

Off The Fringe

Jack and Tom – or Oscar and Felix?

NICKLAUS, DOAK ARE AN ODD COUPLE FOR NEW DESIGN, AS PRESS CONFERENCE REVEALS

By Anthony Pioppi, Contributing Editor

There they were, Jack Nicklaus and Tom Doak, the oddest of golf course architecture pairings, sitting side by side under the glare of television lights and the watchful eye of nearly 75 media types and hangers-on with Long Island Sound and a shocking blue sky serving as a backdrop. The two were together June 16 in Southampton, N.Y., a day before the start of the U.S. Open, to discuss a joint project with the press.

Nicklaus was his usual public self: smooth, charming, humorously self-



Jack Nicklaus (second from left) and Tom Doak (third from left) break ground.

effacing, at ease with the cameras and the questions.

Doak was Doak — uncomfortable as ever in the spotlight, looking like a piano student at his first recital. It was if he would have preferred to be anywhere else in the world except there, one of the greatest spots on the Eastern Seaboard on which to build a golf course.

That is exactly what brought the two together — well, that and owner

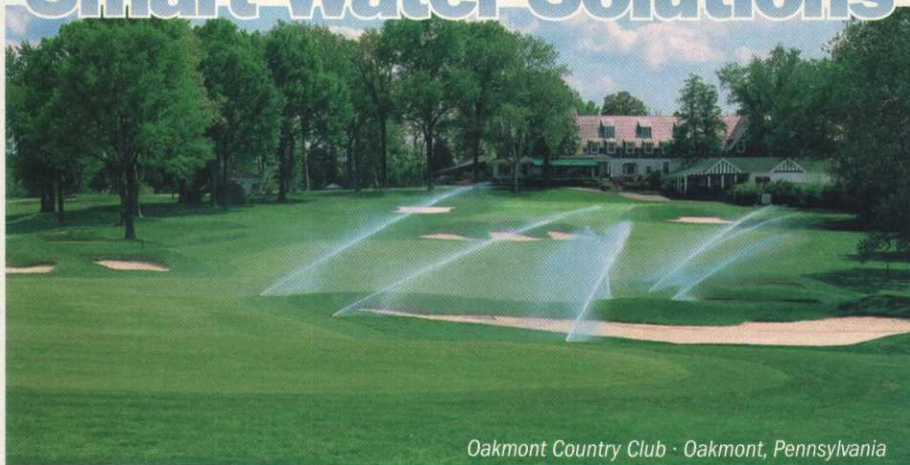
Michael Pascucci's money. It was Pascucci's dream of building a golf course on land that abuts National Golf Links of America, Shinnecock Hills Golf Club and the Great Peconic Bay. The dream will be realized with the completion of the ultraprivate Sebonack Golf Club, a Doak-Nicklaus collaboration, scheduled to open in the fall of 2005.

Whether the first-time pairing will work remains to be seen, but both architects — noted for their healthy egos — say the collaboration will be no problem.

"Doing a golf course with Jack Nicklaus is an honor for me," Doak said, deflecting any thought of the two butting heads. "All golf courses are collaborations."

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Nicklaus, too, said the pairing would work well, and the plan for collaborating would be simple.

"We'll try to do it together," he said. "(We'll) put our heads together and we'll go through every hole, work every hole. Some holes Tom is going to get the call, because we'll like what

Tom did better. Sometimes I'll get the call because we'll like what I do better. That's fine."

Pascucci paid a reported \$45 million for the property he purchased from the Electrical Workers Union pension fund.

Pascucci, who belongs to the Nicklaus-designed Muirfield Village Golf

Club and Golden Bear Club, first hired Nicklaus for the project, then added Doak after seeing his stunning Pacific Dunes layout.

"I want to put the most IQ in the golf course that we can," he said.

But the brain trust already appears to be one-sided. Nicklaus admitted he has not seen one of Doak's courses to familiarize himself with Doak's style, while Doak has seen dozens of Nicklaus projects. Nicklaus walked the site for the first time the morning of the press conference. Doak had been there nearly a half-dozen times. The routing is primarily Doak's with input from Nicklaus's staff.

"We took some runs at routing to start with and Tom took some runs at routing, and frankly routing is more Tom's than it is ours," Nicklaus said.

Both Doak and Nicklaus said the finished product might little resemble the current routing.

"What you put on a piece of paper is what you'd like to say the golf course is going to look like, Nicklaus said. "But generally speaking, it bears no resemblance to what you put on paper and what you finish with. We'll end up with letting the golf course evolve."

Doak's take is the effort will produce an outstanding result if all the sides work together.

"If we take the best ideas everybody has and put them together and get ourselves out of the way and find the common ground between us as far as what is a great golf course ... we're not far apart on that," he said.

Although Sebonack will be smack up against two of the greatest golf courses in the world, Nicklaus and Doak said they do not feel added pressure to come up with a great design.

"I think National and Shinnecock are great courses because they have their own personalities," Doak said. "That's what we're searching for out here as we build the golf course. We can't sit here and tell you exactly what that personality will be — that's the part that has to evolve. That's the fun part."



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Pascucci also talked about Sebonack being an organic golf course. What that means precisely has not been determined.

"The town is working with us. They understand that we're doing an organic golf course and the naturalness of what we're trying to do," he said.

Following the press conference, even Doak was hard-pressed to define "organic."

Apparently, the greens will be built to recycle irrigation water. The preliminary grassing plan includes the use of fescues throughout in-play areas. A pesticide and fertilizer regimen, however, has not been determined.

One prominent superintendent in town for the U.S. Open, who requested his name not be used, was baffled at the description of the course as "organic."

"Organic? What does that mean?" he asked.

As with any golf course in its infancy, there are still many questions, but one was most likely answered well after the press conference was over — that of who will play a greater role in the design.

Doak and his people huddled around a map of the course, discussing a possible green site change with the Nicklaus people. Jack? He wasn't involved in the decision. He had left the property 20 minutes earlier.

Quotable

"It's going to be a bunch of car wrecks. It's going to be like there's oil on the track at Daytona."

— Pro golfer Fred Funk, BEFORE the final round of the U.S. Open. He was right. (Associated Press)

"Most of the pesticides we use today are safer than aspirin. I'm not talking about 20 years ago, I'm talking about today. I'm not talking about all of them, I'm talking about most of them."

— Tim Hiers, certified superintendent of the Old Collier Golf Club.



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Syngenta's Science Project

VERO BEACH, FLA., FACILITY A NERVE CENTER FOR COMPANY'S R&D

By Larry Aylward, Editor

It's hot and muggy, even by central Florida's standards. Kevin Casey, clad in a white lab coat, stands inside the plant production area at Syngenta Professional Products' Vero Beach (Fla.) Research Center (VBRC). The dusty area, laden with intricate machinery, resembles a huge garage. There's no respite from the heat because the area is open to the outside. Casey, whose face contains speckles of sweat, will attest to that.

Despite the heat, Casey is upbeat on this early June day as he speaks about his job — blending and pasteurizing soil to use in tests for turf and ornamentals — to a group of visitors at the VBRC. Casey, a research and development assistant on Syngenta's R&D technical support team, creates soil mixtures to mimic certain soil conditions from different regions of the United States and the world.

Casey flips the "on" switch of the elaborate mixing machine, and it drones loudly while blending batches of soil and sand. Casey grabs a handful of dirt from a table in front of him and runs the rich, dark blend through his fingers. "This is a really nice soil to work with," he says of the muck soil, used to grow sugar cane.

The VBRC is one of four Syngenta facilities of its kind in the United States. It was built in 1963 and is located on 240 acres. It features nearly 40,000 square feet, with 20,000 square feet devoted to 12 greenhouses.

Syngenta invested \$5 million in the facility in 2001 to upgrade it. From the outside, it looks like a posh hotel. In fact, travelers have been known to walk in the front door and ask for



Les Glasgow, the senior R&D group leader in the weed-control unit, conducts an experiment focusing on formulation.

single rooms with king-size beds.

Vero Beach, located in rural central Florida, is often called "Dodgertown" because it's the spring-training ground for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Syngenta prefers the location because the company is able to do green work on-site for the entire year. That wouldn't be the case if the facility was located in the season-changing North. With plenty of pest pressure year-round in central Florida, Syngenta scientists can conduct many tests with fungicides and insecticides. The VBRC supports new-product development and explores new technologies, among other initiatives.

Exploring new technology is part of Henry Wetzel's job. The R&D scientist, who joined Syngenta in January 2003 after leaving BASF, shows visitors the many turf-testing plots he cre-

ated since he joined the company. He discusses overseeding bermudagrass with ryegrass. "[Superintendents] are overseeding turf a lot further south than you'd think," Wetzel says.

Wetzel invites visitors to examine the seashore paspalum plots. He explains that the turf, which is gaining popularity in the South, is sensitive to herbicides.

Later, visitors return to the laboratory where Les Glasgow, the senior R&D group leader in the weed-control unit, speaks to them about improving existing pesticide products through formulation.

Randy Cush, a senior formulation chemist, expands on the topic later. Using a variety of small, black-capped jars in front of him, Cush mixes various chemicals with water to display how Syngenta has improved several of its existing products. For instance, scientists created a better formulation to eliminate the bad odor in Primo EC, which Syngenta calls Primo Maxx.

David Ross, Syngenta's technical manager for turf and ornamental, notes the company will soon offer Heritage TC, a liquid version of the company's azoxystrobin-based fungicide. Ross says the new Heritage has a 10 percent-improved efficacy over the original product. Ross also noted that Syngenta has several fungicide premix products in development.

Syngenta makes no bones about its turf and ornamental business. Company leaders say products are premium-priced because they should be. Syngenta's sales in the golf market topped \$100 million in 2003. As a basic manufacturer, the company says it's dedicated to researching molecules to develop new products. ■

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Month

It's Make or Break Time

The 232-yard par-3 hole at the Tournament Players Club (TPC) of (Fairfield) Louisiana is typical of the Pete Dye-designed course. The hole boasts deep bunkers and water on the left-hand side and imposing mounds on the right. The hole has been described as a hole that can “make or break” a golfer’s front nine.

It demands an accurate long-iron shot into a narrow, deep and well-tiered green, another feature that marks the course as a Dye-design.

The course, which opened this year, was originally situated on 250 acres across the Mississippi River from New Orleans. Dye transformed the relatively flat piece of land into a compelling design – much as he did with his most famous TPC project at Sawgrass. The course is a par 72 and 7,300 yards from the tips. Dye worked with Tour players Steve Elkington and Louisiana native Kelly Gibson to fine-tune the project.

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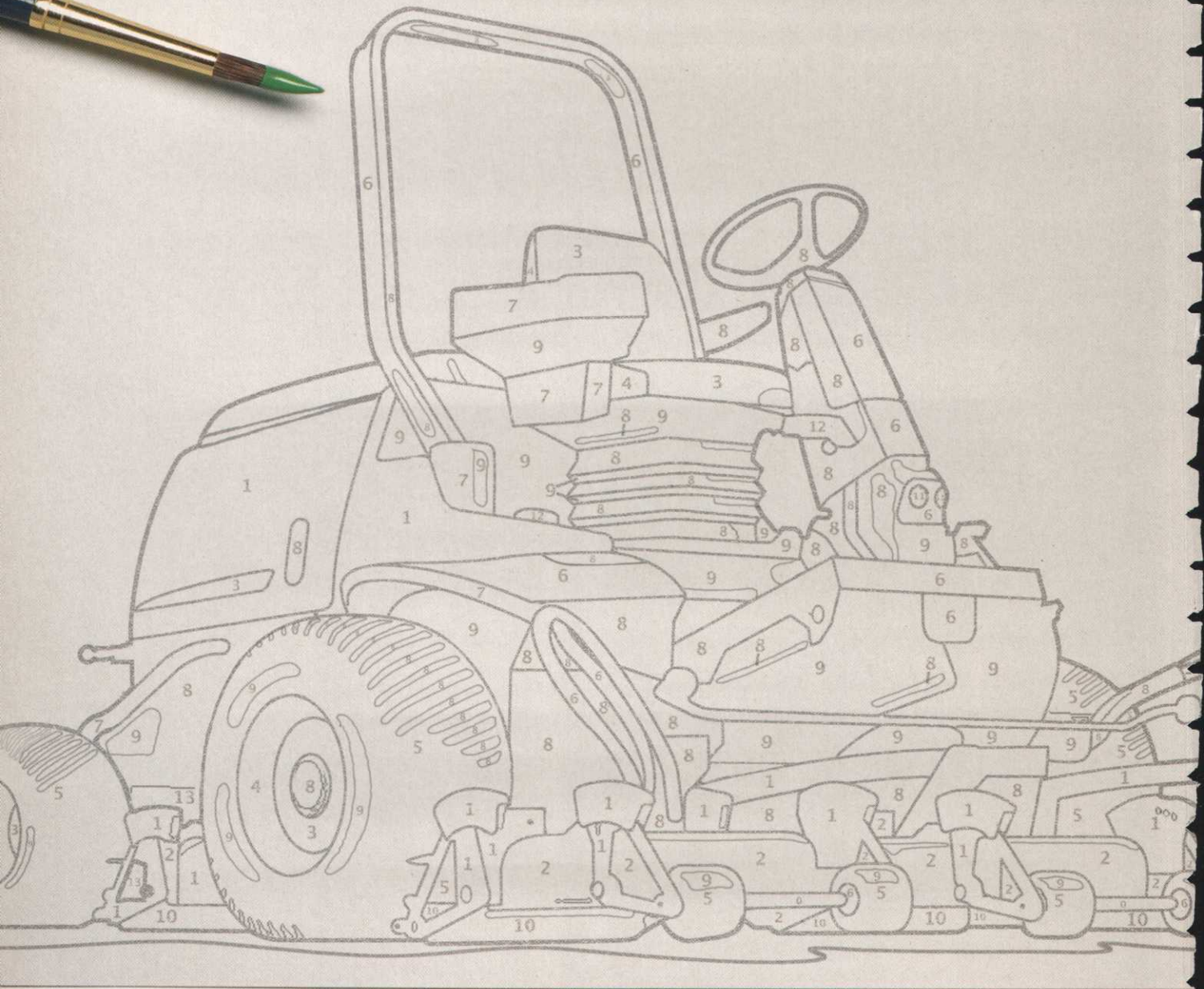
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It came to me recently that unless you are a sod producer, superintendent or sports turf manager, turfgrass ranks pretty low on your list of favorite plants. In that sense, turfgrass is the Rodney Dangerfield of the plant kingdom — it gets no respect.

Orchids are royalty. Roses are white-collar. Turfgrass, on the other hand, is decidedly blue-collar. Sure, we can dress up turfgrass in pin stripes and parade it on TV for millions to see, but the next week the golfers hack it up, ignore divots and ball marks, and drive golf cars through wet spots.

It's not enough that golfers take their *own* turf for granted in their lawns. The real rub comes from state and local regulators (and activists) who lay a large part of the blame for pollution on turf maintenance practices. You don't see these folks tackling vehicle emissions with ordinances like they do with turfgrass.

Some counties in Florida are writing ordinances limiting the amount of turf that can be grown on new lots to 50 percent of the area. Why does our product take so much environmental grief when there are much larger threats out there?

The advocates of these restrictions say they will conserve water in the belief that this solves uncontrolled development's impact on water resources. You don't see these same people limiting the amount of air traffic and vehicles that traverse the county each day to reduce air pollution. Turf actually counteracts water and air pollution as a filter, but it *still* gets no respect. After all, it is underfoot, so why not just walk all over it?

Montreal is about to ban the use of all pesticides used to maintain the aesthetic appearance of turf and ornamentals. On the practical side, I'll give it a year until plant life starts turning brown and weeds begin to flourish before they start backing up — just remember that San Francisco learned the dangers of complete pesticide bans the hard way.

I'll bet Montreal isn't banning the use of chlorine in drinking water or swimming pools or the use of gasoline or diesel fuel. Talk about some dangerous products — but then turfgrass is only deemed to be “nice to have” and not essential.

I guess maybe only turfgrass managers

Turfgrass Is Not the Enemy Here

BY JOEL JACKSON



WHY DOES OUR
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SO MUCH
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GRIEF WHEN THERE
ARE MUCH LARGER
THREATS OUT
THERE?

appreciate the broad and sometimes even subtle benefits of turfgrass. They have been enumerated many times, and most apply to golf courses. They include:

- improving aesthetics;
- providing recreation;
- filtering air and water pollution;
- producing oxygen;
- recycling spots for effluent wastewater;
- reclaiming and restoring damaged areas such as landfills and brown fields;
- controlling erosion;
- increasing security with a clear field of vision around sensitive locations; and
- providing fire breaks in wooded suburban areas.

These factors are not usually considered when assessing a risk/benefit scenario of turfgrass against the zero-tolerance mindset of the antipesticide factions, no matter how few people have actually ever died from turf pesticides.

At a conference in Seattle recently, a regulator suggested artificial greens for area golf courses as one way to stem the flow of pollution into the salmon waters of the Northwest. During a tour, I walked on artificial soccer fields on the Microsoft campus. The pungent smell of crumb rubber topdressing in the warm spring afternoon made me wonder where the quality of our lives might be heading.

Meanwhile on the extensive Seattle waterfront sit thousands of pleasure boats moored three and four deep along every foot of dock, with their bilge pumps dumping gas and diesel directly into the water. As I watched this environmental catastrophe unfold before my eyes, it hit me yet again: Turfgrass really doesn't get the respect it deserves.

Joel Jackson, CGCS, retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.

Youth Will

Whistling Straits put its faith in 27-year-old superintendent David Swift, who accepted the challenge with confidence

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR., MANAGING EDITOR

The cool, fall-like air crackles with anticipation on this June morning. A biting wind roars off Lake Michigan, dropping the 60-degree day to 45 degrees with breathtaking quickness. A blackbird, its ruby-streaked wings glinting in the sunshine, plunges headlong against the gale toward Whistling Straits Golf Course in Sheboygan, Wis.

In the middle of this flurry of activity stands a blonde-haired man of medium height and a thin-but-muscular build, whose feet are spread apart like a sailor braced on the deck against unruly seas. With implacable calm, his sky-blue eyes keep close watch on what's going on around him — the sheep grazing to his left, the wheat-colored fescue rippling in the roughs and at his busy crew members mowing and primping the course's more than 600 bunkers, its fairways and its greens. As he watches the preparations unfold for the PGA Championship, which will arrive at the complex's Straits Course Aug. 9-15, he breaks into a wide smile.

"Our conditions aren't exactly where I want them to be for the tournament, but we're close," says 27-year-old David Swift, superintendent at Whistling Straits. His eyes twinkle as he looks around again, and in a voice brimming with optimism, he says, "I can't wait for the event to start."

Every day presents unusual challenges to "Swiftly," a nickname bestowed on him by nearly everyone at the course (visitors feel out of place if they call him David or Dave). This morning, he set up a roadblock across the two-lane highway that plunges visitors through a messy green, brown and golden patchwork of Wisconsin farmland leading to the course. The sheep in his care pass unscathed to the other side and on to the course to delight (and possibly frustrate) the early-bird golfers at 7 a.m. Wait, did he say sheep? On a course in Wisconsin?

"Mr. Kohler [*Editor's Note: Herb Kohler, CEO of the Kohler Plumbing empire and owner of four area golf courses, including Whistling Straits. Everyone calls him Mr. Kohler, and his presence is deeply felt at the course even when he's not there.*] and [architect] Pete Dye wanted this course to look like it was on the coast of Ireland, so they decided the course needed sheep," Swift says. "It's my job to release them on the course every morning, and you can't have the sheep getting hit by cars. That's why I have to block off the road."

He grins as astonishment registers on the face of his listener.

"If you think that's odd, you should have been here when the crew and I tried to shear them one year," says Swift, rolling his eyes and laughing. "Suffice to say we have a professional do it now."

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