



“As much as Shaffer is a superintendent, he’s also a teacher. He teaches his crew everyday, and he also taught this visiting journalist a few things.”

**SETH JONES**, *Editor-in-Chief*

# An Open mind

**L**ast month we had Austin Allison on our cover, a young up-and-comer in the industry. ¶ This month we feature Merion Golf Club, site of next month’s U.S. Open, where Matt Shaffer is the director of golf course operations. ¶ From Allison in April to Merion in May. That’s like going from the rookie of the year on one cover to a hall of famer the next.

I’ll tell you that I felt some trepidation in taking the trip to Ardmore, Pa. to do a cover story on Merion. I went there knowing full well that Shaffer and his crew would be getting a ton of ink in the next few weeks. Not just in the industry trade magazines, but even in the magazines and newspapers that you find on the newsstand. The new issue of *Golf Digest* on my desk contains multiple Shaffer quotes.

And then there’s always the question of, what will this story do for you? Can a course profile of a place like Merion be useful to courses around the country?

Upon arriving at Merion, it didn’t take long before I knew I made the right choice to visit

the historic course. And not just as I stood over the Ben Hogan 1-iron plaque.

(A side note: the previous week I was at Augusta National for the Masters. The next week I’m standing on the same spot where Hogan hit that 1-iron to win the 1950 U.S. Open. Sometimes, I have to pinch myself.)

Last year we asked readers who they thought the most famous living superintendent was. Paul Latshaw Sr. got the most mentions, but one of his students, Matt Shaffer, also received several mentions. And something else we heard: not only is Shaffer one of the most famous superintendents, he’s also one of the most innovative as well as one of the nicest.

Readers were right on all three points. And that’s why I found so much value in visiting with Shaffer and his staff in mid-April.

Shaffer has a passion for turf, a passion for the profession, a passion for seeing his employees grow as professionals and then move on. He’s dubbed the head superintendent’s office “the launching pad.” It’s currently occupied by Arron McCurdy, but probably not for much longer. Once the Open is over, McCurdy’s phone is going to start ringing, and he’s going to move on to a course of his own.

As much as Shaffer is a superintendent, he’s also a teacher. He teaches his crew everyday, and he also taught

this visiting journalist a few things. Some of these things could be applied to any golf course around the country. As you’ll see, that’s the theme of the story, “An American dream,” our U.S. Open pre-view story, which starts on page 28.

I’ll be returning to Merion the week of the Open. While I’m there, I’ll be blogging regularly at the Golfdom Daily ([golfdom.blogspot.com](http://golfdom.blogspot.com)) and Tweeting as often as I can from @Golfdom. I’ll be reporting on all things maintenance, so if you’d like to see some of the behind-the-scenes operations, and maybe even win a U.S. Open souvenir, please stop by.

Recently our blog has had back-to-back months where we set personal bests for hits in a month. Even more recently, the Golfdom Daily won first place in the TOCA awards for blogs (see page 10). This is the second year in a row the blog has won this award, and last year it also won a Gardner Award (a best-in-show award.) So we like to think that we must be doing something right.

I’m glad I kept an open mind and took the chance to visit Shaffer and his crew at Merion. I look forward to learning more things from Shaffer and his team. Hopefully, you’ll enjoy this month’s cover story while also picking up a few ideas, then stop by the blog and see what else can be learned during the week of the Open.

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