

THE *Golfdom* CONVERSATION:

# David Feherty

GIS 2012  
SPECIAL

GOLF'S HOTTEST  
FUNNYMAN TALKS  
ABOUT SPEAKING  
AT THE GOLF  
INDUSTRY  
SHOW, GOLFER  
EXPECTATIONS  
AND THE ONE TIME  
A MOWER GOT  
AWAY FROM HIM.

BY SETH JONES



**IT SEEMS THAT** David Feherty is always on a roll, always clicking. When he's clicking, that means others are laughing.

"I'm at a stage in my life and I think in my career where I have enough confidence in what I'm saying that people shouldn't take me too seriously," he says.

It's lucky for us that Feherty has found that confidence. His TV show, "Feherty," has been a smash, his multiple books are immensely popular with the golf

world, and whenever he's involved in a golf broadcast, you just don't know what quip he's going to drop next.

Along with his other media gigs he also is a popular speaker. On March 1<sup>st</sup> in Las Vegas, Feherty will be the keynote speaker at the Golf Industry Show's General Session. *Golfdom* caught up with Feherty in mid-January to talk to him about visiting the GIS, the work of superintendents, and if he ever had any maintenance mishaps on the golf course.

**Golfdom:** David, I appreciate you taking the time to talk to *Golfdom* magazine. Everybody in the industry is really excited for your presentation at the Golf Industry Show.

**David Feherty:** Yeah, I'm looking forward to it.

pro shop or up at the greenkeeper's. He let me cut the holes and basically just follow him around.

I got interested in it and the plants and different types of grasses. Of course, we had 20 different types of grasses on the same 10-yard square area.

**Golfdom:** Good, good. So you know a thing or two about maintenance.

**DF:** I know a little bit. You know there's nothing worse than a keen amateur. I don't go to the dentist and give him advice. I let him work on my teeth.

**Golfdom:** Talking turf types, what's your favorite type of grass to hit off of and to putt on?

**DF:** Down here in the South, no greenkeeper in his right mind would want to tend greens down here in the summer. You know you've got to keep them so damp in order to keep them alive that every ball mark looks like a Taliban hand grenade went off.

And the Bermuda that we have these days, the hybrids and these fine-bladed Bermudas are just superb. They stand up to the hot weather. They don't have to be soaked. So I would play from zoysia up to one of the dwarf Bermudas. It doesn't bother me in the slightest if there's a little bit of grain. In fact, I love it. It adds another dimension to the playing surface.

In tennis they play on four or five different surfaces and nobody complains

about it. But, apparently in golf, we all have to play on linoleum — lightning fast, bad greens. You know that's bull. You know playing slow grainy greens brings another player into the equation.

**Golfdom:** I remember a few years ago you emceed the Golf Writers Association of America annual awards banquet in Augusta. It was a great event. We had a blast and a lot of laughs. This will be the first time I'll have seen you speak since then.

Do you make a different presentation for golf course superintendents than you would for golf writers, or if you were presenting to someone unrelated to golf, say a group of bankers?

**DF:** Yes. I'm assuming that a room full of golf course superintendents have to have a sense of humor because they're dealing with idiots a lot of the time. A lot of the time you just have to agree with (golfers), just nod your head. Really, I think the best superintendents, you know they listen to their greens committee or the chairman, they nod their head and then they go ahead and do whatever the hell they think they should do anyway no matter what they tell them.

**Golfdom:** Exactly.

**DF:** That same chairman of the greens will take full responsibility for the greens if they are superb, and absolutely none if we get some bad weather and you get

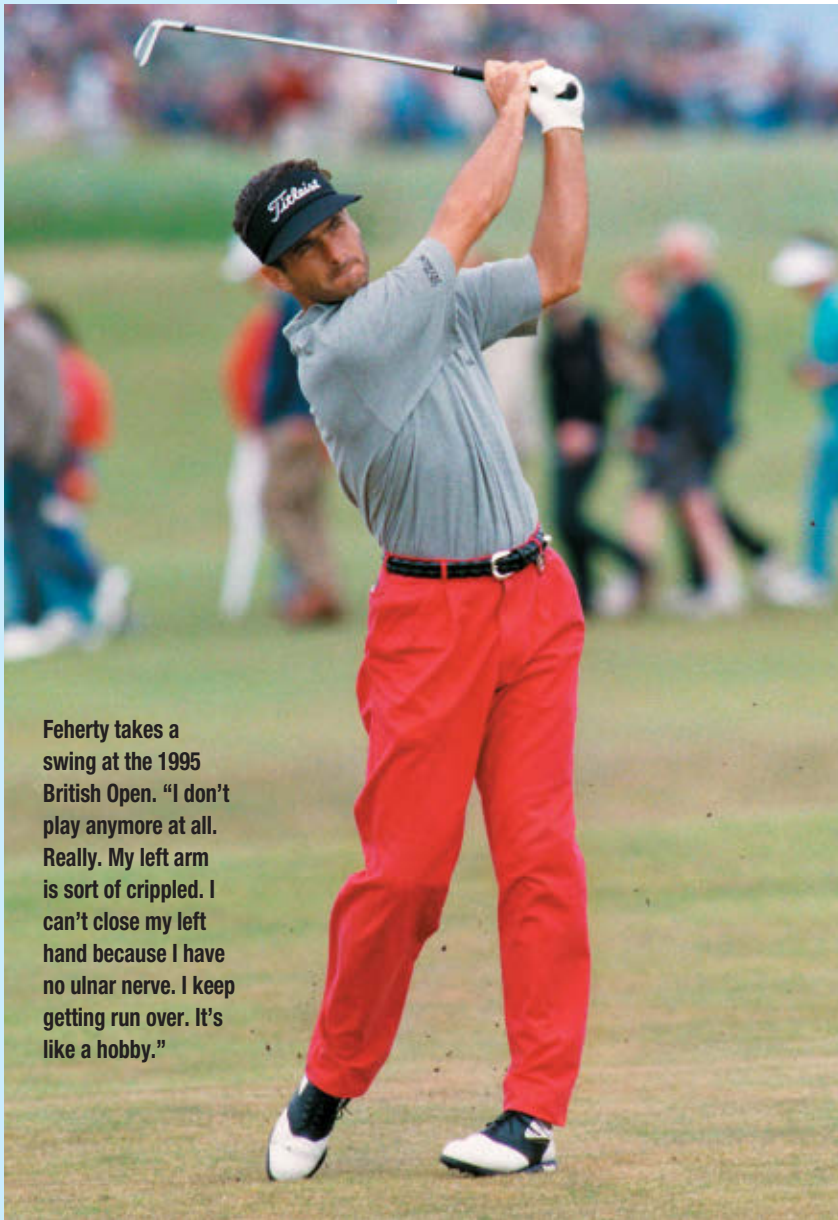
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*"I'm assuming that a room full of golf course superintendents have to have a sense of humor because they're dealing with idiots a lot of the time."*

**Golfdom:** I was reading the promotional materials about your talk. It mentioned that you have a background as an assistant greenkeeper early in your career?

**DF:** Well, I wouldn't really call it an assistant greenkeeper. I was a kid that was allowed to play in what we call the greenkeeper shed. It was basically a bunch of what you would call crude farm implements these days, you know the gang mowers and the — well, the cylinder mowers haven't changed that much over the years except they're now like \$20 grand.

I was always hanging around out at the



Feherty takes a swing at the 1995 British Open. "I don't play anymore at all. Really. My left arm is sort of crippled. I can't close my left hand because I have no ulnar nerve. I keep getting run over. It's like a hobby."

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some brown spot or something that just creeps in and hits you all of a sudden because you get that exactly right temperature where it's in the 70s during the day and in the 50s at night. You have to know exactly when to hit it and sometimes you get unlucky.

And the poor old superintendent is always going to bear the blame for anything that goes wrong and seldom gets credit if the place is perfect. People just expect perfect.

But, sorry, to answer your original question, yeah. My presentation to a group of bankers in some ways will be similar to the superintendents. But, with superintendents, I feel like I'm kind of more among family because, even at my job, I'm on the golf course and I'm down on the ground and I see firsthand just how superb these conditions are at times. It never ceases to amaze me. And I know the amount of work that goes into it, the amount of pressure the superintendent is under.

So we'll hear players being critical and other commentators being critical. Sometimes it's just hard to make a three-foot putt because you're on *Poa* and, late in the day, that's just the way they are. You know they're going to flower a little bit and maybe you've just got to take your nuts in both hands and make a good positive stroke and, even if you do that, sometimes it's going to miss. That's called golf.

**Golfdom:** When you were a young golfer, did you ever feel the opposite way where it was the fault of the superintendent?

**DF:** Oh yes. Absolutely. Well, not just the superintendent. It was anybody but me.

**Golfdom:** Do you know any golf course superintendents personally?

**DF:** Oh yeah. The Masters is one that we have meetings with the superintendent. They invite guest superintendents from all over the country to that and to the PGA Championship. And I'll always try and make a point of finding the superintendent or some of the guys that work on the golf course and just ask them about what they'll be doing and what the weather has been like because so much of our golf course depends on the weather a few weeks before an event.

**Golfdom:** When you signed on to speak at the GIS, did the GCSAA ask you to hold back or anything? Did they ask you to keep it pretty clean or will they let you do what you want to do?

**DF:** Sometimes the groups will say, "Hey, you know, we've got ladies in here," or "We'd like it to be PG." And I say, "Well, hey, you shouldn't have invited me" because that cuts me down to about five minutes. I'll make fun of pretty much anybody and everybody out there, especially myself.

**Golfdom:** Can you give me an early memory of being out and working on the golf course, maybe a moment when things didn't go as planned?

**DF:** One of my earliest experiences of being on a tractor was driving a gang mower at Royal Belfast, which is one of

the oldest golf clubs in Northern Ireland. I was the assistant pro at the time and I'd taken over for a kid who was working the summer there. And I was mowing 13 fairway. And I got off the tractor, left it running, and ran up to the pro shop to get a drink. But it was on a side slope and, when I came back, the gang mower was lying there in the rough to the left of the 13<sup>th</sup> fairway and the tractor had broken through the sea wall and gone 40 feet down into Belfast Loch. Apparently I left it in gear but it was sneaking forwards ever so slowly until it got onto a slope that it liked.

And the sea wall was probably 300, 400 years old and maybe four feet thick. Yeah. There was a little explaining to do there. I just told them the truth — that I'd been drinking heavily.

**Golfdom:** Oh my! Did you get to mow much after that?

**DF:** No, no, not so much. Not at Royal Belfast anyway.

**Golfdom:** So the Golf Industry Show is in Las Vegas this year. Are you a fan of the city?

**DF:** You know I like being in Las Vegas for a night or maybe two because I'm an

alcoholic and a drug addict and it's not a great town to be in for an extended period of time because spare time is any addict's worst enemy. And I keep myself busy. I ride my bike. I mean, I enjoy Vegas. It's uniquely American and it's fun to be there and it's got some great venues for me to do my thing at. So I always look forward to speaking there or whatever I'm doing. But I'm glad to get out of town at times.

**Golfdom:** We touched on it a little bit earlier, about how everyone is an expert, you said that there's nothing worse than a keen amateur. What advice would you give a golf course superintendent who answers to a greens committee that is entirely made up of keen amateurs?

**DF:** Well, I think it depends on the personality on both sides. I mean some superintendents are fortunate... say, for instance, it's an affluent club where the

members are wealthy. You know they got wealthy a certain way, by doing what they know best. Hopefully they have enough sense to know that the greens superintendent became a superintendent, which is an extremely difficult thing to do. It's not dissimilar to becoming a doctor or a veterinarian. You know you've got to go through a long process and learn a bunch of (stuff) that people might think is irrelevant. But you're looking at an expert here that's taken a long time and has learned a great deal and made mistakes along the way.

I mean I imagine, and this is purely conjecture from my focus; I don't have this problem. If it were me, I would listen politely and say, "Yes, that's what I will do. Uh-huh. Absolutely. Yup. Sounds good to me," and then just forget it; you know, go and do what I know has to be done and let him take the credit for it; whatever. And, if CBS or the Golf Channel comes along, I'll be crediting the right guy.

**Golfdom:** David, you've got that great spot on the GIS schedule: Thursday, March 1st, 8 a.m., keynote speaker of the General Session. Tell me, what should attendees expect?

**DF:** It's more difficult to speak in the morning because the bastards tend to be sober. And, especially in Vegas, it could be a pretty tough crowd. They may be a little grumpy from having lost their wad or stayed up and had too many free cocktails.

But I would say don't expect any political correctness because that's just a euphemism for (bull) as far as I'm concerned. I'm at a stage in my life and I think in my career where I have enough confidence in what I'm saying, that people shouldn't take me too seriously because, on my tombstone, there will be something to that effect: nobody took him seriously. Thank God! Life's too short.

**Golfdom:** David, I appreciate you taking the time to do this interview. I'm looking forward to seeing you speak again at the Golf Industry Show.

**DF:** Yeah, it's my pleasure, Seth. See you soon. ■

*"I feel like I'm with family when I'm with the greens crew. I always go to the barn to say 'hi, well done,' because I know how much work goes into it."*



Golfdom EIC  
Seth Jones with  
David Feherty at  
the 2012 AT&T.