you won't have to point out something that is becoming so glaringly obvious: short grass is making a comeback for the good of the game.

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