

## Eight Reasons Scoring Went Low at the U.S. Open

**A**nother United States Open means another several weeks of questions, spin and even a few absurd accusations. And all of it centers around course preparation.

Last year at Pebble Beach the greens were said to be too hard and bumpy. Monday morning golfers asked why the USGA allowed the greens to die, even though one nice deep watering brought them back the day after Graeme McDowell's victory.

This year the entire course was proclaimed by most as too soft, too easy and too kind, even though Rory McIlroy probably would have won had they set it up backwards. Though a promising young man played incredible golf, set records and was the undisputed winner, too much scoreboard red has a way of inspiring people to make funny statements. None more ridiculous than HBO Real Sports anchor Bryant Gumbel declaring the PGA Tour-like setup a ploy by the USGA to boost ratings.

Yet as we know, many frustrated golfers find a more rewarding USGA setup off-putting, still believing the U.S. Open's priority is to make golfers suffer instead of identifying the most skilled player. Even if it means making the setup spill over the top into absurdity, a bizarre number of golfers miss the point of our national championship. It's not about making lousy golfers feel good about themselves. It's about identifying a worthy champion.

So for the point-missers, here is a bulletin-board ready list of eight reasons scoring was low at Congressional:

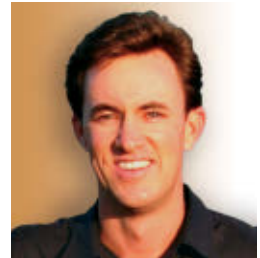
**8. The bunkers had no bite.** With no

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rain 18 days prior to the event, steps were taken to firm up sand that was too soft. During practice rounds the sand was just right, mushy enough yet balls were not plugging. When overnight downpours came, the sand firmed up and the lower cut surrounding bunkers went from sending balls to tough lies to more typical modern day manicured bunkers.

**7. The Blue Course design features almost no strategy,** does little to make players uncomfortable and only posed significant danger in three places: the 10th, 11th and 18th holes. With little to think about and fear, today's players are quite proficient at scoring.

**6. The temperatures were warm** and today's players drive it a mile in hot weather.

**5. After Thursday, there was almost no wind whatsoever.** One less thing for today's already unburdened players to worry about.

**4. Elite players today hit the ball ridiculous distances with equipment that allows them to swing freely.** As the USGA and PGA of America stated in their Tee It Forward campaign, a course at 7,600-7,900 yards puts mid and long irons into their hands. Congressional, even from the tips, is too short to test today's players in a manner comparable to Opens from

eras when equipment rules were in sync with architecture.

**3. Congressional's greens have very little contour and slope,** require little local knowledge and make putting quite easy for today's players.

**2. The greens were receptive to all shots, including from the rough.** This could be attributed to their newness along with the USGA's call to not strain them further with a lower cut just to pick up a few inches of Stimp meter reading speed.

**1. Congressional was in immaculate and amazing condition.** Mike Giuffre and his crew of hard-working staff and volunteers had the fairways absolutely perfect. Parts of the greens looked bad in high-definition but perked up after Thursday's rain. The greens could not have been more different than those at Pebble, nor more conducive to making putts.

The takeaway: great conditioning trumps all else when it comes to red numbers. The new edict should be: the better the conditioning, the lower the scoring.

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