



The USGA Should be Ashamed of Itself

By Rob Schultz

I hate bumper stickers. I hate folks who put stupid bumper stickers on their cars.

There's one exception. I have a friend who drives a beat-up 1960 Falcon. He's a red-neck from Kentucky and he didn't care about the car. It had rust everywhere, had one headlight that worked, you could see the street through the holes in the floorboards. Well, he had a great sticker on what was left of his rear bumper. It said, "Ask me about Mary Kay Cosmetics."

I used to vow that I'd never put a sticker on my car, even if it was one of those AAA types. But this spring I broke my vow. I placed a sticker on my bumper because it meant a great deal to me at the time.

It was the sticker for the USGA, of which I used to be a proud associate member.

Now I'm looking for a knife to peel the sucker off. I'm still an associate member, but I'm not proud of it anymore.

The USGA is supposed to represent what golf is all about: Class, integrity, honesty. Plus, it's an organization that's supposed to be for everyone who golfs, not just the pros.

But in the current *Golf Digest*, all that is blown out of the water by this allegedly prestigious organization which, in my opinion, has turned the U.S. Open into a sham.

In a commentary by *Golf Digest* editor Jerry Tarde, an anonymous USGA official is quoted as saying, "Sure it bothers me that somebody like Andy North, who's one of the worst ball-strikers on tour, has won the U.S. Open twice, but how do you figure it?"

That is a statement that lacks everything the USGA is supposed to stand for. And to top it off, it comes from some naive boob who doesn't have the guts to stand behind his quote publicly.

North certainly does not have the charisma of a Watson, Nicklaus, Norman or Ballesteros, but to unceremoniously undress the guy for winning two U.S. Opens takes unmitigated gall.

"What did he do it for?" North asked during a long phone conversation recently. "What did I do to deserve that?" If I had lost two U.S. Opens after having the chance to win, I could see it. If I was a jerk to everyone I could see it. But that's not the case." North takes pride in staying in the shadows of the PGA Tour. Part of it is done consciously because of the bad press he's received after winning two Opens. It's also due to his rash of injuries that have forced his game to deteriorate to the point where few outside Madison care about what he's doing.

That has led some to misunderstand North, who has a tendency to shoot from the hip and infuriate some obtuse media types when they do question him. After each Open victory, some have taken him to task for it because he doesn't come across like a Zoeller, Crenshaw or Watson. For that reason, the public hasn't gotten to know him because he isn't "good copy".

Ask any golfer who the most famous Andy is on PGA Tour and he or she will answer "Bean." It's never North. Bean, you see, wrestles alligators. That's good copy.

And that's who the public wants to win the U.S. Open and the Masters—who the media likes and publicizes. Golf is unlike almost any other sport in that regard. Few rarely root for the underdog.

That brings us back to the USGA. It is supposed to set an example, set the stage for golf in the future, help the media get away from just glorifying the chosen few at the sake of everyone else. But what this organization is doing is moving golf back 40 years.

The USGA used to set up the Open so only Ben Hogan could win. Today, it sets up the courses so hard that nobody can win; everybody loses except one. And that one merely survives. And nobody's a better survivor than North—hence two U.S. Open victories.

The result backfires the USGA's master plan. The USGA reveres in the big names and it's obviously disappointed when one of them doesn't win.

But what is the U.S. Open supposed to be? There are regional and sectional tournaments held all over the country each year allowing the common man to qualify. It's a tournament for the American public; something for everyone who holds a golf club to dream about.

That's precisely what propelled North into golf. "I dreamed about the U.S. Open everyday when I was a kid," North said. "It's the only tournament I really cared about winning."

His adrenaline pumps at the mere mention of it. It's that adrenaline that allowed him to climb the mountain and claim the peak as his own—twice.

If anything, North should be the role model for the general public. But the USGA shoots that down and just criticizes him for "ruining" their event. What the USGA is really saying is that the Open is not for all of us. It's for the chosen few.

That's precisely what I hate about golf. It's becoming, again, a sport for the so-called elite. I hate that more than bumper stickers.

The USGA should be bowing its head in shame over that anonymous quote about North. Apologies should be forthcoming. Until then, at least I can start scraping that sticker off my car.

When I get it off, I'll give it to my friend with the Falcon. I imagine the USGA only wants those stickers on Cadillacs and Lincolns. But a beat-up Falcon is where it deserves to go. It'll drive those hotsy-totsy USGA goof balls nuts. When it doesn't, I'll know the USGA is finally doing its job.

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